

SOCIALIST

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PAY

THE

SIGNAL

WORKERS!



THIS WEDNESDAY (22 June), signal workers on the railways will be taking industrial action. Trains across the country will grind to a halt in the second of a series of one-day strikes over pay.

Journeys will be disrupted, and many passengers will be inconvenienced.

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Ex-USSR miners sacked for striking

Miners in Kazakhstan (ex-USSR) have put out this appeal for support

THE INDEPENDENT Miners Union of Kazakhstan in the Karaganda coal field, created in February 1992, has organised since that time in opposition to the structures of authority and various levels of the industrial administration.

Despite this powerful opposition, the IMU not only exists but develops. During those two years the number of members has grown four times over, to more than 5,000. There are members of the IMU at 16 of the 24 mines in the Karaganda coal field.

The IMU committee worked out a draft agreement for the protection of the social and professional interests of its members, which it proposed for signing to the administration of the industrial association Karagand coal.

That administration, represented by its general director Grigori Present, ignored our demands, and as a result of this our trade union was forced to enter a dispute procedure on 2 March 1994. On 18 May 1994 we began a strike. The participants met powerful opposition from the administration and from the state trade union of coal industry workers.

G. Present, the general director of Karagandacoal, not wanting to meet our demands, went to court. On 3 June 1994 the court granted the order he asked for, declaring the strike illegal. This was despite the IMU following the labour disputes procedure in all its detail — in contrast to the administration of Karagandacoal, which did not.

Even before the judges' decision, mine managements began to take illegal measures against the participants in the strike. At the Malkudukskaya mine 15 members of the IMU were dismissed; these dismissals were in breach of legislation and were carried out before the judges' ruling that the strike was illegal. At the Karaganiaskaya mine four IMU members were dismissed.

At many other mines, management verbally threatened to sack strikers. Therefore, quite probably, there will be further dismissals.

The IMU has not accepted the judges' decision that the strike is illegal. We are preparing an appeal in the Kazakhstan Supreme Court. We are taking court action to demand the reinstatement of the dismissed members of the IMU.

In defiance of the republic's laws, the area administration has denied leaders of the IMU the opportunity to use the mass media address the public, and members of the IMU itself, about the judges' decision and our response to it.

The participants in the strike, which altogether number about 2,000, are in serious difficulty. Miners' earnings are on average 30-40 US dollars per month — but they are not paid in full or on time. In addition to this, the strikers will, naturally, not be paid for the days of the strike, between 18 May and 6 June. They have also lost bonuses, which comprise about half of their pay, and other additional benefits, and all this seriously affects their families' budgets.

In regard to this hardship, and also support financially those whom the administration have illegally dismissed for participating in the strike, the IMU approaches trade union organisations to ask for any possible financial help for the strike participants.

We would be grateful if you would inform the IMU about any decisions taken to give material support.

Donations should be sent to: settlement account 695960 at Kredseebank of Karaganda, MFO 191801513, Index 470055, Kazakhstan. Any document authorising the transfer of money should indicate that it is a "Charitable Contribution for Authorised Activity" (in Russian Blagotvoritel'nyy vnos na ustavnuyu deyatelnost'), otherwise half the money will be removed for taxes.

We very much appreciated the expressions of support in your telegrams and faxes. We suggest that you may directly send messages to our address, and also, to urge a settlement of our demands and reinstatement of dismissed strikers, to the president of Kazakhstan, Nursultan Nazarbayev (fax numbers 7-3272-626544 and 7-3272-637633) and the general director of Karagandacoal, Grigori Present (fax numbers 7-3212-580795 and 7-3212-592466).

To bring pressure to bear on the government of Kazakhstan, for infringing the international laws covering the rights of trade unions and hired workers, we also suggest protests to the Administrative Council of the International Labour Office (1211, Geneva 22, Switzerland).

From the history of the international working-class movement we know that trade union solidarity is an appreciable force. We trust in the victory of the struggle we have begun, a victory which your support will help to bring nearer.

By Gennady Ozorovsky
Chairman of the IMU of Kazakhstan

Threats against North Korea

By Colin Foster

THE US is pressing for economic sanctions against North Korea because it has nuclear weapons.

The move is probably part of a longer-term plan to push North Korea's now-isolated Stalinist regime into collapse and reunite Korea under the domination of the capitalist south.

North Korea's people

would be well rid of dictator Kim Il Sung and his nuclear weapons or plans for nuclear weapons. The country has probably the most air-tight repressive regime in the world, condemning its 20-odd million people to grinding labour, grey poverty, and compulsory love for the "Great Leader".

But who are the leaders of the US to decree sanctions? The people who keep the

world's biggest nuclear arsenal, who brought us the horror of the Gulf War, who trained the death squads in El Salvador, who obliterated Hiroshima and Nagasaki, who used their nuclear weapons as real, immediate threats against China, Cuba and Vietnam?

Socialists should condemn US bullying of small nations while also condemning Kim Il Sung's despotism.



Kim Il Sung

N. Ireland: murder escalates

By John O'Mahony

A SMALL country pub in Loughinisland, South Down, the regulars elated around the TV set as they cheer on Ireland against Italy in the World Cup.

Two men burst in and open fire on them from behind without warning. Eleven of the 24 men in the bar are hit. Six, including an old man of 87, die. One man is still critically ill and may yet die.

That was on Saturday night,

19 June. The killers were members of the Protestant Ulster Volunteer Force, their victims Catholics.

This incident, terrible though it was in itself, was no more than a link in a chain of events, a chain that still winds into the unknown future. On the previous Thursday Protestant assassins had gone to the Catholic Falls Road, in Belfast, and attempted to kill a Catholic butcher. In response, the Irish National Liberation Army, an allegedly "left-wing"

organisation, went to the Protestant Shankill Road and killed two Protestant men, picked, sectarian-style, at random.

Tit-for-tat killings claimed two more victims before Saturday night's big slaughter at Loughinisland.

Since the beginning of this year, Protestant sectarian killers have slaughtered 24 people. The murder rate is escalating, not slowing down. It is not likely to slow down.

Since the end of last year, when an indefinite IRA ceasefire was widely expected — it did not happen — Northern Ireland has been destabilised by the so-called "peace process". The London and Dublin governments on one side, and the Provisional IRA and Sinn Fein on the other, have been manoeuvring around the possibility of a ceasefire.

Protestant Unionists fear that a British agreement with the Provisionals at their expense is imminent. Some of them — the UVF, the Ulster Freedom Fighters — have drawn their conclusions from what they see as British willingness to be coerced by the Provisional IRA: that real influence in Northern Ireland grows out of the barrel of a gun.

And some have one reflex response to big political questions — kill Catholics. Thus there has been an upsurge of anti-Catholic sectarian violence, overlapping with the Provisional IRA's continuing campaign, in which "politically defined" Protestants are usually the target.

Are the British about to "sell out" the Protestants to get a deal with the IRA? This would mean attempting to force them into some sort of united Ireland. It seems improbable, if only because any such move would create an uncontrollable Protestant/Unionist resistance.

At the end of last year, reports suggested the opposite, that the mooted ceasefire was to come about on the basis of, on the one hand, the Provisional IRA's acceptance that the decisive opposition to a united Ireland comes from Irish people, and, on the other, a British declaration that it would accept a united Ireland

if the Northern Ireland majority wanted it.

For over six months the Provisionals have been discussing these questions, and a formal response to the Dublin/London declaration is, finally, about to be published.

For the Unionist ultras of the UVF, anything less than a British drive to extirpate large layers of the Catholic population is a "sell-out". Such people have become more numerous and more desperate during the last six months of uncer-

"The UVF have drawn their conclusions from what they see as British willingness to be coerced by the Provisional IRA."

tainty.

The attack at Loughinisland was not likely to be the end of sectarian slaughter, unfortunately. We may be witnessing an early stage in a seismic lurch in Northern Ireland politics in which sections of the Protestants will take on the role of "rebels" now played primarily by the Catholic-based IRA.

The modern history of Ireland has seen such lurches more than once. The first rebels in 20th century Ireland were the Protestants — in the first Ulster Volunteer Force, before World War 1 — who armed to stop Britain setting up a parliament with limited powers in Dublin. Their victory goaded into action those who made the Dublin Easter Rising of 1916.

It is almost exactly 20 years since the Protestant Unionists organised a powerful political general strike to stop Britain setting up a provincial government in Belfast in which Catholic politicians had a guaranteed share of power. Any real concession to Catholic demands now would explode a new round of Protestant militancy.

That is the underlying meaning of Loughinisland.

Hands off our Hospitals!
GUY'S AND ST THOMAS'S MUST STAY!
Demonstrate
TUESDAY 5 JULY
March from Guy's to St Thomas's then lobby Parliament
Assemble 5.30pm outside Guy's (St Thomas's Street)
Depart 6pm

How to unite Northern Irish workers

The sectarian murder of six men as they watched the Irish World Cup team on TV brings Northern Ireland to the fore in the minds of British trade unionists. It is unfortunate that when the impact of this new horror fades, Ireland will then once more fade into the background of our concerns. We should not let it! The British labour movement needs to intervene in Northern Ireland if there is ever to be a just solution to the conflict there. *Socialist Organiser* presented this policy for Ireland to the recent UNISON Conference. It was written by Tony Dale.

NORTHERN Ireland is wrecked by sectarian division. Fundamentally the conflict has its roots in the existence of two communities, both of whom go back centuries. Two communities with different aspirations, histories and fears.

The job of trade unionists is not to pass judgement on a good people/bad people basis. Such judgement is the opposite of working-class politics and alien to the spirit of the trade union movement.

Our role must be to advocate an approach and proposals which seek to build workers' unity by recognising the rights, aspirations and fears of both sides. The trade unions should become the advocates of the most consistently democratic settlement of the Protestant-Catholic, Unionist-nationalist conflict.

The history of Ireland has been the history of division. This is reflected in the partition of 1922. Partition has been nothing but bad news for trade unionists, for women, for workers in general, Catholic and Protestant alike.

The South came to take on many of the features of a Catholic state for a Catholic people. For years the rights of women were ignored as the Catholic church ruled on social policy. Trade unionists and Labour supporters had a rough time as politics were dominated by two bosses' parties. Only recently has progress been made in rolling back the power of the Catholic church.

In the North, the state proudly proclaimed itself a "Protestant state for a Protestant people." The job market, the politics and the laws were all made by Protestants for Protestants. The problem with this was that a third of the population was Catholic. This left a time bomb ticking.

In the late 1960s the time bomb went off when the Catholics began to fight back against their position as second-class citizens. The old Northern Ireland state collapsed. The final act was the dissolution of the Belfast parliament in 1972.

Northern Ireland could not and can

not work. At the same time, the South is hardly a hospitable home for one million Protestants.

What is needed is a democratic settlement which can abolish Northern Ireland as the unworkable entity it is and, at the same time, address Protestant fear of becoming an oppressed minority in a united Ireland — what the Catholics were and are in Northern Ireland.

If the trade unions are going to help bring lasting peace to Northern Ireland they need to enter the political arena advocating consistent democracy and conciliation.

Socialist Organiser for a number of years has advocated a federal settlement — a united Ireland with local autonomy for the Protestant majority areas.

The trade union movement has avoided taking overtly political stances for fear of disrupting the existing level of workers' unity in Northern Ireland. Sometimes it is bureaucrats cynically trying to keep politics out of the unions, but in many cases this abstention comes from the sincere concerns of serious trade union activists who do not want to risk disrupting their movement.

Ignoring the constitutional question, the trade unions reinforce the *status quo* by omission. If the workers' movement is going to intervene to break the sectarian log-jam then this abstentionist approach needs to be dropped.

We need to develop and build on the existing level of Northern Irish working-class unity encompassed in the trade unions. How?

Socialist Organiser advocates that the trade unions should create a Labour Party in Northern Ireland. A trade union backed Labour Party as an alternative to Unionists and nationalists would be a healthy step forward.

A trade union based Labour Party would inevitably, at the start, reflect the present politics of the trade unions. It would most likely argue for a vague amalgam of workers' unity and an end to sectarian murders. Even on this basis, such a Labour Party would be a step forward.

However, the success or failure of a Labour Party will at the end of the day depend on its ability to rally Protestant and Catholic workers around proposals for a democratic settlement. That is the lesson of all past attempts to build such a party.

In our view the best answer is the "consistent democracy" advocated by the Russian Bolsheviks in 1913:

"In so far as national peace is in any way possible in a capitalist society based on exploitation, profit-making and strife, it is attainable only under a consistently and thoroughly democratic republican system of government... the constitution of which contains a fundamental law that prohibits any privileges whatsoever to any one nation and any encroach-

ment whatsoever upon the rights of a national minority. This particularly calls for wide regional autonomy and fully democratic local government, with the boundaries of the self-governing and autonomous regions determined by the local inhabitants themselves on the basis of their economic and social conditions, national make-up of the population, etc."



O'Toole's bar in Loughin Island where six people were killed in another sectarian attack

ment whatsoever upon the rights of a national minority. This particularly calls for wide regional autonomy and fully democratic local government, with the boundaries of the self-governing and autonomous regions determined by the local inhabitants themselves on the basis of their economic and social conditions, national make-up of the population, etc."

"The labour movement needs to intervene in Northern Ireland if there is ever to be a just solution there."

The Northern Ireland Labour Party (NILP) which used to get a quarter of the vote was washed away by the Troubles. Its attempts to combine support for the union of Northern Ireland with Great Britain with being a working-class alternative to both Unionists and nationalists was an unsolvable contradiction and it doomed the party to failure. In the heat of the early 1970s the party disintegrated.

If the NILP had developed consistently democratic proposals on the national question then the recent course of Northern Irish history

might have been different.

Many on the left see their role to be that of cheerleaders for the Republican Movement. This translates into making a stupid fetish of "troops out." The British left seem to believe troops out means a united Ireland!

This is a gross delusion. Troops out without a prior political settlement would mean civil war — Bosnia style ethnic cleansing and re-partition. Even the IRA calls not for "Troops Out Now" but for a negotiated withdrawal. What is needed is a political settlement. A part of any settlement inevitably must be withdrawal of troops — but it is the political settlement which is crucial.

The IRA's military campaign is going nowhere — it is in a *cul de sac*. It is not bringing the cause of Irish unity any closer. Protestants see the Provo campaign as a war against Protestants. In fact the Provo military campaign intensifies divisions and pushes the cause of Irish unity further away.

The military campaign should be called off and a cease-fire declared.

UNISON is one of the main public sector unions in Northern Ireland. It has been able to straddle the sectarian divide and organise Protestant and Catholic workers jointly in a trade union as workers.

In the NHS it has been at the forefront of campaigns to defend workers' interests irrespective of whether

they are Protestant or Catholic. In the sectarian atmosphere of Northern Ireland this is no mean achievement.

If the trade unions are going to decisively defend the interests of workers then we need to look at how we use this strength to intervene politically to pose a workers' solution to the troubles.

UNISON is in a powerful position to influence events in Northern Ireland. UNISON has a powerful base especially in the health service in Northern Ireland. We need to look at turning this base of workers' unity on a trade union level into a political movement for fundamental change in Northern Ireland.

From the Socialist Organiser UNISON Conference bulletin



Socialist Organiser's UNISON bulletin available from PO Box 823, London SE15 4NA. £1 + 38p p&p

"The emancipation of the working class is also the emancipation of all human beings without distinction of sex or race."

Karl Marx

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WE SAY

Unite the left! For unity in action and honest dialogue about our differences

Tory freedom works!

THE TORIES came to power 15 years ago as the self-proclaimed "party of freedom". When someone talks about freedom, it is advisable to ask, whose freedom?

One measure of the Tories' version of freedom is what has happened to Britain's prisons under Tory rule. They are now vastly overcrowded. Proportionately, Britain has the highest prison population in Western Europe - 50,000 women and men locked away in mainly 19th century hell-holes.

And prisons are being privatised. There are now three private prisons in Britain. Private citizens working for profit are licensed to imprison other citizens on the basis of a contract with the Government.

The latest private prison, in Doncaster, was opened last week. It is being run by a US firm, Premier Prison Services. It has a capacity for 771 inmates.

Premier's contract with the Government gives them permission to "cram" extra prisoners in - as many as 50 per cent extra, 1169 - and thus maximise their profit! Freedom...

The final touch is provided by the fact that this contract is known - according to an article in the Morning Star - only because the company involved is American and the US has a Freedom of Information Act. Britain does not.

In the land of Tory freedom, the Tories' agreement to allow the private jailers to "pile 'em high and cut your costs" remains a close-guarded secret. Tory freedom works! For the profiteers.

Beckett or Prescott?

SHOULD THE left back John Prescott or Margaret Beckett for Labour leader?

On this question we find ourselves out of step with others on the left - with people we respect such as the Campaign for Labour Party Democracy and the left wing of the Socialist Campaign Group of MPs.

Being out of step like this is no unusual experience for us. Normally, it is not something that we worry about much, if we worry about it at all. Our rule of behaviour when we have clear differences of principle with others on the left was long ago expressed by Marx himself using the words of a medieval Italian poet like this: "Go your way and let the people talk." Time will tell who is right.

In the present case, however, it is not so simple. We regard John Prescott as the least of the evils, not as a positively good left wing candidate. Central to our attitude to Prescott is a calculation that he is the one around whose candidacy the left can best organise an independent rank and file campaign for specific policy commitments (see centre pages).

This is calculation and judgment, not principle. Right is not self-evidently on our side. It all depends.

On a matter like this, we would normally be inclined to listen with great respect to the views of the Campaign for Labour Party Democracy, for example. In this case we remain convinced that it makes more sense to back Prescott.

Why? The key difference between us and others on the left is that we think our first concern must be to use the election campaign to *organise the rank and file*. Prescott is better for that than Beckett. It is not a matter of who sounds - genuinely or fakingly - more left-wing, but of who has the better standing with the bedrock rank and file of the labour movement, and around which candidacy the rank and file can better be organised.

Prescott is a shyster, but, since his 1988 deputy leadership challenge at least, he has clearly represented a limited but real "soft-left", pro-union challenge to the Labour top brass, and one supported by many trade unionists. That is what he represented when he stood against Beckett for deputy in 1992.

Beckett represents no more than the occasional private "assurance" that she has not forgotten her left-wing past.

The Beckettites, we think, have not faced up to what is implied by the scale of possible participation in this election - the need to break out of the token-left ghetto and campaign on clear mobilising issues.

Apart from and outside of assessing the possibilities for campaigning, an argument between socialists about who is less bad, Beckett or Prescott, is futile and stupid. Both are treacherous enough not to be trusted!

The left backers of Beckett do not believe her current left talk: they know better than that. Yet they still seem willing to allow their policy be shaped by speculation about who is slightly less treacherous.

The left should organise the rank and file; at the very least it should proclaim to the labour movement the urgent need to do that.

Of course, we advocate that Labour Party members and trade unionists who vote Prescott 1 should also vote Beckett 2, to stop Blair. That gives us a measure of common ground with left-wingers who advocate Beckett 1, Prescott 2; and we should try to work together where possible under the banner, "Stop Blair!"

Ideas for Freedom

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Three days of socialist debate, Friday 8 to Sunday 10 July,
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FEATURING

Guest Speaker: South African socialist, Neville Alexander, from the Workers' Organisation for Socialist Action on the struggle for socialism after apartheid.
Debates include: "How do we win peace in Ireland?" with Sinn Fein and "Should socialists support the PLO-Israel peace deal?"

FRIDAY HIGHLIGHTS

• "Fascism, free speech and no platform" John O'Mahony (editor of *Socialist Organiser*) discusses with Tim Gopsill (editor of the *Journalist*) and Steve Myers from the Campaign Against Fascism in Europe • "Should we ban boxing?" - a debate • A short course on the theory of capitalist crisis introduced by Martin Thomas • A forum on building rank and file groups in the unions • Stalinism and music • "What is the role of left-wing papers?" Jill Mountford of the AWL debates the Editor of *Tribune*, Mark Seddon

Additional sessions include

- The politics of the World Cup
- An introduction to the politics of war - the example of World War One

SATURDAY HIGHLIGHTS

• The AWL debates Sinn Fein on peace in Ireland • Neville Alexander and Tom Rigby from *Socialist Organiser's* Editorial Board discuss the struggle for socialism in South Africa • Hillel Ticktin examines Why Yeltsin failed and Bob Arnot looks at The Russian economy - the collapse continues • Cathy Nugent and Avedon Carol from Feminists Against Censorship discuss "Women, sex and pornography" • Clive Bradley defends Modernism • Rob Dawber asks "Did God write the Bible?" • Alan Johnson and Caroline Henry present a short course to introduce Marxism

Additional sessions include

- Crime - why do people do it? What should socialists say about it? • Are legal strikes possible any more? • Is pop music dead? • The AWL, "entryism" and the Labour Party • A short history of black people in Britain



SUNDAY HIGHLIGHTS

• Professor Meghnad Desai debates Martin Thomas on "Is full-employment possible?" • Neville Alexander and Sean Matgamna look at how the international left can work together • Gail Cameron and Tony Greenstein debate the Israel-PLO peace deal • Jon Pike asks "Why should socialists be bothered with philosophy?" • Paul Field looks at South Korean capitalism and unification • Janine Booth discusses Lesbian and Gay struggles after Stonewall • *Socialist Platform* run a series of discussions about the roots of the Cliff, Healy and Grant Tendencies

Additional sessions include

- A history of contraception
- A short series to introduce Marxism - Does socialism mean state tyranny? Why workers' revolution?

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Cheques to "WL Publications" to WL '94, AWL, PO Box 823, London, SE15 4NA

Severn Crossing strikers need your support

By a Severn Crossing strike committee member

ON Thursday 16 June the contractors, Laing/GTM, announced that they were sacking over 700 construction workers for going on strike that day. We had been trying to negotiate improved bonus and attendance payments for several months without any serious response from the Company. We had followed Laings' dispute procedure to the letter. We held a secret postal ballot which showed a 2:1 majority in favour of strike action.

We then held a mass meeting which agreed on a series of one-day strikes and a ban on weekend working. We were still trying to negotiate with the Company. Their only response was to issue letters to every worker on the site threatening to sack us if the action went ahead. Another mass meeting decided that we could not bow down to this intimidation and voted to go

ahead with the one day strike on 16 June.

The bulk of the sacked workers are TGWU and UCATT, with a small number of GMB and craft union members.

Basic pay for skilled workers at the site is £4.09 an hour. The basic rate for unskilled labour is £3.58 an hour. Most workers have to work a 50 to 60 hour week to get anything like a decent living wage. Bonus rates are very unreliable and the management continually change the targets. They also use different bonus rates to try and divide different groups of workers on the site. Workers on the river bed can be stuck for 18 hours or more depending on the tides. Some will be working up to their waists in water. There are no special compensation payments for these conditions. Recently the huge construction gantry on the Welsh side collapsed. Mercifully no-one was injured this time.

Laings conceded that productivity has increased by 100% in the last year.

Our basic pay has not increased by one penny. For the last two years there has been a pay freeze in the industry. This year's pay award will be 2.44%. Laings have deliberately used the recession to drive down wages and conditions. They treat the workforce with arrogance and contempt. Some of the sacked workers have been with Laings for more than 30 years. Norman Haste, Laings project manager, has referred to our claims for better pay as a "festering sore" that has to be got rid of.

We decided that enough was enough. Laings left us with no alternative but to strike. We know that we can win this dispute. Laings cannot close this site permanently. They have to complete the Crossing. But if we are to be certain of winning we need your support.

What you can do to support us:

- Hold a workplace collection for us.
- Invite a speaker to your workplace or union meeting
- Send official union donations to the Strike Fund

• Send messages of support to the Strike Committee

• Support our picket lines with delegations from your workplace or union organisation

• Take copies of this leaflet to construction sites in your area

• Messages of support, donations and requests for speakers to:

Second Severn Crossing Strike Committee, c/o Transport House, Victoria Street, Bristol, BS1
Telephone Chris Greedy 0272 737014 (evenings), 0272 230555 (days).

Socialism and democracy

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The left and the Labour leadership

By Martin Thomas

SOCIALIST WORKER last week (18 June) struck a note very unusual for that paper. "The Labour leadership contest is important", it insisted. "Labour – no matter how frustrating – is different from the Tories".

The launching of the Labour Party in 1900 was, said *SW*, "a great achievement... For the first time parliament and elections were no longer the exclusive territory of the ruling class and their parties. Workers had a clear choice between parties backed by their bosses and a party backed by working-class organisations... It firmly established the idea that workers needed to organise industrially and politically".

A Labour vote is a class vote. "The media claimed only the Liberals could beat the Tories in whole regions of the south of England... [but] in all these areas a majority of people are ordinary workers who can be won to identify with the rest of their class and vote Labour".

And "within the Labour Party socialists need to support those who want to see the party as a vehicle for change against those who want to squeeze out any talk of socialism".

In the leadership election, said *SW*, "the choice is... between Blair who wants to totally sever the party's link with the unions and others who will be forced to pay lip service to its importance. We should vote for the union link". Paul Foot's column advised readers more specifically to vote for John Prescott:

All very welcome — except

that, almost certainly, it does not reflect any real shift by *SW* on the Labour Party.

Usually, day-to-day, *SW* has what Marxists call a "syndicalist" approach. It argues that parliament and the parliamentary political parties are irrelevant, and that socialists can make progress only through trade-union action like strikes. That "syndicalism" was expressed even in last week's *SW*, when its editorial asserted:

"We don't have to rely on Labour leaders or wait for the next general election to beat the Tories and finish off Major... by building on every strike and every protest ordinary people up and down the country can strike the death blow to this rotten government". As if an increase of strikes can somehow push out the Tory Government and bring in Labour without elections, or the Labour Party, being dragged into the process!

But this is only half-syndicalism. Syndicalists who were confident about their ideas would reject all "kick the Tories out" agitation as a diversion. The answer, they would say, is not to play parliamentary politics but to focus on the real industrial struggle.

SW is not so sure, and not so serious. It trims its politics to the "mood" of those whose attention it wants to catch. And so last week's *SW*'s "Labourite" turn is not unprecedented. *SW* does the same at every general election! Paul Foot summed it up very frankly in a comment just before the 1979 general election: "For the next three weeks I am

a strong Labour supporter... I shall be going around... telling everyone to vote Labour" (emphasis added).

At general elections *SW* supports Labour – and the rest of the time it rejects any ongoing campaign to press working-class demands on Labour as a waste of energy. *SW* is, so to speak, "the revolutionary alternative" on strikes, but pure Labourite on current overall politics as reflected in parliament. Instead of being an element in an overall policy designed to organise Labour-supporting workers, mobilise them around demands, and bring them into a fight against the Labour leadership, *SW*'s Labour vote is a gesture of deference to the Labour leaders, a signal that "we'll take care of the strikes, you can take care of the rest".

And in the leadership contest *SW* is passive "soft-left", voting for Prescott as the lesser evil without any of the effort which *Socialist Organiser* has advocated to use the contest to organise the rank and file round working-class demands on the Labour leadership.

Socialist Outlook has also ducked out of the job of organising the rank and file to give substance to the "critical" element in critical support for the soft-left against Blair.

As regular readers will know, the way things generally stand between *Socialist Outlook* and ourselves is that we see them as feeble, wavering, lukewarm, "soft", while they see us as being harsh, sectarian, ultra-left.

However, *Outlook* can be very left-wing indeed, and very

angry about how "right-wing" *Socialist Organiser* is – when it's all a matter of gestures without real content.

"Labour needs socialist policies. Left must stand against Blair and Prescott" was their front-page headline on 11 June. An article inside by Pete Firmin criticised *Socialist Organiser* (and *Labour Briefing*) as weak and defeatist because we "plump for (a poor) second best from the start" by critically supporting Prescott or Beckett.

But *Outlook* plumped for something much less than second-best: backing Ken

"*SW* is 'soft-left', voting for Prescott as the lesser evil without any effort to organise round working-class demands."

Livingstone's sham leadership effort.

Livingstone made no real effort to get the nominations necessary to enter the contest. And his priorities set out in the *Morning Star* (6 June) and *Campaign Group News* (June) were not left-wing. His "central goal" was to "sharply raise the level of investment in the British economy" (i.e.... more

capital!), and the measures proposed towards this goal included tax concessions for bosses making investments. More tax cuts for the rich!

Back in April 1985, Pete Firmin wrote a statement with other left-wingers in Brent East Constituency Labour Party as part of an unsuccessful attempt to stop Livingstone being selected as parliamentary candidate there. "When Reg Freeson [the previous Brent East MP, a right-winger] described Ken as a left-wing opportunist, many of us agreed. We felt however that Brent East would be able to keep him under some kind of control. This has proved to be an illusion".

But Pete's article in *Outlook* took us to task for "openly displaying [our] hatred of Livingstone".

It is not some personal vendetta! If we guided ourselves by such factors, then our chief campaign now would be against John Prescott, since his campaign manager, Richard Caborn, was central to the purge in Sheffield Central CLP in 1992, when 15 supporters or alleged supporters of *Socialist Organiser* were targeted and several of them expelled.

We go by political arguments. It is no answer to those arguments to shy away in horror from our "open display" of our attitudes, as if the left were a vicarage tea-party where plain speaking is out of order.

The whole Livingstone business was a side-show in the Labour leadership contest; yet *Outlook*'s eyes were firmly fixed on that side-show. Their headline meant, in fact: "You

28 MPs of the Campaign Group! This coming week, nominate Ken Livingstone!"

Now *Outlook*'s readers have to wait until 25 June, just five days before the ballot papers go out, for guidance on the actual contest. (It will, so we hear, be to vote against Blair – either Beckett or Prescott, with no particular preference).

What about our proposal for committees in the unions to organise for basic policies – rebuild the Welfare State, unshackle the unions, and so on – and press them as demands on the candidates? Pete Firmin wrote that it "needs taking up by the left, but... is severely restricted" by the short timetable of the contest.

Then why waste an important part of the short time available with windy declamations which are in fact only querulous appeals to a few left MPs? Why not get down to the real business straight away?

There was a large element of wilful foolishness in what *Outlook* said in support of Livingstone, the publicity-seeking non-left non-candidate. They were looking for a gimmick, wishing they were some place else. The objective political meaning of it was a form of sectarian abstention – all of it at one remove, all of it unserious, all of it playful and child-like rather than grown-up.

Outlook know as well as we do just what Livingstone is and what he represents. Instead of facing the real issues and the real possibilities in the Labour "primary", they preferred to indulge in a bit of sectarian whimsy and fantasy.

Getting it rite

IT SEEMS that the Americanisation of our education system may have some drawbacks.

Our Grammatically Challenged Dept. reports that signs in the windows of US fast-food chain Wendy's read "Be cool in school! Good grades has its rewards."

So it's a big "Hadn't you do well" to Reagan, Bush and Clinton.

UPTIGHT Italian fascist leader Gianfranco Fini says he does not mind a gay man voting for him but "the important thing is that he doesn't try to seduce me, because that's a different matter entirely."

We presume an MSI Pink Section is out of the question.

Meanwhile, Italian gay activist Franco Grillini commented that "Fini is in no danger of being seduced, because he makes us sick."

SOMEONE appears to have stolen a large file of statistics from, er, the police.

The Home Office estimates that 50,000 racially motivated crimes are reported to the police each year. Strangely enough the *police* recorded only 8,700 racially motivated crimes last year.

Home Office research shows black people are twice as likely to be stopped as whites.

Peculiar, that...

Roger Hood, a criminologist at Oxford University, estimates that black people also receive harsher sentences than white people.

And it seems that one-ten men in jail are Afro-Caribbean — nine times their proportion outside jail.

Police and the legal system, racist? Odd that. Well, it's almost certainly just a couple of bad apples...

WE hear that Ken Livingstone had to negotiate a very stormy passage through last week's meeting of the Socialist Campaign Group of Labour MPs.

The general mood of the meeting, which was better attended and larger than usual, was that Ken had been wrong to put himself forward for Labour leader yet again.

Ken did not go down well. Few present took his

GRAFFITI

VIVELA
REVOLUCION

By Cyclops

explanations for his four-day-long on-off-on again campaign for nominations very seriously.

The mood at the meeting was summed up best by Ken's former buddy at the Greater London Council, Newham MP Tony Banks.

Banks recalled Ken's confidence when he first entered parliament, and how the two of them had discussed how one day Ken could be leader of the Labour Party...

"Well, son. You've blown it," was Banks's conclusion.

P.S. Just how many MPs did nominate Ken Livingstone?

We don't know anyone who knows. But you can bet that he is not as popular in the Campaign Group as Margaret Beckett.

"I asked, 'Do you support the rail strike,' answer as follows: 'Yes...' If this advice is followed strictly I can guarantee that the Labour leaders would win some unaccustomed self-respect and the gratitude of all decent trade unionists. They would not I think, lose a single vote." Well put — by Paul Foot in *Guardian*-columnist mode (20 June). Whether Paul Foot as Socialist Worker columnist would agree is a tricky question. After all, SW's constant theme is that supporting strikes cannot be squared with Labour Party activity, because Labour wants votes and supporting strikes allegedly loses votes.



The once and no future Ken

The Guardian's dream ticket

PRESS GANG

THE GUARDIAN TODAY
SUNDAY PRESS
THE WORLD

By Jim Denham

FEW, IF any, eyebrows were raised at the news that the Confederation of British Industry (or, at least, its Director General, Howard Davies) has come out for Tony Blair. After all, if the entire British press feels able to give its backing to Blair, why not the CBI? In fact, Mr Davies' endorsement of the Boy Wonder seems to have been considerably more whole-hearted than most of the Tory press, which tends to qualify its support with awkward questions about "principles" (or lack of them) and little jibes like the *Daily Mail's* "Where's the beef in Bambi?"

In this respect Mr Davies comes closer to the approach of *The Guardian* which, not being a Tory paper, feels no need to deride Mr Blair for his lack of anything remotely resembling socialist principle. *Guardian* columnist Hugo Young, for instance, noted approvingly that "Mr Blair can revert to the old language (i.e., use the word "socialism") with some impunity. Since nobody outside believes he is a socialist, they will not suspect him of meaning it... his 'socialism' is a word that now represents no more than what he personally speaks for: a politics pinned on the essential relationship between society and the individual, the potent divide, as he sees it, between the modern left and right".

I've no idea what — if anything — that actually means. But sure enough, at last Saturday's exciting *Guardian*-sponsored conference *Whatever Next?* up popped a grinning Tony Blair to give the "keynote speech", repeating exactly the same sort of vacuous nonsense: "Once being radical is defined as having a central vision, based around principle but liberated from particular policy prescriptions that have become confused with principle, then being radical is the route to electability". Whatever it meant, it apparently went down well enough with the assembled Fabians, Lib-Dems, ex-SDPers and assorted *Newsnight* presenters.

But the *Guardian* has another, rather different, audience it also has to play to: rank and file Labour Party members and trade union activists. Such people are unlikely to be impressed by waffle about the "essential relationship between society and the individual" or "central visions" somehow "liberated from particular policy

prescriptions". Such people tend to believe that politics still has something to do with old-fashioned notions like class, ownership and economic power. For this constituency, the *Guardian* has a *de facto* line of boosting Margaret Beckett's left-wing credentials at every possible opportunity. Last week, for instance, Mrs Beckett told Radio 4's *Today* programme "We need to have legislation which allows a sensible, workable and fair approach to secondary picketing so that people are not treated in the way they sometimes have been in the past, without any regard for reasonable industrial rights which would be enjoyed anywhere else in Europe". The *Mail* and *Express*, naturally, seized upon these remarks as proof that Labour was preparing to "unleash strikes across Britain". But the Tory press was at least accurate in pointing out that nothing in Mrs Beckett's words contradicts existing Labour Party policy, drawn up by none other than Tony Blair during his period as

Shadow Employment Secretary. Only the *Guardian* suggested otherwise, with a front-page story headlined "Beckett back secondary pickets". Other recent *Guardian* articles have made much of the fact that the majority of the Campaign Group are supporting Beckett and that (unnamed) "leading Labour women" would regard her defeat for the Deputy Leader's post as "a judgement on the party's sexism".

Most of the *Guardian's* pro-Beckett pieces have appeared under the by-line of Patrick Wintour, a supporter of the Labour Co-ordinating Committee and a keen Blair enthusiast. The name of Wintour's side-kick Seamus Milne, has been notably absent from any of the paper's coverage of the Labour leadership campaign. Milne was once a prominent supporter of *Straight Left* — a Stalinist "entryist" publication aimed at the mainstream Labour left. Margaret Beckett was also a *Straight Left* supporter. This, of course, has nothing to do with the *Guardian's* enthusiasm for the Beckett cause. But a Blair/Beckett "dream ticket" would fit in rather nicely with the personal loyalties of the *Guardian's* political staff.

Beckett's no sister of mine!

WOMEN'S EYE

By Trudy Saunders

IN JUNE 1991 *Labour Briefing* described their "Class Traitor of the Month" thus: "Always ambitious (she) has floated with the political tide, carefully cultivating her career and displaying an astonishing indifference to the hobgoblin of consistency."

The Class Traitor? None other than Margaret Beckett, the candidate in the current Labour Party leadership contest that *Briefing* and others on the left want to support.

Beckett's parliamentary antics clearly shows her to be an out-and-out careerist. In 1976, while a member of soft-left *Tribune*, she accepted the post of parliamentary under secretary of state for education working under soon to be SDPer, Shirley Williams. Beckett replaced Joan Lester who had resigned in protest over IMF-imposed spending cuts.

When Labour moved left in 1979, so did Beckett.

In 1981 she publicly denounced Neil Kinnock for failing to vote for Tony Benn in the deputy leadership contest. In 1983, she was a member of both *Tribune* and the Campaign Group. In the same year she voted for Kinnock in the leadership contest and was rewarded with the job of Social

Security spokesperson.

In 1988, after a series of failed attempts to gain a place in the Shadow Cabinet, Beckett, broke from the Campaign Group and became a staunch and uncritical Kinnockite. As a result she won a place on Labour's National Executive. One year later she secured her longed-for place in the Shadow Cabinet. Her stated reason for her break from the Campaign Group was opposition to the Benn/Heffer leadership campaign in 1988.

Beckett continued her mindless loyalty to Kinnock and was John Smith's *chosencandidate* for deputy leader in 1992.

It is important at this stage to remember the reasons why Beckett became a central part of Kinnock's economic team which also included Smith, Brown and Blair.

This extremely right-wing clique was put in place by Kinnock after the '87 election disaster. In the preceding period Kinnock had had to isolate and pick off frontbenchers like John Prescott who still insisted on making vaguely left wing policy proposals like his plan to create one million jobs in two years.

The task of the new team was to ensure that Labour made no pledges to do anything if it involved spending any money or attacking the rich. Beckett was only too willing to take on this job leading even a middle of the road Labour commen-

tator like Hugh Macpherson of *Tribune* to comment after April '92: "When Margaret Beckett was asked if Labour's plans contained an element of redistribution, she dissembled like a Victorian Lady being asked if she harboured impure thoughts."

As a leadership candidate she is pulling out all the stops. "Vote for me because I am a woman" is her rallying cry. Yet she has not made one commitment to help the millions of low-paid and unemployed working class women whose lives have been made misery by the Tories over the last 15 years.

Socialists should support candidates first and foremost on the basis of politics, not sex. A Labour leader who refuses to reverse Tory ravages on the Welfare State, introduce a minimum wage, rights for part-time workers and full employment is not representative of the needs of working-class women.

Proof of just how two-faced Beckett is can be provided by the following facts. She retained her membership of CND after supporting the Gulf War and embracing Labour's support for the Bomb. She also continued as a member of the Campaign for Labour Party Democracy after supporting the witchhunt and the Policy Review.

The task of the left and the unions is to do what we can to stop Blair becoming Labour

Party leader. Blair represents the hard right wing of the party. He is a bitter opponent of trade unions and trade unionism and offers nothing to the working class.

There is little to choose between all three candidates. On balance, John Prescott is the left's least bad option as the candidate in this contest closest to the working class and trade unions.

Although Prescott has nothing solid in his political record which places him sharply to the left of Beckett, he does not display her astounding hypocrisy and political instability. Prescott himself has a despicable and disgraceful record, notably at 1993 Labour Party Conference when he used his trade union credentials to help push through OMOV — but, compared to Beckett, he is a relatively consistent "soft-left".

The Labour leadership contest is an opportunity for the left to campaign to pressurise the candidates into fighting the Tories.

More importantly, we can use the election to reach out to many ordinary bedrock Labour Party supporters who will be backing Prescott and try to *organise* them against the right.

It also gives us a chance to agitate for a democratic method of electing a leader — maybe then we would have a candidate we could positively support.

Lancaster and Morecambe Young Labour show the way

Youth need benefits, jobs and training

THE Tories have embarked on a moral crusade against the homeless and poor. This is at a time when millions of students and youth face a summer with no benefits, and millions of people remain unemployed.

Labour's response has been a disgrace. They have refused to commit Labour to restoring benefits to 16 and 17 year olds and students. They have floated the idea of a skivvy £50 a week cheap-labour scheme, for only 50,000 youth.

Serious socialist youth must not take this crap lying down. We need to get onto the streets to campaign against the Tories' scapegoating of youth. We must also take the battle into the labour movement and fight the spinelessness of the Labour leaders.

The best place to begin the fight-back is through the Young Labour groups. That's exactly what Lancaster and Morecambe Young

Labour are doing. Everyone should follow their example.

Below, Michelle Brown from Lancaster and Morecambe Young Labour group explains their campaign on youth benefits and lists some ideas for other Young Labour groups.

1. Pass policy in your Young Labour group.
2. Write a leaflet setting out the facts of youth poverty, homelessness etc. Demand the reinstatement of youth benefit rights, proper investment in jobs and training, and a home-building programme.
3. Submit a motion to your local Labour Party outlining the above and criticising the Labour leadership's failure to commit themselves to restore benefit. Demand real jobs not more cheap labour schemes.
4. Send speakers to trade union branch meetings. Ask them to pass

policy supporting the reinstatement of benefits. The T&G may be willing to provide speakers for a Young Labour group public meeting on youth benefits, jobs and training. Your local Civil Service trades union, the CPSA, may also have policy on reinstating benefits.

5. Write to Labour councillors or MPs. Ask for statements attacking the Tories and supporting your campaign. Ask them if they will be willing to be quoted in local papers.
6. Write letters to the local papers.
7. Make an appointment with local Tory MPs. Ask them lots of questions so that you can get them quoted them in the local press on beggars, benefits, youth training and jobs.
8. Organise a picket outside your MP's surgery. Last year we organised a protest on grant cuts. We had 60 people outside Dame

Elaine's surgery. When the people with appointments came out we occupied the room for about an hour after she had fled. We refused to leave until the press arrived. We gave our statement and left only when we had been threatened with being arrested by dog-handling police.

9. Tell the papers when your Young Labour Group meets and get them to come down and photograph your next stall in town where you have lots of people signing your petition!

10. Make sure you send off petitions to the relevant Tory and ask for a response. Again this can be printed in the local press.

11. Don't do protests where you get inside cardboard boxes pretending to be homeless. This enrages homeless people and charities.

YOUTH FIGHTBACK

Rebellion



... the voice of revolutionary socialist youth.

This page is separately edited.

Editor: Mark Sandell

Phone: 071-639 7967 for details of our activity.

Letters and articles to *Youth Fightback* c/o PO Box 823, London SE15 4NA.

Youth Fightback is...

Courts free Nazi thug

By Mark, South London

SECOND in command of the Nazi British National Party is Richard Edmonds. Last Friday, Edmonds was found guilty, along with two other Nazi thugs, of a violent racist attack yet walked free from court.

The incident happened last year on the afternoon following the rout by anti-racist youth of the BNP from their Brick Lane paper sale.

After abandoning their sale the Nazis went off to lick their words in "The Ship" pub in Bethnal Green.

It was outside this pub that Edmonds and others shouted racist abuse and spat at Steven Browne and his white girlfriend, Jenny Bone. Edmonds threw a glass at the couple. One of his BNP underlings, Biggs, smashed a glass into Browne's face, scarring him for life. Once Browne was on the floor, another BNP member, O'Shea, kicked and punched him.

Last Friday Edmonds walked free: he had already served his short three-month sentence in jail while awaiting trial.

Edmonds was campaign organiser for Derek Beackon, who was elected as BNP councillor for Millwall ward in East London at a by-election, then defeated in the 5 May council elections. The attack on Browne took place only two weeks after Beackon's by-election victory. It shows as clearly as possible the nature of Nazi organisations like the BNP.

Wherever the BNP gain support the direct physical threat to blacks, Jews and other people they dislike increases. That is why socialists and the labour movement can not and must not let them peacefully build up their organised strength of their race-hate gang.

Simple self-defence demands that we physically stop the BNP organising.

But this can not be just a job for small groups of 'hard lads', as some on the left seem to think. The only

way to smash the BNP is to build a mass anti-racist movement with its roots deep in working-class communities and in the labour movement. Such a mass movement could mobilise local people to stop Nazi meetings, demos and paper sales, and destroy any base they build.

Yet such a movement can only be built if it offers real answers to working-class people about jobs and housing, and systematically opposes the scapegoating racist filth spread by the press and the establishment.

Tragically the existing anti-racist movement is weak and divided. The major groups, both the SWP's ANL (Anti Nazi League) and the ARA (Anti-Racist Alliance), specifically rule out countering the Nazis' claims to offer housing and jobs through racism. Instead they rely on a moralistic 'racism is wrong' campaign.

They do not focus on the labour movement, aiming instead to build a 'popular' hotch potch alliance including "good" Tories and Liberals. They consciously avoid making major left wing social and political demands

"Any new police powers taken on the pretext of combatting the racists will be used against the Left."

that would upset their right-wing allies.

At best, this misses the point. White youth without jobs or housing listen to the Nazis because they claim racist policies can create jobs and housing. That is why black youth are being attacked daily on British streets.

Only the millions-strong labour



Nazi Richard Edmonds walks free from court

movement has the power to give real answers to unemployment and to the housing crisis. And only with real answers can black and white unite against the bosses and the Tories and their racist scavenger squads.

The labour movement can scour out racism and smash the Nazis, but only if we relate to the real issues. Cosying up to the very establishment, 'anti-racist' though they may claim to be, which has helped to create the conditions in which the Nazis grow, can not build the mass working-class anti-racist movement that is desperately needed.

Edmonds' case also shows the danger of looking to the state and the courts to sort out the Nazis. Look to the devil to fight sin!

The sentences for these violent Nazi thugs are likely to be lower than those dished out to anti-racists arrested by the police after the march against the BNP headquarters at Welling!

During the trial, Judge Christopher Handy said: "When people associate themselves with extreme political organisations, whether on the right or the left, as officials they are to a cer-

tain extent riding a tiger."

This, remember, is a case of extreme racist violence, yet the Judge puts these Nazi thugs in the same category as the left who mobilise to stop them attacking blacks and Jewish people.

It is crazy to look to this judiciary or the police to crush organisations like the BNP. They won't do it. Any new powers they take in the pretence of catching the racists, will be used against the left. After all, much of the raw racism on which the BNP feeds is created by the capitalist system. Its judges, police and laws demonise black immigrants — and their British children! — as undesirable, alien and a threat to the British way of life, unless they are rigidly controlled by strong immigration laws.

There is only one force that has the power and the basic self-interest to really sort out thugs like Edmonds and the BNP gang — that is the labour movement.

Black and white, united in the labour movement, have the power to destroy the fascists.

Power-crazed teacher of the week

By Anna, Nottingham

DURING my recent maths GCSE exam, the invigilating teacher paced up and down, pausing beside my desk every few minutes. He sighed and looked down at my work. "Twat," I thought, "I know what you're thinking — she can't pass maths in a stripey T-shirt, it's a physical impossibility."

"Come and see me in my office after the exam," he whispered with conscious authority.

Since I knew what it was about, I wasn't panicked. But if I had been a nervous type, or hadn't known what I had done wrong, I might have been worried about it for the rest of the exam, possibly affecting my result.

I went to see him: "Look, it's not fair on others," he said, "if they make an effort and you do what you like. If you come to your next exam like that you'll be sent home."

I just told him calmly that technically he had no right to stop me sitting my exams because of my clothes.

"Right, that's it... bad attitude... letter to parents... I'm not arguing with you!" He had lost his rag.

"I'm not starting a big argument," I reasoned, "I'll wear the uniform if you're all that bothered."

"Make sure you do!" He began to walk off, so I called after him: "Wait a minute, we were having a conversation. Don't you want to hear my point of view?"

Then the antique fall-back line comes out: "It's a rule — no discussion."

When the bulk of teachers in school talk down to pupils like this, you can begin to understand the blinkered view of many pupils that "teachers are the enemy". School uniform is used to maintain some control over young people, to separate them from teachers, to further the inequality. Wearing school uniform is a ridiculous, and trivial rule which all pupils — including first years — should, wherever possible, break and strive to change.

Don't let the Tory media

Fight for

union rights

Rebuild the

welfare sta

Labour should fight for working-class people's interests

THE LABOUR leadership elections give millions of people the chance to use their vote to express what they think of the party's policy and direction.

People should use that vote. We should send out a clear message that...

1. We want the Labour leadership to really lead a serious fight to get rid of

this hated Tory government at the earliest possible opportunity.

2. We want to see the party leading workers in struggles like the BR signal-workers who are striking for a decent pay rise.

3. We want to see the party committed to clear and identifiable policies in the interests of working-class people.

Policies like:

- The repeal of the anti-union laws and their replacement by the restoration of a legal right to strike, to take solidarity action and to picket effectively.

- A shorter working week of 35 hours and the rebuilding of the Welfare State and public services like education and housing.

This would provide both desperately needed jobs and improved services for working-class people.

- A minimum wage of £4.05 per hour. This would put some limit on the ability of sweatshop employers to exploit the least well-organised groups of

workers.

These policies are a long way from the kind of root and branch socialist reorganisation of society that is required. But if Labour did go out and fight even on this limited basis, it would start to give confidence and purpose to millions of working-class people who at the moment don't see Labour giving any real lead.

Vote for Prescott against Blair

NONE OF the candidates in the Labour leadership election can be trusted to fight for the policies we need, but John Prescott is by a long way the least bad of them.

Prescott is not a yuppie toff like Blair or shameless ex-left turncoat like Beckett.

Prescott gets the bulk of his support from ordinary trade union activists who make up the bedrock on which the Labour Party is built.

Because of this he is more likely to respond to demands and pressure from ordinary trade unionists and Labour Party members.

It is important not just to vote for Prescott in the election but to organise as well.

There's also no point just moaning about the Labour leadership and voting for Prescott as a protest. Ordinary

Labour supporters should join the party, get involved in real campaigning around issues like the Welfare State that affect ordinary people's lives, and fight to change the policies and direction.

Right now you can do the following:

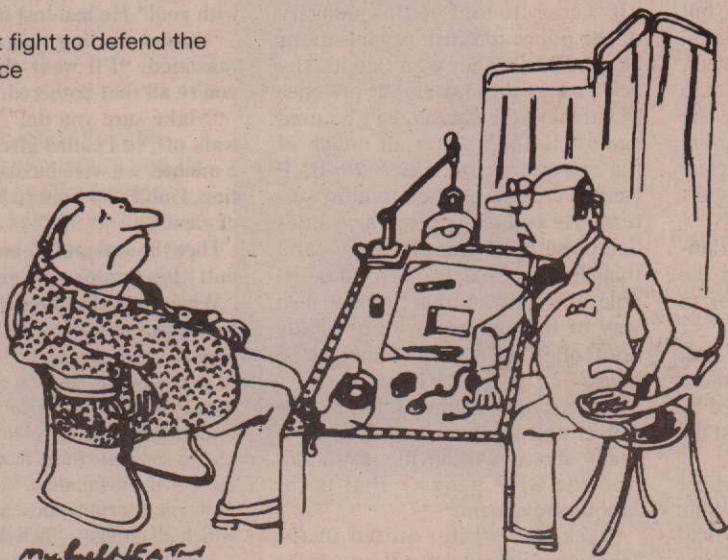
- **IF YOU** are a trade unionist who is not an individual member of the party then why don't you join today?

There is now a cheap rate for trade unionists who are not already members. Write to: the Labour Party, 150



BACK

Labour must fight to defend the Health Service



Well, Mr Thompson, you can either die, or have private treatment

Read Socialist Organiser every

choose Labour's leader

Labour doesn't need Blair to beat the Tories

THE TORY press are busy telling Labour supporters that Tony Blair is the only man who can win the next election for Labour.

No one should be fooled by this nonsense. The billionaire press will play exactly the same game with Blair as they did with Kinnock. First they will build him up, then they will knock him down.

They will be able to do this because what they identify today as Blair's good qualities — his TV manner, his lack of any clear or radical policies and his relative youth — will tomorrow become his weaknesses.

As the next election draws closer the Tories' media hounds will point out that Blair is just an empty vessel, with no clear policies or beliefs who will do or say anything in order to get himself elected to a job he has not got the experience to do.

No Labour supporter should forget who lost us the last general election.

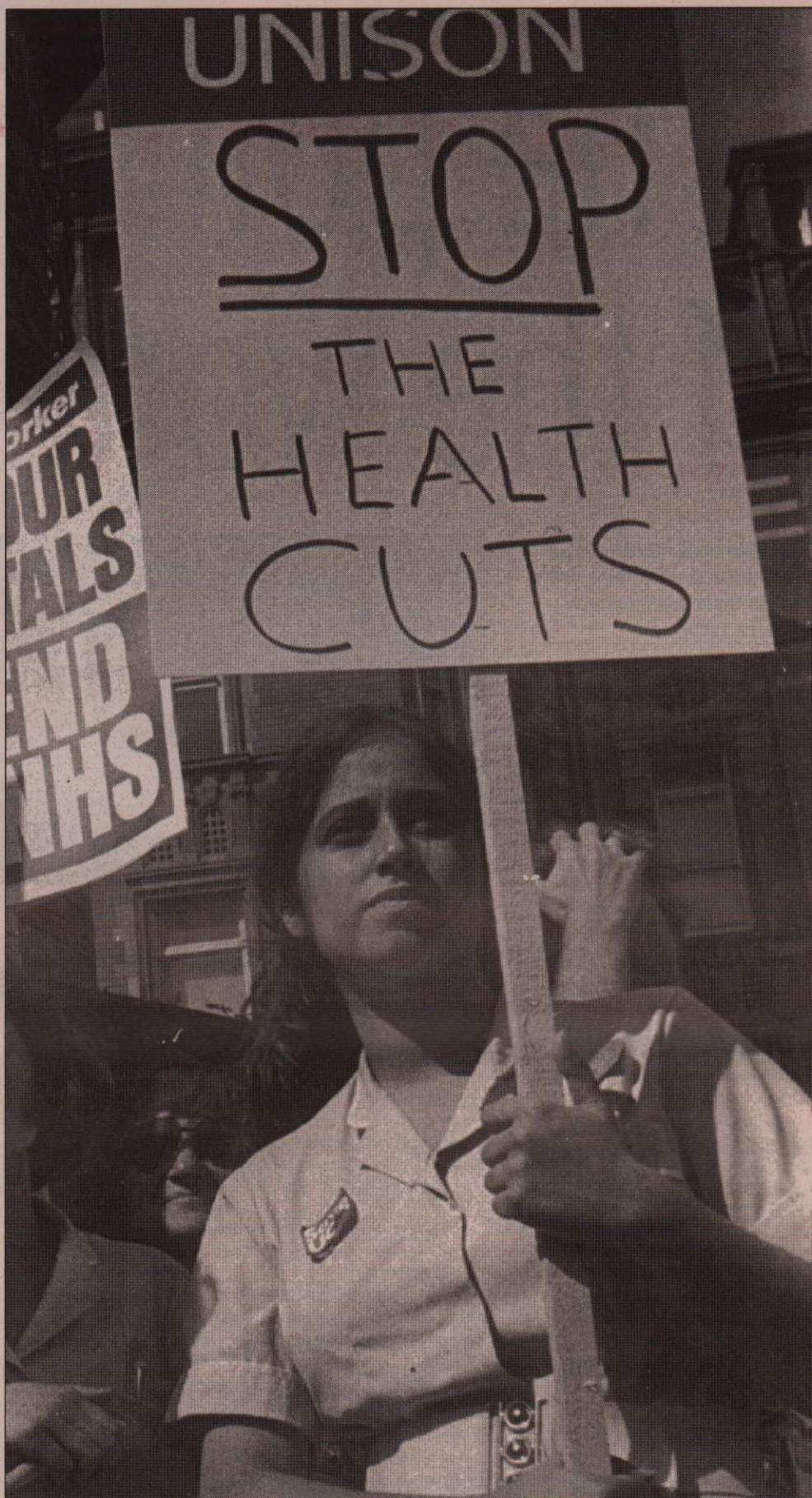
It was Neil Kinnock. Nobody believed him, no one trusted him. The electorate knew that he was prepared to say and do anything to get elected. So they didn't elect him.

Labour can probably still win the next election whoever the leader is. That's because the political tide is turning against the Tories across the whole country.

But Tony Blair is the person *least likely* to capitalise on this.

That's because Blair doesn't offer any kind of real alternative to the horrors of capitalist Britain after 15 years of Tory rule. All he offers is pale pink Toryism. He wants to keep the Tory laws that shackle our unions, and he opposes setting a figure on a minimum wage or even promising that Labour will definitely bring one in.

The only thing that Blair stands for is the idea that no matter how bad it gets for working-class people, they should not fight back and they should not threaten the power of the unelected bosses, bankers and bureaucrats who really run Britain.



S!

te!

Walworth Road, London SE17.

• **LINK UP** with other left-wingers in the Labour Party and the trade unions. The Alliance for Workers' Liberty (which produced this poster) is an organisation which fights for socialist policies in the labour movement and which aims to transform that movement into a force which can overthrow capitalism and replace it with a socialist system based on democratic planning for human needs.

• **GET IN** contact with us! Write to: PO Box 823, London SE15 4NA.

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What is the Welfare State?

"The political economy of the working class"

In the first of two articles Dale Street looks at the origins of the Welfare State and its role in capitalist society

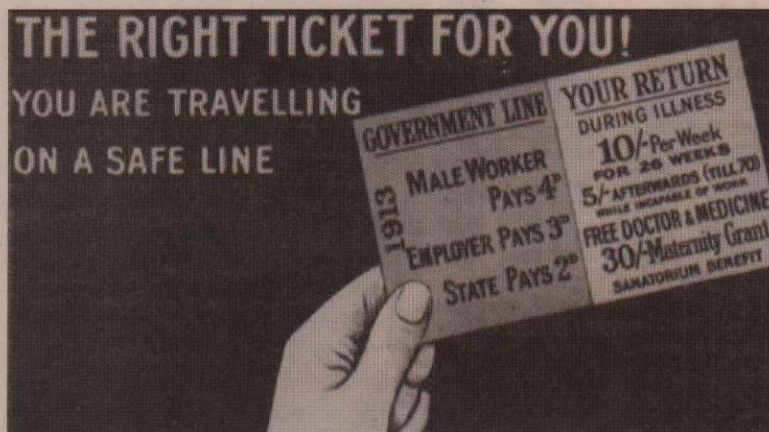
AFTER THE General Election of 1945 it seemed to many as if the citadels of power had finally fallen to the army of labour. Churchill and the Tories had been defeated. On the basis of a landslide victory the first ever Labour government to enjoy an absolute majority had been elected.

Labour's electoral victory in 1945 was the product of a wave of radicalisation and a popular demand for far-reaching social reforms which had been unleashed by the ending of the war.

Churchill had recognised the Second World War for what it was: a war of empire, a war rooted in the no-holds-barred rivalry between the world's leading capitalist powers.

But millions of workers in Britain and elsewhere saw the war in very different terms. For them it had been a war against the barbarism of fascism, a war against the Nazis who had once been so admired by Tory politicians and the Tory press.

And many workers also drew their own conclusions about the war and how it had been won. The war years had seen a growth of state intervention in the economy, increased progressive taxation, and full employment — the very measures which, in peacetime, the Tories had claimed



"Social insurance" before 1945 was scanty and patchy

would lead to economic ruin.

Many of those voting in 1945 had been born during the barbarism of the First World War, grew up during the bosses' offensive of the 1920s, searched for work in vain during the slump of the 1930s, and were then conscripted to fight during the Second World War.

There was a determination that the return of peace should not bring with it a return to the poverty and humiliation of the 1930s: slum housing, mass unemployment, poor health, the means test, and minimal educational opportunities.

Workers who had defeated fascism abroad were not prepared to return home to a country where those who had inflicted such poverty and humiliation on them were allowed to again take up the reins of power unchallenged.

Labour's landslide victory, its policies of nationalisation, and its establishment of what subsequently became known as "the Welfare State", seemed to mark the beginnings of a new epoch.

Nationalisation was not the beginnings of the "expropriation of the expropriators." Nor was it the first stage in the creation of a democratically planned economy. Even so, workers greeted nationalisation with enthusiasm. As one reporter described "vesting day" in the Rhondda Valley:

"An hour before dawn today miners' wives took their children, some still asleep, and carried them up the starlit road to the Penallta Colliery to show them something they would remember the rest of their lives.

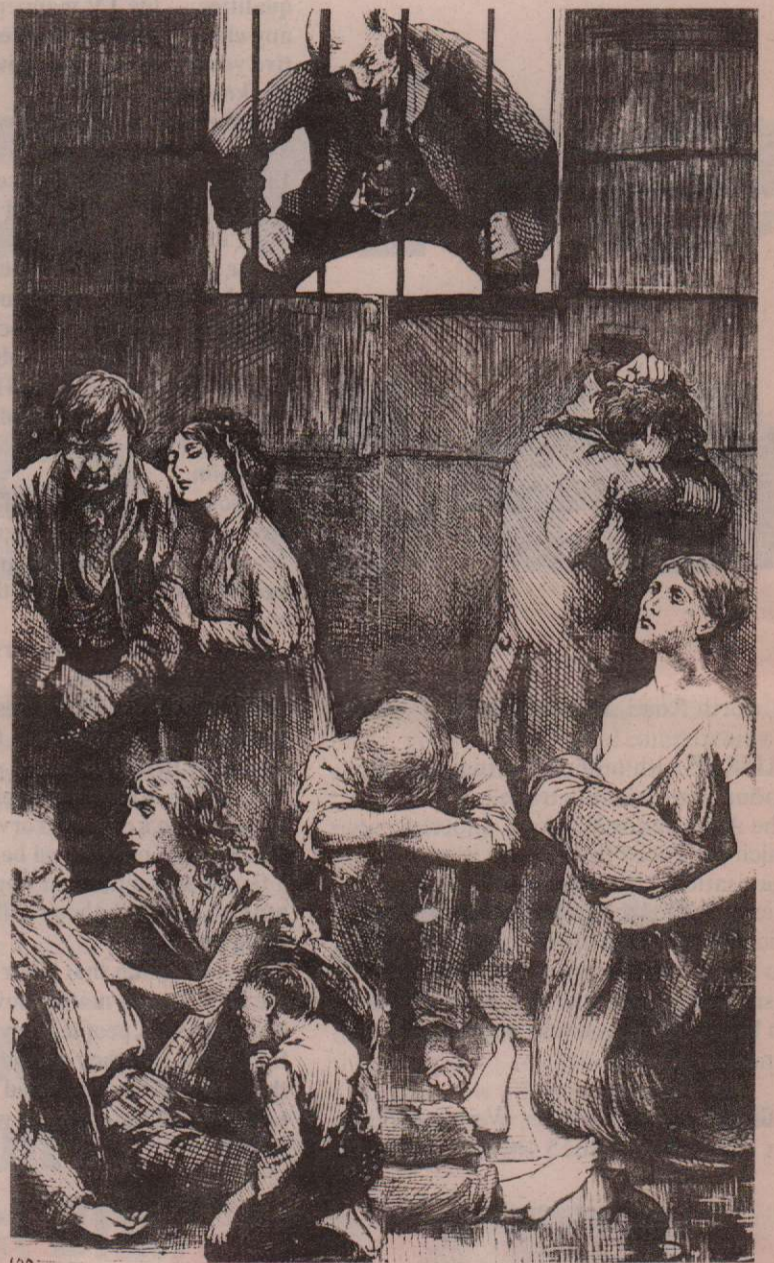
"They saw chains of 'glow-worms', hundreds of miners in steel helmets and pit clothes, fathers, brothers, cousins, each carrying his lamp, winding out of the colliery yard.

"Labour's landslide victory and the Welfare State seemed to mark the beginning of a new epoch."

"A band was playing under the shadow of a pit-shaft. The blue flag of the National Coal Board was hoisted and 'Bob' Silcox, wearing a khaki battle dress jacket, shouted into a microphone: 'Private enterprise has had it!'"

The laying of the foundations of the Welfare State, allied with a commitment to full employment by the post-1945 Labour government also seemed to hold out the prospect of a better future.

The development of the post-war social security system was based upon the Beveridge Report ("Social Insurance and Allied Services") of



"Welfare provision" workhouse style

1942. Such was the popularity of the Report that people had queued up to buy it on its publication. Copies of it were parachuted into the Nazi-occupied territories as evidence of the ideals for which the Allies were supposedly fighting.

The Report promised "a scheme of social insurance against interruption and destruction of earning power, and for special expenditure arising at birth, marriage or death... [in order] to make want under any circumstances unnecessary."

The basic principles of the Report, albeit in a diluted form, were introduced in successive pieces of legislation adopted by the post-war Labour government: the Family Allowances Act (1945), the National Insurance Act (1946), and the National Assistance Act (1948).

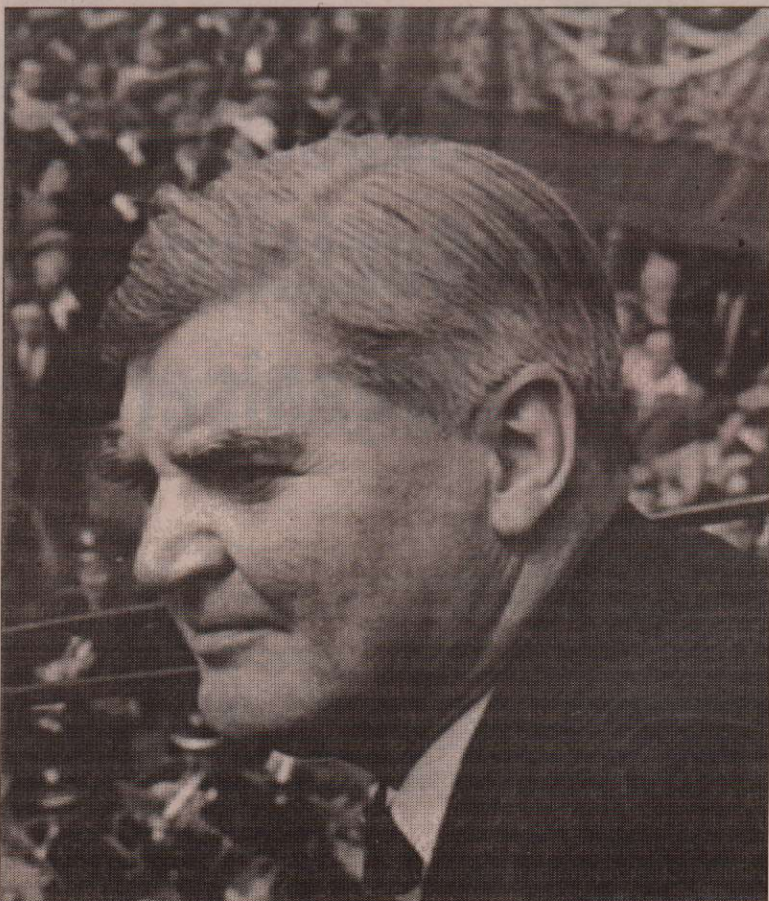
Between 1945 and 1975 the real value of benefits, with the exception of child support, virtually doubled. Absolute poverty, and the fear of absolute poverty which had been a hall-mark of working-class life in

the 1930s, was effectively eliminated.

But the disappearance of absolute poverty was a product of full employment rather than the development of the social security system in the post-war years. This maintenance of full employment was itself, however, a break with government policies of the 1930s and an expression of welfare stateism.

The wartime coalition government's "Employment Policy" White Paper explicitly rejected the idea that "every trade depression would automatically bring its own corrective", and instead declared that "the government accepts as one of their primary aims and responsibilities the maintenance of a high and stable level of employment."

In the 1945 election Labour committed itself to the maintenance of full employment, which, by the early 1950s, was understood to mean an unemployment level of no more than 3% (whereas in the 1940s full employment had been equated with 5% or even 8.5% unemployment).



Nye Bevan: architect of the Health Service

REBUILD THE WELFARE STATE



The 1945 election: Labour won on a promise of reform

Reflationary measures were adopted by successive post-war governments, both Labour and Tory, in order to "soak up" unemployed workers by stimulating demand when unemployment reached 2.5%.

Between 1945 and 1975 the annual average for unemployment exceeded 3% on only four occasions (1947, 1971, 1972 and 1975). By comparison, annual average unemployment in the inter-war years had been 11%, reaching 17% during the years of economic depression. How far post-war full employment was a product of government economic policies and how far it was a spontaneous consequence of an expanding economy both nationally and interna-

"The NHS gave millions of workers' families healthcare which they had previously been denied."

tionally, however, was a question in itself.

THE POST-WAR expansion of education had already been set in motion before the end of the war by the 1944 Education Act. Moreover, in the context of full employment, education came to be seen increasingly as an opportunity to secure a decent future rather than a short-term financial loss.

The 1944 Act made state education, for the first time ever, entirely free. The school leaving age was raised to 15, a clear break was introduced between primary and secondary education, and free school meals, milk and medical inspections were introduced.

Labour pledged itself in the following year's election to ensure implementation of the Act. On elec-



Wartime full employment showed workers that joblessness depended on political action, not Laws of Nature

tion Labour began a crash school rebuilding programme, recruited and trained another 35,000 teachers, scrapped grammar school fees, and raised the school-leaving age to 15.

The Tories maintained this momentum after they returned to power in 1951. The remaining "all-age" schools were transformed into primary or secondary schools, over 200 new schools were built, university colleges were upgraded, and the building of seven new universities was commenced.

Within two decades of the end of the war the average reading age for 15 year-olds had improved by some 25 months. By the early 1970s the number of children staying on at school voluntarily until the age of 16 had increased to 60% and the number of children leaving school with no academic qualifications had plunged to 19%.

EVEN MORE popular than the post-war Labour government's education reforms was its establishment of the National Health Service, created by the Health Service Act of 1946 and inaugurated in July of 1948.

Within three months of the creation of the NHS opinion polls recorded a clear majority describing it as the government's greatest achievement. Opinion polls in subsequent decades rarely revealed lev-

els of support for the NHS below 80%. For many, the Welfare State became synonymous with the NHS.

Prior to the creation of the NHS proper healthcare had been an unaffordable luxury for many workers. The interwar "National Health Insurance" scheme did not include hospital treatment, and "non-working" mothers and pre-school children were excluded from it. Only 7% of those covered by the scheme received any dental treatment, and only 25% of the population had access to free ophthalmic care.

"A free health service," proclaimed Bevan, the architect of the NHS, "is a triumphant example of the superiority of collective action and public initiative applied to a segment of society where commercial principles are seen at their worst."

The NHS provided millions of workers and their families with access to healthcare which they had previously been denied. During the first five years of its existence over 26 million pairs of glasses and six million sets of false teeth were dispensed as the NHS began to tackle the accumulated backlog of ill-health.

As was the case with other aspects of the Welfare State, such as social security, full employment, and improved educational opportunities, the NHS marked a real advance for the working class in comparison with the pre-war years.

But the emergence of the post-war Welfare State was not simply a matter of the labour movement beginning to re-shape society to its own needs. Beveridge, for example, was a Liberal, whilst Butler (who had been responsible for the 1944 Education Act) was a Tory.

The proposals of the Beveridge Report of 1942, although subsequently watered down, did not have to be implemented in the face of determined opposition on the part of the ruling classes. On the contrary, *The Times* hailed its contents as:

"An opportunity for marking this decisive epoch with a great social measure which would go far towards restoring the faith of ordinary men and women throughout the world in the power of democracy to answer the imperious needs of a new age."

Moreover, the manifesto upon which the Tories fought the 1945 election, which called for a massive extension of state control of industry and a major increase in public spending, was well to the left of the Labour Party's current policies.

The 1947 Tory Party conference went even further. It approved the "Industrial Charter", which committed them to the maintenance of full employment and the Welfare State, increased public spending, and acceptance of the irreversibility of nationalisation. Again, the Tories of the late 1940s were well to the left of Labour of the 1990s.

The Tories' benevolent attitude towards the Welfare State in the post-war years was a reflection of the inherent contradictions of a Welfare State within capitalist society. Welfare stateism can bring real gains for the working class. But, as the Tories of the 1940s and 1950s

"The Welfare State was a response to the demands of the labour movement, but also shaped by capitalism."

recognised, it can also be of benefit to capitalism.

SUCH CONTRADICTIONS were not peculiar to the post-war Welfare State. They had already been apparent in earlier social reforms which had been hailed as victories for the working class, but which at the same time were in the interests of British capitalism and British imperialism.

In his analysis of the Factory Acts of the nineteenth century which lim-

ited working hours, for example, Marx described such legislation as an example of the "political economy of the working class" and as "the result of centuries of struggle between the capitalist and the worker."

At the same time he also recognised that such legislation served the longer-term interest of capitalism by preventing the over-exploitation and exhaustion of the labour force: "Capital takes no account of the health and length of life of the worker, unless society forces it to do so."

The School Meals Act of 1906 was likewise ambiguous in terms of its benefits. On the one hand the provision of free school meals for some working-class children was socially progressive. On the other hand, the legislation was motivated by concerns amongst members of the ruling classes about the need for a well-fed and fit working class to fight in wars.

These contradictions within social reforms — and, on a much larger scale, within the post-war Welfare State as a whole — are themselves a reflection of the contradictory position of the working class within capitalist society.

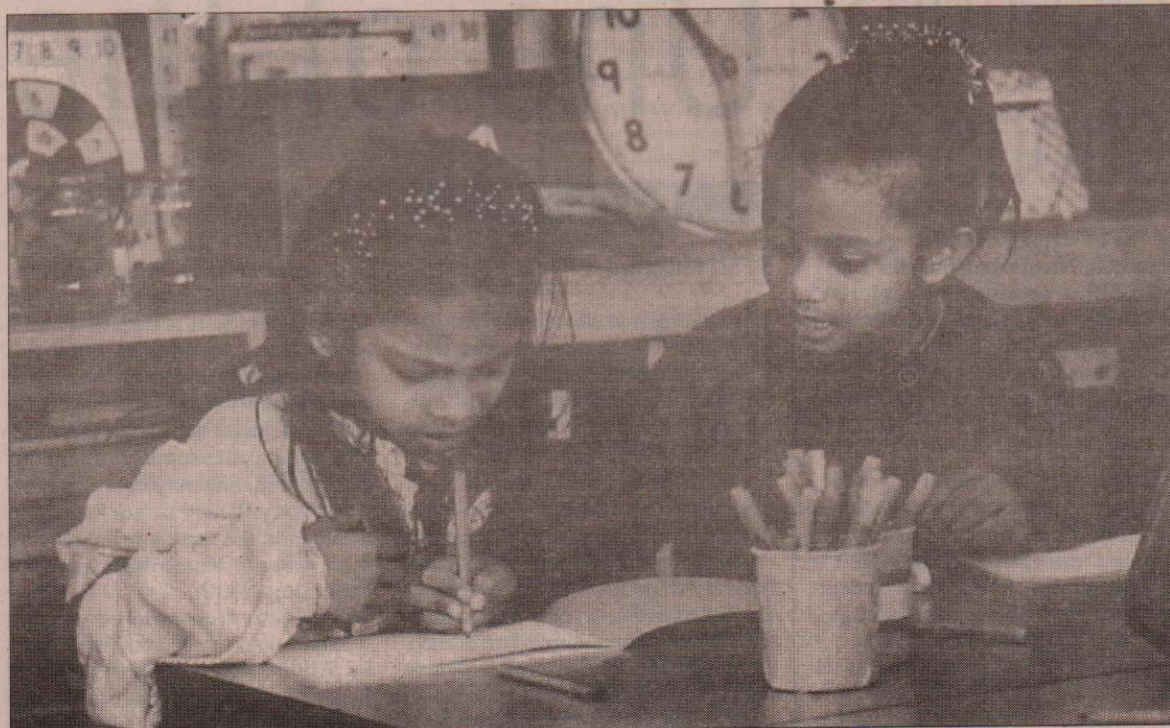
The working class is a living class of human beings, struggling to meet its social needs and to maintain and improve its living standards both materially and culturally. It shares in the basic human drive for self-improvement.

But the working class is also an element of capital. In Marxist terminology, it is "variable capital", as opposed to "constant capital" (machinery and raw materials). The labour power which the worker sells to the capitalist is the source of profit of the latter.

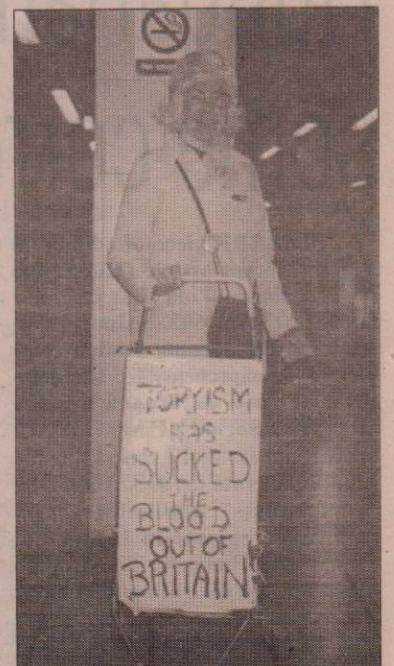
Individual pieces of social reform, like the Welfare State as a whole, can thus simultaneously improve the situation of the working class as human beings and also improve the conditions for the reproduction of capital, by increasing the rate at which surplus value can be pumped out of a fitter and better educated workforce.

On a ideological level social reforms and the Welfare State in general can likewise perform a similar dual function. On the one hand they can be seen as the imposition of the "political economy of the working class" onto capitalism. On the other hand they can be seen as "proof" that capitalism is capable of meeting basic social needs, and thereby "legitimise" the existence of capitalism as a system.

The post-war Welfare State in Britain was an embodiment of such contradictions. It was a response to the demands of the labour movement for far-reaching social reforms and brought real benefits to the working-class. But it was also shaped and determined by the needs and ideology of capitalism.



The 1944 Act made state education entirely free for the first time ever



The Tories are out to wreck the results of decades of activity and pressure by the labour movement

The SWP's "popular front" farce

THE SWP's response to the fascist candidates in the local elections illustrates only too well the old saying about history repeating itself the third time as farce. In the 1930s the Stalinist Communist Parties adopted 'popular frontism' — the subordination of anti-fascism to only what their hoped-for Liberal and Tory allies would accept — after the disaster of their previous self-isolation had split the German working class, thus helping Hitler take power.

In the late '70s, the SWP adopted the same 'popular front' approach to mobilise youth behind anti-racist pop-concerts and carnivals. Now they mouth the same politics but this time mobilising nobody. And if there is one thing far worse than the SWP organising a popular front then it is the SWP just pretending to, when really organising nothing more than a bad advertising campaign for SWP membership and a fundraising scam.

A report given to one *SO*-seller in Manchester illustrates this well.

The SWP (in ANL clothing) were

knocking on doors in Ashton, East Manchester, a few days before the council elections, collecting money with the story that the BNP "might stand" in Ashton. One woman who answered the door was convinced by the SWP talk of the Second World War, the BNP being against the Health Service etc., and gave a donation. When later that day she asked her daughter who the BNP were, and heard about their policies of racism and the blaming of immigration for economic crisis and unemployment, she said that she agreed with the BNP on all that.

In order to get money, the SWP had avoided confronting all the racist arguments that are so prevalent in Ashton. They'd picked up some cash but done nothing to take on racism and fight the battle of ideas as it needs to be fought. The third time as farce is therefore, "popular frontist" opportunism, as a fundraising measure, to financially prop up sectarian self-isolation.

Douglas Vespa
Manchester



"Don't vote Nazi" wasn't enough in Tower Hamlets or anywhere else the BNP were standing: socialists had to say "vote Labour."

Hungarian elections: some corrections

A BIZARRE piece of editing on my recent article (Hungarian elections — old wine in a new bottle? *SO* No. 603, 9 June 1994) rendered the opening section completely incomprehensible. The deletion of any reference to the Hungarian Socialist Party (MSZP) made it appear that I was saying the Free Democrats (SZDSZ) were the "communists" who had recently returned to power in Lithuania, Poland and Hungary! The deletion also excluded the voting figures for the MSZP — a rather important piece of information for an article of this type.

I originally wrote: "After the second round of voting in the Hungarian elections the widely predicted slaughter

of the governing coalition gave the resurgent Hungarian Socialist Party (MSZP) a comfortable majority. With 208 out of a possible 386 seats (54%) in Parliament, their nearest rivals, and possible coalition partners, the Free Democrats (SZDSZ) were left trailing with 70 seats (18.5%)."

There were a number of other, smaller, problems. For example, an early deletion of a reference to the Young Democrats (FIDESZ) left a later mention of this Party incomprehensible, with not even an explanation of what the initials mean.

Please print this letter by way of correction.

John Cunningham
Hungary

Jewish question: "Abram Leon was wrong"

This discussion piece was submitted by Werner Cohn to our magazine, *Workers' Liberty*.

Because *Workers' Liberty* has appeared irregularly and when it has appeared, as one-subject special issues, we have not had a chance to publish it. We are glad to do so now in *SO*.

Abram Leon, whose book, *The Jewish Question*, Werner Cohn criticises, was the leader of the Trotskyist underground during the Nazi occupation of Belgium. Only in his 20s when he died in a gas chamber at Auschwitz in 1944, Abram Leon had been a left-wing Zionist before becoming a Trotskyist. He wrote *The Jewish Question* during the war, surmounting great difficulties. The manuscript was put into its final shape by Ernest Mandel, who provided a summarising afterword. It was published in 1946, the first English edition in Mexico.



Nazis lead Polish Jews to a concentration camp

according to Leon, there no longer is a social role for usury, and the Jewish usurer today is no more than a "vestige." Therefore contemporary anti-Semitism is a piece of false consciousness, deliberately exploited by the fascists. Furthermore, a workers' state will solve the Jewish question, as is shown by the Soviet Union (this was written during Stalin's lifetime!). Altogether, Leon suggests on page

enced by the very anti-Semitism that killed him. In this, of course, he was not alone.

Leon's book was first published, posthumously, in a small French edition by a Trotskyist group in Paris in 1946 and then in an obscure English edition in Mexico in 1950. It was ignored by all until it was resurrected by the Trotskyist movement after the 1967 Arab-Israel war. In 1968 it was republished in Paris with a lengthy anti-Israel introduction by Maxime Rodinson. In 1970 the English edition was republished by the (American) Socialist Workers' Party, together with an even sharper attack on Israel and Zionism by Nathan Weinstock. Mr Jack Barnes' SWP, in its Pathfinder Press, has kept it in print ever since.

It seems that most if not all Trotskyist groups now promote this work. John Rose, in a 1986 pamphlet issued by Tony Cliff's Socialist Workers' Party, has called it "the authority on the Jewish question" (emphasis is Rose's). The Spartacist League of the United States, led by Mr James Robertson, has seen fit to praise Leon and to publish his picture as recently as 29 June 1990, in its *Workers' Vanguard*. Even in *Workers' Liberty* of July 1990 we can find a similar endorsement, in a Forum contribution by Mr Barry Buitekant, who finds the Leon book to be "required reading."

THE articles on the Jewish question (*Workers' Liberty* No.14, July 1990) failed to tell the reader

about one of the most striking developments of post-Trotsky Trotskyism, viz, the charge that Judaism is simply usury writ large. (When Marx was a very young man, before he became a Communist, he had taken a similar position).

The main vehicle for this accusation today consists of the promotion of a curious book by Abram Leon, *The Jewish Question*, originally written between 1940 and 1942 in Europe under the press of the Nazi occupation. According to Leon, individual Jews in previous time who did not practise usury would convert to Christianity, while, conversely, Christians who were usurers would therefore become Jews. No wonder the exploited masses became anti-Semitic! But in modern capitalism,

"Leon suggests that the disappearance of the Jewish group is a historical necessity."

259, the disappearance of the Jewish group is a "historical necessity."

Abram Leon was twenty-two when he started writing this book. He finished it about two years later, and two years after that, in 1944, he was killed by the Nazis at Auschwitz. He never had the benefit of a higher education, nor did he have intellectual control over the hodgepodge of secondary sources that he cites. But the greatest tragedy in this story is that Leon's thinking was fatefully influ-

One of the boys

PLATFORM

By Liz Millward

I AM surprised *Socialist Organiser* has not commented on the way Margaret Beckett has been written out of the campaign for Labour leader by the media. Whatever you think of Beckett's policies, she is surely as worthy of being taken seriously as the odious Blair.

For a start, Margaret Beckett is doing the job and doing it more competently than John Smith ever did. Both in and out of Parliament Beckett has taken on the Tories with some aggression. She has also been acting leader for a comprehensive election success. Despite having to take over at a moment's notice just

before an election, Beckett has coped effectively and seems to be growing with the job.

Any man in this position could now be planning his victory speech, but Margaret Beckett is treated as little more than a caretaker. Qualities taken seriously by the media — like experience — are possessed by Beckett in larger quantities than Blair. She also has the support of a major trade union. She may not be as pretty as Tony Blair, but nor was John Smith, and the same journalists who ignore Beckett are responsible for canonising Smith.

The same press who constantly whinge about the general uselessness of John Major appear to want Labour to elect his double. The minute Blair is elected (if he is) the media will start criticising him for

being too young, too inexperienced, too out of touch with the unions. In supporting Margaret Beckett, the press could have the best of both worlds, but because she is a woman she is not even considered.

The media seem to have forgotten that Margaret Beckett did not become deputy leader by magic, but because she did well in a vote. She has a wide base of support in the party, including on the left and in the unions. Her recent achievements as acting leader should increase her following in the constituencies.

The media may pretend that their support for Tony Blair is because he is a "moderniser" but I suspect he is also a man after their own image — artificial, shallow, well-dressed and well-spoken. Or, as we say, one of the boys.

Toothless trash



Clive Matthews
reviews
Reality Bites

Directed by
Ben Stiller

REALITY BITES is populated by twenty-something anti-yuppies lost in a search for identity in the underemployed nineties, rejecting the materialistic values of the eighties.

These are people who take the media images of themselves very seriously. The film is aimed at anyone else who does likewise. As a film and as a social exploration and as a love story, *Reality Bites* is a failure. As a teen movie with a best-selling soundtrack it will, I suspect, fare little better.

The plot is so inconsequential that it hardly matters. A group of graduates led by Leliena (Winona Ryder) meander along through a succession of MacJobs seeking the reason for their existence. This non-drama is played out on two fronts.

Leliena is trying to make a film por-

trait of her generation, a cross between a video diary and *The Living Soap*, and these are the reality bites of the title.

Neither side of the pun is particularly true of this film. It is not realistic and it has no bite. The large chunks (or 'bites') of the video footage — intercut into the film — may be fashionable cinematography, but all they do is supply a sort of fake

*"This is
existentialism read
through the bottom
of a beer glass."*

existential angst for those who never made it past the opening chapter of *Nausea*. This is existentialism read through the bottom of a beer glass.

On the other side, reality — in this case life after being a student — doesn't bite either. The characters never have anything resembling a serious problem.

The film's other front is a will they/won't they love story between



Would-be slackers

Leliena and college friend Troy (Ethan Hawke). He, we are told, is very clever, but can't hold down a job because he is happier playing his guitar and singing with his band.

Troy is not able to master his own

feelings but, so we are told, has that elusive quality of knowing who he is. The central point is that this is a generation growing up without role models and having to grope its way along. Here the film is at its most hypocritical.

Not only is this film a blatant attempt to cash in on the latest media image of youth (and thus supply role models) but Troy's character is little more than an anaemic up-date of James Dean's persona from *Rebel Without a Cause*. A mass media product cannot subvert itself so easily.

The foil to Troy is Michael (Ben Stiller), the last of the yuppies, a young executive on an MTV-type station. Leliena dates him. Michael is played by the young and successful director of *Reality Bites*, Ben Stiller, but that fact fails to add any irony to

what is a clumsy piece of characterisation. Michael is everything that Troy isn't: materialistic, successful, and possessed of a cardboard cut-out stupidity that exists only so that Troy's cardboard cut-out cleverness can look impressive next to it.

The crux of the problem with *Reality Bites* is that it is not really a film for real slackers — those who have fallen out of the bottom of the middle class, either by chance or because of economic recession, into a bohemian lifestyle. It is a film for would-be slackers. You know the sort: part-time bohemians who remain middle-class and wear their modish dissoluteness as a shallow fashion statement. Even the soundtrack is a neatly sanitised and commercialised shadow of the real soundtrack of this generation.

The right-on hang 'em and flog 'em brigade



Richard Love
reviews *Heart of
the Matter*

BBC1
Sunday 19 June

SUNDAY'S HEART of the *Matter* dealt with the proposal to have harsher sentencing for 'hate' motivated crime, in particular tougher sentencing for racially motivated attacks.

Such a proposal would be a watershed in the British justice system. At present crime is judged by actions. If someone has been attacked in a certain way it is Grievous Bodily Harm or Actual Bodily Harm. This proposal would, for the first time, mean crimes being judged by 'thought': what the attacker was thinking during the crime would determine what crime it was and therefore how the criminal is sentenced.

Heart of the Matter argued against such a change for three reasons.

Firstly, on practicality. How can

you determine whether a crime is hate-motivated? What would be evidence? What categories of hate should be used (racism, homophobia, misogyny, acne-phobia)? What invasions of civil liberties and privacy would be used to gather evidence?

Secondly, it comes a bit too close to 'thought policing' for comfort. The same principle could acquire a more general application. Other — especially political — motivations could in future determine sentencing. The precedent would not be good — especially for socialists.

And thirdly, it would do nothing to aid the general fight against racism. In Boston USA, where such legal criteria exist, the law is used by white supremacists as a propaganda weapon. In Britain the 'Rights for Whites' BNP would love it. They would argue this is a 'special' law for blacks.

Heart of the Matter did put forward an argument in favour of such legislation, but all those interviewed sounded very much like a "right on"

version of the "hang 'em and flog 'em brigade", arguing for tougher sentencing against those whom they currently define as scapegoat for the world's ills.

The programme's arguments made sense, but they were very inadequate. It opposed the proposed legal change but put nothing positive forward instead.

I find our whole legal system, which is based on retribution, completely misdirected. I am not interested in punishing criminals just for the sake of it. Our whole legal system is based on revenge, 'punish the criminal', 'make the culprit pay for the crime'. Calls for "justice to be done" are generally meaningless. What justice can be done after someone has been beaten and left for dead because he is black? Revenge may be sweet but it is not socially useful.

What the legal system could do if it really wanted to make a worthwhile difference is have some sort of rehabilitation program. Such a program could make some racist criminals see that their beliefs and actions are wrong. The present system releases them embittered by a period of punishment, but with the same beliefs as when they committed the crime. No progress is made at all; if anything the situation is worse because the released criminal is more bitter.

Once a racist attack has happened society has already failed. No amount of tinkering with the legal system will change that. Talk of stiffer sentences rarely deters anyone from committing any crime, let alone a crime which is motivated by irrational hate.

What is needed is some way of combatting the hate before it gets so intense that it leads to the brutal attacks which are now almost routine. This means attacking the system that creates and uses racism as a part of class rule. Face it, the legal establishment is never going to fight racism.

Tues 28 June, 11.40pm, Ch 4

Features performances of various musical works from women composers through the centuries. A documentary — *To Mention But a Few*, Tuesday 28 June, 9.00pm, Channel 4 — attempts to answer the question why there have been so few women composers and why their achievements have been buried.

The Projection of Modernity
(Mon 27 June, 12am, BBC2)

This midnight programme shows how 1920s Soviet film makers, Eisenstein and Vertov, communicated what they believed to be socialist ideas.

Frontline (Wed 29 June, 9pm, Ch 4)
Soul II Soul leader Jazzy B discusses with other black celebrities the idea touted by Tottenham Labour MP Bernie Grant, that in response to increasing racism in Britain blacks should receive inducements from the state to emigrate.

By Wayne
Geoffries

Secret History
— *The Soviet Wives Affair*
(Sun 26 June, 7pm, Ch 4)

With the recent deluge of propaganda extolling the virtues of the family, *Secret History* uncovers how the 1945 Attlee government colluded with Stalin to break up the marriages between British servicemen and Soviet women.

Timewatch — *Seeds of War*
(Sun 26 June, 8.50pm, BBC2)

Timewatch pieces together archive footage and documentary evidence to examine the competing theories as to which events triggered the beginning of the First World War.

Small Forces Big Noises
(Mon 27 June, 11.05pm,

If

If you can keep your head when all about you
Are losing theirs and blaming it on you,
If you can trust yourself when all men doubt you,
But make allowance for their doubting too;
If you can wait and not be tired by waiting,
Or being lied about, don't deal in lies,
Or being hated, don't give way to hating,
And yet don't look too good, nor talk too wise;

If you can dream — and not make dreams your master;
If you can think — and not make thoughts your aim;
If you can meet with Triumph and Disaster
And treat those two impostors just the same;
If you can bear to hear the truth you've spoken
Twisted by knaves to make a trap for fools,
Or watch the things you gave your life to, broken,
And stoop and build 'em up with worn-out tools;

If you can make one heap of all your winnings
and risk it on one turn of pitch-and-toss,
and lose, and start again at your beginnings
And never breathe a word about your loss;
If you can force your heart and nerve and sinew
To serve your turn long after they are gone,
And so hold on when there is nothing in you
Except the Will which says to them: "Hold on!"

If you can talk with crowds and keep your virtue,
Or walk with Kings — nor lose the common touch,
If neither foes nor loving friends can hurt you,
If all men count with you, but none too much;
If you can fill the unforgiving minute
With sixty seconds' worth of distance run,
Yours is the Earth and everything that's in it,
And — which is more — you'll be a Man, my son!

Rudyard Kipling

Walking on Trotsky's grave

Pablo Velasco denounces a new version of the old Stalinist slanders against Trotsky

LAST November, reports appeared in some Mexican newspapers, notably *El Financiero*, and in the English *Independent* (25 November 1993), that both Trotsky and the famous Mexican muralist, Diego Rivera, had spied for the FBI. The allegations came from William Chase and Dana Reed of Pittsburgh University USA. They are of particular interest now because of the collapse of the USSR and the rethinking that is taking place amongst at least some people previously influenced by Stalinism.

The "allegations" are as follows. Rivera informed the US in 1939 about Communist infiltrators and political assassins within the Mexican state, of Moscow-trained Spanish civil war refugees active in Mexico on the border, and of the money coming from the US to finance the Mexican Communist Party (PCM). According to these "researchers" Rivera may have been prompted to inform the US by his break with Trotsky in 1939. The FBI did not take much notice of the "reports."

Amongst the evidence produced to support these claims, is that the FBI was from 1929 onwards tapping Rivera's phone. FBI agents also tailed him across the USA and there are allegations of "secret conversations".

It seems to prove only that the FBI was spying on Rivera!

The case against Trotsky is even less clear. According to Reed, they have "uncovered some very damaging stuff about Trotsky... I can tell you that we have concrete information that Leon Trotsky too was an informant for the US government." No doubt more ambiguous passages from FBI files will be forthcoming,

but so far the "researchers" have not revealed their claims. However, even a cursory glance at Trotsky's life in Mexico would show how absurd such claims are.

Trotsky had come to Mexico at the end of 1936 from Norway, just before the Norwegian government was about to hand him over to Stalin's police. Prior to this he had been under virtual house arrest in France. During the period after his arrival in Mexico (9 January 1937) some of his closest supporters were murdered, including his secretary Rudolf Klement and later his son and fellow revolutionary, Leon Sedov.

Rivera had secured Trotsky's passage to Mexico by meeting with President Cardenas and persuading him to grant Trotsky asylum with the condition that Trotsky did not interfere with the internal life of Mexico.

"New claims by academics echo the Stalinist lie that Trotsky was 'an agent of American imperialism'."

However, almost immediately there was resistance to the asylum from within Cardenas' cabinet, with vehement opposition from the Foreign Relations Secretary, Eduardo Hay. Further opposition came from the Communist Party, who were promoting the line from the USSR that Trotsky was a fascist and from the trade union federation, the CTM,



Diego Rivera (left) with Frida Kahlo, Natalya Sedova, Reba Hansen, Andre Breton and Trotsky: 1938

which was led by the Stalinist Vicente Lombardo Toledano.

From March 1937, Trotsky's household and papers were rigorously searched and probed by the Dewey Commission who investigated the claims made against him in Moscow. They found that the charges were trumped up, based on reports of meetings in hotels that had been demolished, and came from people of dubious character.

At the same time, agents of the GPU, Stalin's secret police, began arriving in Mexico. Some of them

came straight from the barbarous activity of the Stalinists in Spain where they had brutally hounded and murdered non-Communist Party revolutionaries fighting Franco.

From the beginning of 1940 the press of both the Communist Party and the CTM included calls to "Kill Trotsky".

On 27 May 1940, David Siqueiros led a group of PCM thugs who machine gunned Trotsky's house. The intended victims saved themselves by hiding under the bed. The guard Robert Sheldon Hart was

killed. He was accused of being an accomplice of the GPU, but no proof was ever found, and Trotsky defended Hart to the last.

On 20 August, Ramon Mercader, who had befriended members of Trotsky's household, entered the house and mortally wounded Trotsky with the infamous ice pick.

What would Trotsky have told to the FBI, which would not have made his situation even worse?

There is neither opportunity nor motive for such actions, and such accusations should be treated with contempt. But there is a precedent.

As early as October 1936, Trotsky had predicted that Stalin might sign a pact with Hitler. When this happened in August 1939 (the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact), the Stalinists had an awful lot of explaining to do, given their previously "anti-fascist", popular front policies. Many militants left the PCM at the time in disgust, and of course it now looked very silly to accuse Trotsky of collaboration with Hitler, when this was Stalin's new policy! Instead, Trotsky became "an agent of American imperialism," with all the damnation that this implied, particularly in Mexico, which had been invaded by the US a number of times in the previous one hundred years.

A particularly good opportunity to attack Trotsky on these grounds came in October 1939, when he was invited to testify before the Dies Committee in the USA. This committee, a direct forerunner of the McCarthy witch-hunting Committee of the post-war period, was certainly digging for dirt, but it would also have provided a public platform for Trotsky to defend himself against the lies told about him at the Moscow trials.

Nothing came of the plan, as Trotsky was not granted a visa to enter the US. I suspect that the "evidence" which the academics have "found" mainly consists of this material. But this is hardly new or unknown to followers of Trotsky.

Trotsky, the Mexican police, and the Stalinists

THE Stalinist secret service, the GPU, murdered Leon Trotsky in August 1940. They had failed to kill him three months earlier during a machine gun attack on his house in Mexico City, led by a Stalinist Party leader Siqueiros.

In the following excerpt from a letter to the Mexican Attorney General (27 April 1940) Trotsky denounced the GPU, exposed the fact that the leaders of the Mexican and other Communist Parties collaborated with the GPU, letting their organisations be used as its tools. Trotsky called for the intervention of the Mexican bourgeois state against the Stalinists, regarding them as a "terrorist" agency against the working class and an alien force in the labour movement.

Against the GPU in its operation against the left, Trotsky was willing to collaborate, on his own terms, with the bourgeois state, just as he would have collaborated with bourgeois-democrats against fascists.

This is one of the clearest pointers to the direction of Trotsky's thinking on the eve of his death. This was part of a clear political alignment, not a hole and corner collusion with the capitalist police. It can only be presented as such by suppressing Trotsky's ultra-hostile political characterisation of Stalinism and its agencies in the months before April 1940.

Post-Trotsky, post World War II "Trotskyism" adopted a more supine attitude to Stalinism, as it expanded outside of the USSR. Trotsky's last stance became an embarrassment. Trotsky was in our opinion right.

"The organisation of the GPU has very well-established traditions and methods outside the Soviet Union.

Before all else, it is essential to categorically establish that the activity of the GPU is closely intertwined with the activity of the Comintern, or more precisely with the apparatus, with its leading elements and most trusted supporters. The GPU

needs a legal or semi-legal cover for its activity, and an environment favourable for the recruitment of its agents: this environment and protection are found in the so-called "Communist" parties.

The general scheme of the GPU organisation abroad is the following: in the Central Committee of each section of the Comintern there is placed a responsible director of the GPU for that country. His status is known only to the secretary of the party and one or two trustworthy members. The other members of the Central Committee have but a slight inkling of the special status of this member. I do not have any data referring specifically to the functioning of this activity in Mexico. But there is no reason to doubt that, insofar as one refers to the organisational methods of the GPU, Mexico is not an exception.

As a member of the Central Committee, the country's GPU representative has the possibility of approaching with full legality all the

members of the party, study their characters, entrust them with commissions, and little by little draw them into the work of espionage and terrorism, sometimes calling on their sense of party loyalty, but as often making use of bribery.

It cannot be doubted in the least that the former and present chiefs of the Communist Party know who is the local director of the GPU.

Permit me also to assume that David Alfaro Siqueiros, who took part in the civil war in Spain as an active Stalinist, may also know who are the most important and active GPU members, Spanish, Mexican and of other nationalities who are arriving at different times in Mexico, especially via Paris. The questioning of the previous and the present general secretary of the Communist Party, and also of Siqueiros, would help very much to throw light on the instigators of the assassination attempt and together with them, discover their accomplices."

Leon Trotsky

Support the signal workers!

By a railworker

LAST Wednesday's strike (15 June) was a massive success. Despite management attempts to intimidate they could only run trains for the cameras.

The Midland Main Line was their showcase. They never had any hope of running anything into Sheffield but staffed the boxes south of there. Of the four — Trent, Derby, Leicester and West Hampstead — only one, Leicester, had the usual signalling staff involved operating the box. The rest were controlled by managers and supervisors.

They also ran trains on the Chiltern line and, later in the day, on the London, Tilbury and Southend Line.

Railtrack massively lowered safety standards to allow these lines to be operated. Whereas we have to do the job regularly and under supervision and lose our certificates if we haven't worked for some time, Railtrack made no such requirements for management.

However they will use the fact that they operated the boxes on part of the Midland Main Line to

put pressure on the usual staff. They will claim that the strike was futile as it achieved nothing apart from the loss of a day's pay. Why not work this Wednesday, they will say. It's usual management strategy of putting all the pressure on what they see as a weak area and trying to spread the scabbing from there.

What should signalling staff do next? We should bring our own pressure to bear. We need strike committees, give support to those taking action, particularly in weak areas, and put picket lines on the boxes we think scabbing might occur in. We should also spend the time in between strike days ringing round the boxes, talking to other signalling staff, passing information on and scotching management rumours designed to divide us.

Managers and supervisors should remember that a victory for us helps their pay packets as well! Each one that proves their own "worth" by trying to help higher management defeat the action and becoming a signalman for the day isn't proving that Railtrack doesn't need the striking signalworkers! They are only proving that they can get by

without any managers or supervisors on those days!

Help signalworkers win!

THE SAME discussion is happening in every messroom. Why get all of us out on strike? Why not just have a key group of workers out, funded by the rest, to give the bosses a bloody nose? That way we all win at minimum cost.

Whether you agree with the idea or not, that is what is happening right now. Signalling workers have been chafing at the bit for a long time now, 7 years, and are now having to fight "their own" bosses, Railtrack. Everyone else on the railway has been told that this is not their dispute; they are not to get involved; and they must cross picket lines. Well that's nothing new from management.

And what is also not new is the fact that every railworker benefits if the signal workers win. Right now signalworkers are bang up against the government's pay limit. The Tories aren't interested in how much productivity workers are giving, they just want more. They want to keep us all, most of all in the public sector, down. Thus BR is told 2.5% is enough for workers.

The Tories had hoped to have an easy ride with their public sector pay limit but are clearly worried by the action of the signalworkers and the decision of the ASLE&F conference to reject 2.5%. A victory for one group of railworkers makes it easier for the rest of us to win.

The offer, the claim and the Government pay limit

EXACTLY WHAT have Railtrack offered? Anything or nothing? Actually it is nothing. Up until the Government "not getting involved (honest)" intervened, Railtrack had offered 5.7%.

After they were "reminded" about the government's pay limits they reduced this to 2.5%. But the signalworkers' claim is for an interim pay award to reflect the erosion of differentials over the years. And the fact is 4 out of 10 signalling posts have gone in the last 10 years, yet signalling staff are still operating the same network. Railtrack are now offering nothing towards that. 5.7% was never enough. Stick out for the full claim of 11%!

New start for the SMTUC

By Trudy Saunders, SMTUC Assistant Secretary

THE first meeting of the Socialist Movement Trade Union Committee, since its conference in February took place last Saturday, 18 June.

Last week, one-time *Socialist Outlook* supporter and SMTUC secretary for the last five years, Caroline Sikorski with three others, Jan Pollock, Phil Griffin (ex SMTUC Chair) and Martin Allen announced that they would not accept re-nomination for their officer positions. Their reason for not standing was "a change in direction" in the SMTUC, citing "political organisations" who "support a different way ahead for the SMTUC from" that "of the last five years". They go on to say "it would have been preferable for the SMTUC to retain its loosely organised democratic activist campaign approach, centred primarily around current struggles".

Sikorski and her friends represent little in the trade union movement. They behaved in the most undemocratic manner in the SMTUC. Over the last year they did not invite the two other officers not in their clique — Alan Thornett and Christine Hulme — to officers' meetings. As secretary, Sikorski consistently failed to carry out the decisions of the Committee or the conference. Their final undemocratic act was to refuse to hand over

the SMTUC mailing list and to steal £16 belonging to the 'Unshackle the Unions' campaign, which they obviously intend to run themselves.

This gang of four have shown no interest in supporting workers' struggles. When Cate Murphy, a former SMTUC officer, tried to organise an SMTUC meeting is support of striking ambulance workers in 1990, she was condemned by Sikorski and her pals. During the Gulf War, the SMTUC was conspicuous in its failure to issue anything opposing it.

Under Sikorski — known in impolite circles as the Margaret Beckett of the left — the SMTUC achieved nothing. It was little more than a talking shop for *Socialist Outlook* and their supporters — many of whom now profess to have been very unhappy with Sikorski's antics, yet did nothing to stop her at the time.

For the SMTUC it is positive that these four no-hopers have gone. *Socialist Outlook* supporters now show a real willingness to work with *Socialist Organiser* and independents to build the SMTUC and organise campaigns. The make-up of the Committee reflected this.

The meeting also agreed to organise major campaigns on the Welfare State and the right to strike. The long-time policy (which was deliberately never implemented by Sikorski) to bring together trade union Broad Lefts and other rank and file groups will now go ahead.

A&P Appledare lock out

MANAGEMENT at one of Britain's biggest ship repair yards A&P Appledare at Falmouth, are locking out the entire workforce for one month.

The month-long closure is designed to intimidate union members at the yard into accepting the sacking of nearly half their workmates. A&P Appledare plan to sack 119 out of a total workforce of 340. They cynically say that they can't keep the yard open until the redundancies are accepted as it wouldn't be fair to their customers to take on work at Falmouth while a threat of a strike action exists!

The unions must stand firm in their opposition to job cuts and

workers at other A&P yards should refuse to touch any repair work that would normally be done at Falmouth.

BBC action postponed for talks

BOTH BECTU and the NUJ have called off any further strikes at the BBC pending at least 6 weeks of further talks with management. This is a potentially dangerous strategy as it will lead to demobilising the members without winning any concessions.

McTay marine strike wins solidarity

FORTY PEOPLE employed by McTay Marine at Bromsborough on Merseyside went on indefinite official strike last Friday 17 June.

Picket lines are being respected by another 140 agency workers at the yard. This has brought the work to a standstill.

The dispute is over the manage-

ment's attempt to cut wages by about £20 per week, the removal of an attendance bonus and the introduction of a new productivity bonus. This is the first time the yard has had a strike in 20 years.

If this strike is successful the 140 agency workers will be taken on to the books at McTay's.

Scots colleges to strike

By an EIS member

STRIKE ACTION in Scotland's 46 further education colleges now seems inevitable following the breakdown of talks between the Employers' Association and the two unions representing college lecturers. A meeting of the Joint Negotiating Committee on 6 June broke up without agreement and no further meetings scheduled.

Management are insistent that there will be no pay increase from 1 April 1994 unless significant changes in lecturers' conditions of service are agreed to. If such changes are not accepted, management are threatening to pull out of national bargaining from 15 September with each college thereafter issuing its own contracts of employment.

NATFHE strikes

By a NATFHE lecturer

The last two weeks have seen well supported strike action by NATFHE members in colleges all around the Leeds Area.

The continuing dispute is over the imposition of new contracts on lecturers in Further Education. Management want 'flexibility', 'restructuring' and 'job evaluation'. Joseph Priestley College held a one day strike on Tuesday 7 June.

Right-wing win in CPSA

By a DSS worker

THE INCUMBENT Marion Chambers has won the election for CPSA President with an increased majority. This vote is proof that the "UNITY" campaign needs to discuss how the left is to move forward in the union. "UNITY" needs to base itself on radical politics for the transformation of the union and militant support for rank and file workers in struggle.

Despite a formal commitment to action to defeat Market Testing last year UNITY certainly did not do what was needed. It concentrated on the minutiae of internal union matters and didn't concentrate on putting over a fighting policy that could win majority support amongst the members.

Many more miracles where that came from



reddish substance from Legnaro and found "seeds" or spores, which he named *Serratia marcescens*.

S. marcescens is actually a bacterium and the first person to see actual bacterial cells was the German biologist, Christina Ehrenberg, who was studying red spots on cooked potato in 1848. He found that the organism grew in spots or colonies with an intense red colour. These grew quickly to cover the entire food, dripping with a clear fluid. *S. marcescens* appeared in the summer months.

Now, an American microbiologist, Johanna Cullen of George Mason University, Fairfax, Virginia, has recreated the conditions of the "miracles of Bolsena". She incubated sacramental bread with a culture of *S. marcescens*. Within three days, spots had appeared which were very similar to those in Raphael's fresco. She also repeated the conditions of the Legnaro incident by treating warm polenta with the bacteria. After two days, it had been extensively invaded by a blood-red colour.

Another "miracle", the annual liquefaction of the blood of San Gennaro in Naples, was given a potential secular explanation a few years ago, when a chemist showed that a mixture of substances available in the Middle Ages had a similar appearance to the dried blood and seemed to become liquid at certain temperatures. In fact, it was a fine powder with low friction between its particles.

This followed on the heels of the revelation that the Shroud of Turin was woven over 1000 years after Christ and that, therefore, the origin of its haunting image of a crucified man could not have been direct and miraculous contact with the corpse of Christ. Of course, these secular explanations of miracles may not be correct: no one will allow analysis of the blood of San Gennaro and no sample of the host of Bolsena remains. However, it makes you think!

Local Government pay offer rejected

Unions representing over 1.5 million local government workers have jointly rejected the national employers' offer of 3.25%.

On closer examination, the offer is a lot worse than it first appears. Spread over a period of 21 months, the offer is as follows: 1% + £75 on 1st July 1994, 1% + £75 on 1st April 1995, then another 1% + £75 in August 1995 up to 31st March 1996.

This year, UNISON is organising over 1 million of the 1.5 million local government workers. The other two main unions are the GMB and the T&G. It is the first time manual and non-manual sectors have lodged a joint claim.

Part of UNISON's claim is for the harmonisation of pay settlement dates — the manual sector usually settles later in the year. This should mean a levelling up so that the manual side benefits, but instead the offer has been spread out so that neither side benefits: the white collar side is spread over 19 months to the blue collar's 21 months.

The next meeting with the national employers is on 6 July, where it is expected that an improved offer will be made. There should be full consultation with members, via a ballot, on acceptance of any offer. Any improved offer must be funded by national government, and not by local Councils. Few Councils will

have budgeted for a pay increase, and they have been told that any pay rises must be funded by increase in productivity — this means more cuts.

If the offer is rejected, there should be an immediate recall conference to discuss a rolling programme of strike action in rejection of the offer.

Bromley UNISON to ballot on strike action

UNISON members in Bromley Council are currently being balloted on a one-day strike over the Council's plans to scrap nationally agreed terms and conditions.

The plans will mean the abolition of national pay scales, and incremental and cost of living pay rises will be determined by performance-related pay schemes. They also plan to introduce a 'menu' system for entitlements such as sick pay, holidays, and maternity pay — staff will choose which 'benefit' they want to take.

The ballot of manual and non-manual workers across the Council, runs until 30 June, and the proposed strike will take place on 14 July.

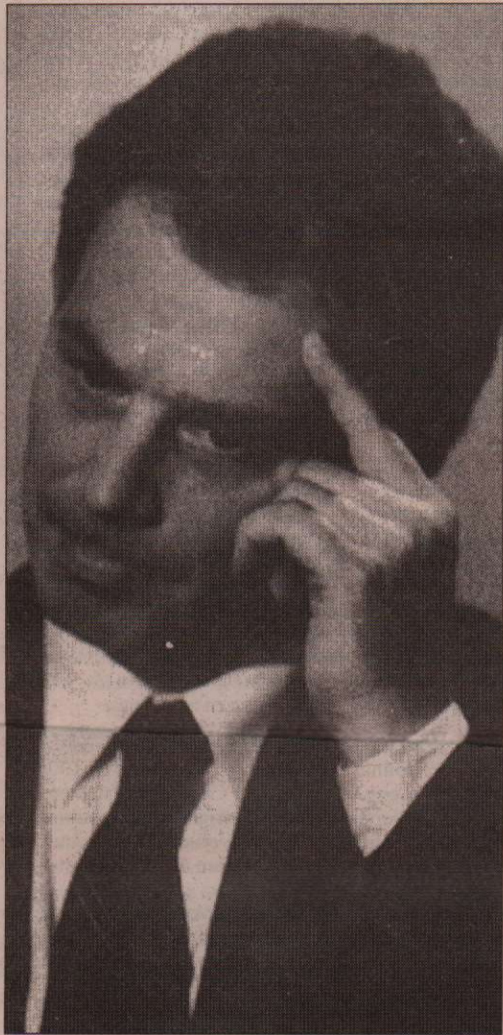
SOCIALIST

ORGANISER

Take nothing for granted

By Joan Trevor

The Tories' favourite Labour leader



Stop Blair!

By Gerry Bates

FACE IT: you know in your heart that Tony Blair would make the best Labour Party leader. He is handsome, he is pretty; he's much favoured in the City; he's a barrister by trade; with Tony, Labour's got it made.

Any other points in his favour? Even though he is not a socialist, Blair is, of course, a society-ist. Where a Mrs Thatcher denies that society exists at all, asserting that only individuals and families exist, Tony Blair is bold and radical enough to insist that, yes, society does exist. That's heady left wing stuff in these post-Thatcher '90s.

And of course he will keep the unions in their place so that they won't embarrass Labour and lose us votes: note how moderate and responsible Blair is being about the rail dispute.

And look how bright and fresh he is on TV! Compare best-white Blair to grey, disgruntled, yesterday's man Major, he of the ingrained tiredness that no detergent will ever wash out.

Anything else to be said for chart-topper Tony? Yes, only Blue Rinse Blair can win votes for Labour from disillusioned Tories. No one else can. And so on, and on, and on.

Yes, indeed! Ridiculous nonsense! The millionaire-owned and mainly Tory media — and the BBC too — are selling you Blair like they sell you soap flakes, fashionable clothes or the latest pop star. And what crass bilge it is.

Blair may look like the shifty-eyed, self-regarding creep he is, but they are building him up as a man who radiates "vision", integrity and trustworthiness.

He is a privileged son of the middle classes, a man who has never had to fight

for anything. He had his way smoothed through school and college and then through parliament. But they are selling him to labour movement voters as the natural political leader for a party based on the exploited and the underprivileged people who constitute the labour movement.

Blair has never *done* anything more demanding than stand his ground in the set-piece debates in the House of Commons, but he is being sold as a tried and tested Labour leader of proven capacity.

Blair talks vague and evasive waffle whose only clearly defined elements consist of bland clichés, but his empty speeches — long-winded ways of saying "vote for me" — are examined and praised for their statesman-like greatness.

This is "democratic discourse" at its most decadent and most repulsive — pop star promo stuff. But the saddest thing of all is how seriously it is being taken by sections of the labour movement.

You see them interviewed on TV — where this campaign is mainly being fought — middle aged labour movement activists reciting the list of Blair's alleged virtues and advantages like schoolboys regurgitating wha. the teacher has crammed into them.

"Yes, Mr Smarmy, I'm backing Tony Blair. I think he has the charisma. He can win for Labour. He will win back Tory voters, he can take Labour to power in this modern age."

Of course these interviews are the media reflecting itself back on to the viewer — regurgitating through the mouths of bamboozled interviewees what it fed them in the first place.

Vast numbers of rank and file labour movement people must find this as

sickening as we do, and know it for what it is — a hi-jacking of the affairs of the labour movement by the media agencies of the class enemy.

If enough people vote in the election, then Blair, the media-made fake superstar, may get a rude shock. Things are not as cut and dried as the media and the Parliamentary Labour Party — which overwhelmingly backs Blair — tell us they are. The great danger is that not enough people will vote.

Time is short. This sort of labour movement election has not been experienced before. Above all the left is not organising as it should to stop Blair.

The level of media-orchestrated idiocy now being spewed out by the Blair campaign is not representative of the real labour movement — not even at its worst. Despite the media hype, Blair is not home yet. The Tories' favourite Labour leader can still be stopped. (See pages 4, 8 and 9).

LAST WEEK'S obituary of playwright Dennis Potter called him a child of 1945 socialism and in this week's paper you can read more about what the post-war Labour government achieved, the sorts of things that gave the working-class boy Dennis a decent start in life.

Everyone who has grown up since 1945 remembers what the Welfare State has meant to them personally, but many of the things we accepted as normal have gone and what's left is going fast, robbed from us by the Tories while Labour politicians gawp on with their flaccid jaws hanging round their knees.

Many of the benefits we enjoyed seem dated, like a copy of the *Dandy*.

You don't have to be older than twenty-something to look back misty-eyed at, for instance, the memory of free school milk.

Now, when the media echo the Tory bastards and cowardly Labour politicians echo the media harping on about how we must go forward, not look back to the bad old days of a strong labour movement, you wonder why people can't stand up for old-fashioned concepts like the idea that we should feed children properly.

The idea that something as modest as a daily half pint of milk should be supplied free to all children nowadays sounds quaint and old-fashioned.

It is a frightening indication of how much the Tories have battered social provision and undermined our confidence in our beliefs of what is possible under capitalism that all that stuff seems somehow utopian now — under socialism, maybe, we'll feed our children properly. But under 1990s capitalism? Dream on!

Well, those things were possible under capitalism *before*, and they are possible *now*!

We have to restate that fact again and again and fight for it in a million small ways wherever we are active: in our local Labour Parties, in our trade unions, in conversations at the bus stop, if that's all opportunity affords us.

But the Tories' decimation of the Welfare State has happened so fast and in so many ways and so comprehensively that it's hard for us to see it all.

The Tories have an overview. They sit at the top of society with all the Civil Service, legal system, unelected quangos, media and most of academia to command, plotting our lives, who'll get what, who'll pay for it and how much.

One of our tasks in the Alliance for Workers' Liberty is to get an overview for the working class and tell people what we see. That's why we publish this newspaper and pamphlets and broadsheets for the unions, for work in the Labour Party, for work with young people.

A cursory glance over the political landscape tells us we can't take the Welfare State for granted and that we must fight to defend and rebuild it.

But likewise we can't take it for granted that we'll have the resources to put up that fight.

We appeal to all readers to help us be the overseer and the organiser of all the forces we can muster in our fight to defend and rebuild the Welfare State.

Please send cheques/postal orders payable to "Workers' Liberty" to: AWL, PO Box 823, London SE15 4NA.

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