

# SOCIALIST

ORGANISER

*It will be socialism or barbarism!*

Inside:

**Socialist Outlook:  
an anatomy of their  
political crisis**

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*Don't believe the media hype*

# We can still

# beat Blair!



**T**ONY BLAIR'S "new" Clause Four represents a backward looking and deeply reactionary attempt to tie the Labour Party to the ridiculous idea that the capitalist economy can guarantee social justice.

The Defend Clause Four Campaign has correctly pointed out the document's flaws:

- It commits Labour to a market-dominated capitalist economy.
- It has no commitment to an expanding role for public ownership.
- It deprives Labour of any long-term ambition to reorganise society on a socialist basis.
- It has no commitment to the redistribution of wealth.
- It leaves Labour without any guiding economic strategy.
- It does not locate the Labour Party within a wider labour movement.
- It commits Labour only to equality of opportunity, not to equality. It says nothing of the fight against discrimination. It makes no mention of the fight against sexism or racism.
- It contains no commitment to full

employment.

• It fails to demarcate Labour clearly from the Liberal Democrats and 'one nation' Tories.

• Much of it is verbose, incomprehensible or just plain meaningless.

The central absurdity of Blair's statement is the idea that it is possible to place "power, wealth and opportunity in the hands of the many" while maintaining in full the economic results of Mrs Thatcher's social counter revolution — which is "power, wealth and opportunity in the hands of the money"!

The National Executive's document is so right wing that even normal Blair enthusiasts in the media have been embarrassed. The *Guardian's* Simon Hoggart has described it as an "intellectually dead" proposal which "might be the most impenetrable piece of high-minded verbosity ever foisted on a British political party" while Andrew Rawsley admitted: "The big question which will be raised by the left, but not just on the left, is whether Labour's aim of creating a more just, equal and fair country can be achieved here and

now, while millions are without work. Or whether any of those other resounding declarations can be achieved without a radical recasting of society and the economy — including, dread word for Labour, tax."

Significantly, Blair has failed to even mention the phrase "full employment" in his "new" Clause Four.

This is not just a defect but a major humiliation for the parliamentary and trade union "soft left" headed by Deputy Leader John Prescott and GMB general secretary John Edmonds.

Though both Prescott and Edmonds have tried to delude themselves and others that the phrase "opportunity for all to work and prosper" really means "full employment", Blair has not been so prepared to encourage their illusions.

Speaking on the Dimpleby programme last weekend (19 March) Blair ruled out Edmonds' and Prescott's interpretation and then spelt out the fate of their soft left touchstone:

"We do not think you can wave a magic

Continued on page 3

## *Defend Clause Four, defend socialism!*

## Build the Welfare State Network

# The left must seize the time!

By Rosalind Robson

IN SOUTHWARK, South London, just as in many other places in the Britain, if you are a young working class person, finding a job is very tough indeed — the youth unemployment rate is around 20%. How many times has this kind of statistic been repeated over the last two decades? So many times that it has become a bland repetition that no longer has the power to evoke the true reality which is, for the youth affected, a catalogue of broken dreams.

Let us now consider an even more obscene figure. If you are a young black man in this part of South London the unemployment "rate" — the most relevant statistic that summarises your prospects in life — is 60%.

For these young, working-class men, the future is a sick joke. It has no meaning and no substance. The only way to go is down the road of despair, meeting only poverty, physical and mental illness, perhaps a drug-induced numbness.

And the government continues to do everything in its power to crush the hope and life out of youth. They are destroying the future for our children through the gross underfunding of education.

In Southwark, the one chance of getting some training and education, and reversing records of failure at school was to attend Southwark College. Here, in dirty, overcrowded buildings, you could get some qualifications, and regain some confidence.

Since the college was incorporated — as a result of government policy — it has gone from having a surplus of half a million pounds to a deficit of £1.5 million: 38 teachers are now threatened with the sack.

This is a depressingly familiar story — everywhere in the country post-16 education is under threat. Thousands of working class youth could lose their second-chance at getting an education.

And this second chance is so desperately needed because of what the Tories have done to our schools. Consider again the statistics:

27% of primary classes and 9% of secondary classes have more than 30 pupils.

Up to 10,000 teacher jobs could go in this round of cuts.

Up to £4 billion of repairs need to be done to make schools habitable. Many schools are vermin-infested, need asbestos removal, and have other health and safety hazards.

Whatever Gillian Shepherd says, we now have a two-tier education system. When Tory peer, Lord Skidelsky, spoke last week about a policy for introducing a fee-paying, means-tested, voucher system he was merely talking about a more "radical" version of the Tories' existing policy for education.

To all this there is a massive resistance, much of it yet unorganised. But parents, teachers and youth are beginning to get organised. In Southwark college lecturers are on all-out strike to defend their jobs and to defend education. School teachers up and down the country are balloting for strike action. Thousands of parents will take to the streets on Saturday 25 March, demonstrating in support of teachers, fighting for their children's future.

We now have the chance to build a national movement. The left has to seize this opportunity and must immerse itself in the battles ahead. We need a movement that will link activists but we also need to forge a political alliance that can both take on the Tories and prepare to fight the Labour leaders. We need labour movement leaders who do more than pay lip-service to defending comprehensive education (as

David Blunkett has done). We need real commitments.

That is why the left must build the Welfare State Network. At its conference — entitled "from the cradle to the grave" — on 8 April there will be a chance for activists and socialists to get together to discuss organising the fightback. We cannot afford to miss this chance.

## From the cradle to the grave

A Welfare State Network  
campaign conference to defend

● Education ● Health  
● Pensions

Saturday 8 April 11am-5.30pm,  
University of London Union,  
Malet Street, London

Speakers: Sue Lister, Chair of Fight  
Against Cuts in Education (FACE), Alec  
McFadden Trades Council rep TUC, Alice  
Mahon MP, Neil Gerrard MP, Doreen  
Cameron NATFHE

Tickets £5 waged, £3 low waged, £1  
concessions

Write to WSN c/o Southwark Trade Union Support  
Unit, 42 Braganza Street, London SE17.

## Taslima Nasrin speaks in London

ON THE evening of Wednesday 15 March 450 people heard Bengali author and feminist speak at Conway Hall in central London.

Taslima Nasrin spoke about the stupidity of inter-communal conflicts. Her book, *Shame*, which is banned in Bangladesh, is a thorough condemnation of the anti-Hindu riots in Bangladesh, which took place at the end of 1992.

Over 50 copies of *Shame* and more than 70 copies of the latest issue of *Workers' Liberty* — which carries an interview with Taslima Nasrin — were sold at the meeting. 200 sig-

natures were collected on a petition demanding the abolition of Pakistan's blasphemy laws.

Gail Cameron from Workers' Liberty and Alan Simpson MP were the other platform speakers at the meeting. Gail Cameron insisted that it is the duty of us all to unequivocally back Taslima's right to free speech and to oppose the Muslim bigots who have threatened Taslima Nasrin's life.

● Copies of *Shame* can be bought from Soma Books, 38 Kennington Lane, London SE11 4LS. Send £5.95 plus £1.00 p&p. Cheques to "Soma Books."

## Save Mumia Abu-Jamal!

MUMIA ABU-JAMAL is a former Black Panther currently on death row in America for a murder he did not commit.

There is a rally in defence of Mumia Abu-Jamal at 6.30, on Wednesday 29 March at the Friends Meeting House, Euston Road (Euston tube and BR).


Speakers include Bob Crow (RMT), Jake Ecclestone (NUJ).

### Workers' Liberty

The March issue of the new monthly series contains:

- Interview with Bengali feminist Taslima Nasrin
- Ken Coates MEP on the battle to save Clause Four in 1959-60
- Will Ireland be united?
- Jim Higgins, James D Young and Mike McGrath continue our symposium on the IS/SWP-Britain Plus Animal Rights, Education Cuts and more

£1.20 plus 29p post Subscription £12 for 10 issues from WL Publications, PO Box 823, London SE15 4NA.



### Workers' Liberty 1995

Workers' Liberty is three days of socialist discussion and debate hosted by the Alliance for Workers' Liberty. It will be held from Friday 30 June to Sunday 2 July at Caxton House, Archway, London.

#### Tickets

Tickets bought before the end of April are cheaper — the prices for three-day tickets are: £6 (unwaged); £10 (low-waged)/(students with grants)/£14 (waged).

Write for your ticket to: WL95, AWL, PO Box 823, London SE15 4NA. Cheques to "WL Publications".

# We can still beat Blair!

**From front page**

wand and secure full employment... It would be dishonest to tell people that after so many years or so of a Labour government full employment would come back.

"We are not going to set targets saying that there will be so many jobs in a certain time... or say to people that we can guarantee you a job."

Blair's assault on Prescott's remaining left credentials go some way to explaining the *New Statesman's* description of the press launch of the "new" Clause Four.

"Sitting next to the Labour leader, his deputy, John Prescott, looked glum. When he endorsed the new Clause he seemed strangely lacking in conviction."

Edmonds appears to be lining up the GMB to back Blair despite his eve of publication call for "full employment" to be "clearly stated in the rewrite of Labour's aims and values."

## Join the campaign!

Name/Organisation .....

Address .....

.....

Phone/Fax .....

Donation .....

Affiliation fee: £10 minimum/£30 regional organisations/£50 national organisations.

## Badges ● Videos

I would like to order copies of the

Ken Loach video at £6. Total ..

I would like ..... badges

(1:£1; 4:£2; 10:£4.50; 25:£10).

Total .....

Cheques to "Defend Clause Four" c/o the NUM, 2 Huddersfield Road, Barnsley, Yorkshire S70 2LS.

Phone enquiries and to order copies of the Clause Four bulletin please phone: 0171-207 3781 or 0171-708 0511.

For a Defend Clause Four speaker please phone 0181-854 7326.

The humiliation of the soft left has been topped off by the complete absence of any reference to the fight against racism and sexism in the new clause. Clare Short will be particularly embarrassed by that. Nevertheless we predict that all the soft left will back Blair. They think they are being clever. But the reality is that they have been crushed.

This was the intention all along. As one of Blair's entourage put it several months ago: "The aim isn't to defeat the hard left — it's to crush the soft left and make them eat their words."

Nevertheless, the new clause can still be defeated. The media hype about victory now being guaranteed for Blair is all wrong.

As the Defend Clause Four Campaign

*"The real balance of forces is — despite Blair's monopolisation of the media and the party machine — far more favourable to the left than many people think."*

explain in their latest bulletin the real balance of forces is — despite Blair's monopolisation of the media and the party machine — far more favourable to the left than many people think:

"The phoney consultation has ended. During this exercise no one knew the content of Tony Blair proposals.

A questionnaire was written to engineer answers that would give the impression that members wished to change Clause Four.

## Defend Clause Four, defend socialism

# Lobby Special Conference

Saturday 29 April, 11.30 am, Queen Elizabeth Conference Centre (Westminster tube)

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## Open meeting

# Where now after 29 April?

## A socialist agenda for Labour

Sunday 30 April, 1pm, University of London Union, Malet Street

.....

The NEC refused to ask "do you wish to retain Clause Four as it stands?"

Even so, only 1.5% of the individual membership and 20% of CLPs have indicated that Clause Four should be "more clear and concise." Of those supporting a rewrite most wanted to see "redistributing wealth" and "common ownership" included. Neither has been. The London and South West regional conferences have voted to retain Clause Four. The North-West voted to support "All forms of common ownership." The much publicised Scottish conference voted to renationalise the utilities.

Tony Blair has no mandate for change.

Nor does he have the unions sewn up as the media claim. We can still hope to win more trade union support than when last year's conference voted to keep Clause Four.

UNISON wants to see "a continued role for public or common ownership" including renationalisation of the utilities. They have not yet decided how to vote. The MSF President said the union should support MSF's conference policy to back Clause Four. CWU is holding a ballot. Both could come out for keeping Clause Four."

As the campaign argues, socialists have no alternative but to confront Blair's loyalty bandwagon head on:

"The empty phrase mongering of the proposed Clause Four will in the long run merely re-inforce public suspicions that Labour politicians will say anything to get elected.

Scrapping Clause Four is a victory for Margaret Thatcher rather than Tony Blair. The vital 'loyalty test' is to principles — not individual leaders. Vote to keep Clause Four."

"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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# Socialist Outlook: an organisation in crisis

**S**Ocialist Outlook is undergoing a protracted political crisis. Recently it lost its main political leader, Phil Hearse, to Militant Labour. Hearse walked out just after their 1994 conference and denounced the organisation in the pages of *Militant*. Much that he said about Outlook was true — even though he, who bore much of the responsibility for it — had no right to say it as he scuttled.

The organisation is crippling faction-ridden. What is left of its leadership is extremely demoralised. For example, Alan Thornett's response to Tony Blair's speech at the October 1994 Labour Party conference, before a meeting of Outlook supporters, was to proclaim that this proved the Labour Party was dead!

Many of the members of the organisation as individuals do their work in local organisations, trade unions etc., but the organisation as such seems to be in an advanced state of dissolution, of being absorbed into the political environment around it.

It is undergoing the political equivalent of bio-degrading.

There are fundamental causes of this, above and beyond the formidable weaknesses of the organisation's political leadership.

Immediately there is the general decline of the labour movement and of the left. The

main group from which Outlook descends — the International Marxist Group — was always dependent on the tides, currents and fashions of radical — in fact radical petit bourgeois — opinion, combining it with bits of text-book "Trotskyism". The drying up of these currents has, therefore, inevitably shrivelled this tendency.

But something more fundamental has happened to them. Their entire political world outlook has been shattered.

Since the 1940s their "official Trotskyist" current — which in our opinion was the negation of key elements of the Trotskyism of Trotsky, our Trotskyism — had spun its "optimism" and "perspectives" around the survival and expansion of Stalinism, which it identified with the "World Socialist Revolution".

They were critical of Stalinism, of course, but simultaneously they identified it as the "actually existing" proletarian revolution. The collapse of Russian and Eastern European Stalinism at the beginning of the '90s has, therefore, shattered their entire world outlook.

Politically the ground has been well and truly cut from under their feet. These are people who will, in real debate and discussion, either radically rethink the theoretical basis of the revolutionary socialist politics we share with them, or disappear.

"Disappearance" can mean either dis-

solving or turning into a destructive and irrational — and congenitally stupid — sect of the Healyite or Lambertist sort — organisations characterised in politics above all by charlatanism — by pretend politics, and by the substitution of words and phrase-mongering and of textual "Trotskyist" "orthodoxy" for Marxist

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*"The truth is that, rationally assessed, there is no reason why Outlook and ourselves should not be in one democratically structured organisation."*

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analysis of reality.

Those, on the whole, have not been the methods of the tendency of which Outlook is part. It is no part of a Trotskyism capable of living and growing in the new conditions. Yet it is the only way for them to go if they continue to reject the course we have followed — rethinking modern "Trotskyism" back to Trotsky.

The implications of the collapse of the "deformed and degenerated workers' state" theory are slowly and inexorably working themselves through in the consciousness of the international tendency of which Outlook is part, whose best known leader is the septuagenarian Ernest Mandel. One group now seems to want the international organisation to liquidate itself at its "World Congress" this summer.

The tragedy of what is happening to Outlook is that there are many sensible and devoted comrades in and around the group. We work with some of them in the trade unions, in the Labour Party and in campaigns. They work with us as individuals. Group to group relations do not exist.

We have in the past tried to get this organisation to discuss with us, almost always in vain. Their leaders are not confident politically. They are subjective people obsessed with old grudges and half-forgotten disputes of the past. They avoid discussion. They seem to fear discussion. Instead of discussing their differences with us and at the same time uniting with us in common action where we have agreement the leaders of Outlook demonise *Socialist Organiser*.

They exaggerate our differences. They attribute to us positions we do not hold.

## Democratic centralism and the organisation of the organisation (extracts)

### Tendency Z — May 1994

**THE I\*\* IS IN CRISIS.** Since our last conference, membership of the organisation has continued to fall. Seven CC members (of whom three are PC members) — all of them representatives of minorities — have resigned from the organisation and one other cde has resigned from the PC.

We continue to have serious problems about our dues income, paper sales and income from fund-raising which mean that we continue to have a level of full-time staff below the minimum necessary for efficient administration and condition of the building needs some serious attention.

This document argues that a re-evaluation of our structures and method of operation is long past due, and that we are getting to the point where our ability to intervene in the class struggle is undermined by our inability to determine a clear line, carry out such a line collectively, or assess the correctness of that line in retrospect.

We need to change the culture of the organisation to one where comrades will present a line of march to the organisation on the grounds that it will answer the needs of the class rather than that it will be sufficiently vague to gain a majority of votes. We also need to change the culture to one where comrades carry out the line of the organisation whether or not they agree with it. These two requirements are interdependent. What we are saying is that the politics of our perspective must be prime.

An internationalist approach is of paramount importance to our organisation. The WM is the practical expression of the importance of internationalism and we defend it against any attempt to dissolve or dissipate it. We believe that it is necessary to struggle within the WM to unite the widest number of people against any moves at the next World Congress to dissolve the WM or to undermine its character as a Trotskyist international and we commit ourselves to be part of that struggle.

The recently departed Phil Hearse once polemicised with us on the basis of invented quotations which he said came from *SO!* (See "Their polemics and ours" *Socialist Organiser* 4 June 1992).

Yet the truth is that, rationally assessed, there is no reason why Outlook and ourselves should not be in one democratically structured organisation.

The Alliance for Workers' Liberty is committed to building a revolutionary organisation in which there is both a normal practice of debating all issues in the public press, with no privileges for the incumbent leadership, and discipline in

action in the class struggle.

Outlook, instead of joining us in such an enterprise, spends much time and energy in often trivial internal polemics and disputes. Its leaders are in practice unable to galvanise the organisation for common efforts.

Much of their internal discussion — for example, about who best understands "the United Front", "entryism" etc — are foolish and decadent disputes about words and concepts considered abstractly and platonically, apart from practice!

Unless the healthier members do something about it, this organisation will

continue its sad process of bio-degrading.

For ourselves we have written to Outlook proposing discussions about joint work. A wider group to group discussion about general politics would in our opinion also be useful to both tendencies. Supporters of Outlook should demand of their leaders that they at least talk about such things with us; that instead of trying to minimise they should try to maximise areas of collaboration with us.

For the information of our readers we present here some extracts from their internal bulletins.

Thomas Dubh Carolan

## Thornett and Co share the politics that led Hearse to join Militant(extracts)

By Steve Lewis (Clarke is Phil Hearse, Davies is Alan Thornett)

### Introduction — "We have nothing to hide" says the CC majority

THE PC SAY they are "angered, shocked and surprised" by Clarke and Kirkham jumping ship to join the Militant. This may be the truth but, sadly as far as the CC Majority is concerned, it is not the whole truth. The phrase is repeated in the statement, on at least three occasions, that there is "nothing to hide".

In point of fact, it was an open secret among leadership comrades for some time that Clarke/Kirkham were trying to steer our group into the political orbit of the Militant. Clarke even wrote a document a few months ago suggesting regroupment with Militant.

The overwhelming majority of members of our group who are unaware of this regroupment document should be "angered, shocked and surprised" by Clarke/Kirkham's decision to resign — but not those CC Majority leaders who have been virtually discussing little else over the past few months but Clarke's political trajectory.

The November 2nd PC resolution says that Clarke/Kirkham have never raised their intention to join Militant. This is very likely true. But they did raise their view that we need a regroupment project with Militant — a significant occurrence that is probably worth a mention by the PC document, don't you think? Sadly for our membership, Clarke/Kirkham's view on regroupment never emerged into the light of the formal democracy of our organisation, but was confined within the 'informal' CC Majority channels of debate and communication.

The suppression of internal differences within the CC Majority is not merely a side aspect of their politics, it is central to how the CC Majority cling on to power in our group. They are riven with differences on virtually every significant matter

affecting the future of our group — so they produce documents that consciously suppress and fudge their own differences. The CC Majority face the awful knowledge that they can only cling onto power by systematically avoiding debates and thereby lowering the political level of the membership.

What the group should really be concentrating on is the lessons we can draw from Clarke's political development over the past four years — beginning with his concerted (and successful) campaign to get the group to support the parliamentary candidatures of Fields and Nellist in 1991. This was a key turning point in the political development of our group and a balance sheet of this experience deserves a full document of its own.

Then we should study how Clarke, along with a small number of other individuals now in the CC Majority, strove to ensure that our group emulated Militant's abandonment of entrism. We must ask ourselves the burning question — what degree of success did Clarke achieve in getting the CC Majority to torpedo entrism as a national tactic of our group, carried out in a democratic centralist fashion?

But most importantly (because it reveals so clearly the scale of the degeneration of the CC Majority's politics), we should examine the conclusions that Clarke adopted regarding the anti-poll tax campaign and how, in his view, the Militant leadership had the correct tactics to build the campaign, whereas our group had the wrong ones.

Thus to sum up — while Clarke was one of the central leaders of the CC Majority, he said we should support Militant's parliamentary candidates, tail-end its withdrawal from entry, praise its leadership of the anti-poll tax campaign, emulate its sectarian approach to the united front...

And comrades are surprised that Clarke ended up making the ultimate leap of logic in joining Militant?

The truly frightening thing for our group

is that the political positions that Clarke developed over the past four years were not just individual obsessions — because of his role as one of the central leaders of the CC Majority, they became the de facto positions of our newspaper, our leadership and our group! There is a direct political continuity between the politics of the CC Majority and the politics that led Clarke to join the Militant.

Clarke's political legacy is bequeathed to the CC Majority.

I would invite comrades to compare and contrast these statements, one from Clarke, who is a former central leader of the CC Majority, and one from Davies, who is a current leader of the CC Majority — our national secretary, no less.

Clarke: "The Poll Tax campaign won because it did not go primarily through the organisations of the labour movement and thus was able to avoid being bureaucratically derailed. Taking the Poll Tax campaign into the labour movement was correct, but the mass non-payment campaign was what won." (PCDB 13 p.18)

Davies: "The poll tax movement was a spectacular success (the biggest victory against the Tories by far since the defeat of the miners) precisely because it was not constrained by the trade union and labour leaders... we should recognise that the poll tax was the best opportunity since we were formed as an organisation to make breakthroughs in recruitment and development... Militant made mistakes (and bent the stick too far) but they did get the essentials right from the start..." (PCDB 13 p.11)

As a political "line" for the group this is a transparent capitulation by the CC Majority to Militant's sectarian method of party building. Clarke, of course, drew the same political conclusions as Davies — which led to Clarke deciding that if faced by a choice of joining Militant or staying in a group struggling to ape Militant's party-building tactics, he might as well join the real thing.

But even Davies's analysis of how the poll tax was defeated is based on delusion

and ignorance.

## The fall of Thatcher and Militant's 'role'

POINT NUMBER ONE. Did the single factor of mass non-payment directly lead to the defeat of the poll tax? The answer is a resounding no — the mass non-payment campaign was just one of a number of factors which collided to produce the amazing victory... of the council tax!

The poll tax became history in essentially the same way as Post Office privatisation has now become history — because of divisions within the Conservative Party. Of course, the mass non-payment campaign (along with the popular front campaign carried out by the Labour Party, Lib Dems, wet Tories, etc.) acted to put huge pressure on Tory backbenchers to give Thatcher the push. But the decisive issue which led to the downfall of Thatcher was Europe... it was her Atlanticist hostility to the question of ERM membership, which rang huge alarm bells within the establishment about the potential damage to British capitalism's long-term interests. The decision was then taken by the Tory Party's famous "men in grey suits" that she had to go.

To argue the Clarke/Davies line, that it was the Militant-led campaign against the poll tax that brought down Thatcher, is an appalling miseducation of both members of the group and the wider vanguard we seek to influence.

## The Council Tax — a

## great victory for the workers?

POINT NUMBER two. Was the defeat of the poll tax a huge victory ("a spectacular success" in Davies' words) for the working class? The answer is another resounding no. It can only have been a huge victory if it was independent working-class action that led to the downfall of the poll tax, but in fact as we have noted, it was divisions within the capitalist executive bloc that represented the decisive factor.

This is so clearly illustrated by two things: firstly, by what replaced the poll tax legislation, and secondly, by what became of the mass anti-poll tax movement.

The council tax was imposed to replace the poll tax. Was the council tax a victory for the working class in any real shape or form? Of course not — what kind of "Marxist" would argue that? Yet that is the concrete outcome and result of Davies' "spectacular success" of the anti-poll tax campaign. And that's not all. Courts are still pursuing poll tax defaulters wherever they surface. I could show Davies members of our group who are still being attacked by the poll tax legislation. And where's the campaign to protect them now? Vanguard-chasing elsewhere, no doubt.

When I refer to the "degeneration" of the CC Majority, I say this because a clear recognition of Militant's sectarian betrayal would have been ABC for the CC Majority just a few short years ago.

Clarke and Davies have produced balance sheets of the anti-poll tax campaign which are nothing more than an apologetic cover for that sectarianism — and the CC Majority still continue to elect them as the key leaders of our group!

Now let us consider what has become of the mass anti-poll tax movement. What lasting impact has this huge movement had on British politics? Less ambitiously perhaps, what lasting impact has it had on the British left?

The answer to the first question is — practically nothing! Militant's refusal to take the campaign (not just the non-implementation campaign but support for the non-payment campaign as well) into the labour movement meant that the radicalism of the campaign by-passed the traditional organisations. The ongoing trench warfare between new realists and militant socialists was left to be fought out without the involvement of newly radicalising layers — to the enormous benefit of the right-wing bureaucratic misleaders of the class.

Thus Militant's tactics ended up as a capitulation to the current political weight of the bureaucracy within the working class. Militant, in common with ultra-left abstentionist groups that litter the British far left, end up being soft on the bureaucracy because they make no effort to challenge their power within the workers' movement. With their miseducating balance sheets of the anti-poll tax campaign, Clarke and Davies ("Militant got the essentials right") join hands with Militant in letting the bureaucracy off the hook.

## The pre-conference discussion — a comment (extracts)

# The origins of the present crisis

By Doyle

THE FORTHCOMING conference of the \*\*G comes at the end of a "long wave". This began in the late 1970s and has terminated in the last couple of years. I refer here not to the dynamics of the capitalist economy but to a party building strategy adopted by British Fourth Internationalists.

The origins of our organisation's ill-health do not lie then in the (personal) ineptitude of individuals, but in its troubled birth from an unprincipled split in the SL [Socialist League] and a demoralised directionless band of Trotskyist travellers that had, most recently, been chewed up and spat out of the Matgamna mastication machine. Putting together two drastically dissimilar groups was an intractable matter at best. It has had mixed results. Most of the old SG left soon after the unification, and, as the CC majority acknowledge, nearly all the subsequent fusions failed (PCDB5 p.3). There are some powerful lessons to be learned from all this, not least of all the danger of splitting organisations and the need for a high degree of both programmatic and tactical

confluence in prospective partners. It is the after-effects of the split, and our consequent over-reliance on far left regroupment on the basis of pragmatic and short sighted agreements, that has got us here.

We all want a political explanation to the organisation's problems. This is the one I offer: our political self-conception born out of 1987 as a "unifier" of currents; an architecture for regroupment for the lost left providing a stable non-sectarian chassis in turbulent times to whomsoever could agree on a minimum platform. What we failed to do, to use a pleasing phrase of Chris Brooks, was to fight for our own "hegemonic space" (PCDB6 p.6). We got the orientation wrong. Most of all, we have never identified a coherent political project for ourselves. Thus the endless tactical changes of 'alliances' and journals with which we were involved — astoundingly complex at times. Thus the lightweight entrance criteria. Thus the difficulty in holding on to those we recruited. Thus the federalism. Thus the continual vent of spleen by a membership left hopelessly behind in the whirlwind of Finsbury

Party manoeuvres. And thus the origins of the 'no debate' culture — "don't rock the boat 'cause it's precariously balanced" (remember the ridiculous instructions previous to the 1991 Conference that we were not to say too much as it was only a 'holding operation?').

There must be something more important to discuss, like, perhaps, what the hell we're doing with ourselves. The CC majority has not provided us with any answer of great depth. Their concern over the absence of a "centralising project" needs to be addressed. This urge to find a single unifier I have always found perplexing, as a great many of the ones they've come up with in the past have had no relevance beyond the London left. It has always been my understanding that what made us special in Britain was our unique comprehension of the MO in building a revolutionary party, but no-one seems to talk about this anymore — and the "campaignist" orientation of the CC majority certainly indicates a degree of forgetfulness on their part of the \*\*G's early declarations of intent not to turn into a reincarnation of the IMG.

# Organise for a public sector day of action

## WHAT WE SAY

THERE IS an incredible amount of resentment building up in the public sector to the government. In schools it's actually turning into the beginning of a resurgence in industrial action. In several areas the NUT are balloting for a day's strike on 5 April, including Derbyshire, Rotherham, Sheffield and Doncaster. In addition, Derbyshire UNISON is balloting for a day's strike to coincide with us.

In the NHS, resentment over pay is illustrated by the midwives' union voting to end their no industrial action policy (but not their no strike policy). The protests outside every hospital on the 30 March — UNISON's "NHS Fair Pay Day" — will hopefully be massive. Any dispute over pay in the NHS will, by its nature, become a battle over the whole future of the NHS and the government's piecemeal running down and privatisation of health care.

In the Civil Service, resentment is growing over market testing and the constant changes and increased stress that the likes of the Job Seeker's Allowance will mean.

On the railways, management are stepping up the pressure as the privatisation bandwagon rolls on. This has led to a number of local dis-

putes, a referendum on industrial action by the drivers' union ASLEF and discussions amongst RMT activists on the need for national action to defend job security, terms and conditions and union rights.

In local authorities the workers have taken a battering from years of cuts and increased workloads, but there can be no doubt that it's possible to win action. This is shown by the Newcastle action and will hopefully be shown by a yes vote in the Strathclyde UNISON ballot for a day's strike on 4 April. Strathclyde plan to join the Lothian Region Branch for a massive demonstration against cuts in Edinburgh on 4 April. In local authorities there are actually reasons to believe that a national ballot for action which is clearly aimed at central government rather than the local authorities will be easier to win. Members often see local action as attacking the local authority who they see as being clearly too skint not to make the cuts.

The fire service has also seen protest action across the country in opposition to council cuts.

Starting a campaign now for action in November 1995 is not a moment too soon. What happens in the unions' annual confer-

ences between now and then will be crucial. Hopefully it will be possible to win several key public sector unions to the position of balloting for a day of action in November. Where this is not won nationally in unions it will take considerable energy and commitment from hundreds of activists on the ground to win support for balloting for union action branch by branch to coincide with the day of action. To pull this off a large layer of activists need to be convinced to go for it.

The absolute minimum that this initiative has the potential to achieve is a major national demonstration and some strikes to coincide with it. It has the potential to achieve a one-day public sector-wide strike, a massive demonstration and the basis for an ongoing rank and file cross-union campaign for the public sector and welfare state. With a Labour government beginning to look almost inevitable a strong public sector-wide trade union alliance could bring forward the inevitable disputes that will surface between the unions and the Labour government over the funding of public services, the minimum wage and anti-trade union laws, and help to prepare victory for our side.

## Newcastle shows the way!

NEWCASTLE UNISON, with the support of Strathclyde UNISON and the FBU have called a conference for Saturday 13 May 1995 in Leeds, to build for a one-day public sector strike and week-day demonstration in the run up to the government's Budget Day in November 1995. They aim to make the need for greater funding of public services a headline issue. On that day the government will be fixing tax cuts to bribe people into voting Tory at the General Election.

Newcastle UNISON have shown what planning and determination by trade union activists can achieve. After two months of careful organisation Newcastle UNISON and teaching unions NUT and NASUWT all struck on 1 February. Large numbers of working-class people from the local community swelled a demonstration — the

biggest in the city for years.

A key aspect of the Newcastle action was joint campaigning with service user groups, community groups and the Labour Party.

At a rally on the same day the leader of the Labour-controlled council, announced — to everyone's surprise — that the council would seek permission to keep the existing council tax levels. This would have the effect of exceeding government-set spending targets.

All serious socialists in the trade unions have a duty to do their utmost to build the conference on 13 May and fight for support for Newcastle UNISON's call for a strike and demonstration. The wave of protests at cuts, in particular cuts in education, around the country shows that there is a huge potential for such action.

## Join us as a Trade Union Supporter!

If you are a trade union activist and are sympathetic to the views in *Socialist Organiser* and *Workers' Liberty* magazine, why not join up as a Trade Union Supporter?

You can sign up for just £3 per month. We will send you our publications, and put you on our trade union mailing list and we will let you know about the relevant Workers' Liberty trade union fraction meetings. Either send a cheque for £36 for a year or £18 for six months, or write to us for a standing order payable for £3 per month. Write to: the Alliance for Workers' Liberty, PO Box 823, London, SE15 4NA.

## Organising to defend the public sector

Saturday 13 May 1995

Lecture theatre 2, Leeds Metropolitan University, Calverley Street, Leeds

Called by Newcastle UNISON

Supported by Strathclyde UNISON,

Northern Region FBU, Socialist

Movement Trade Union Committee,

Trade Union News

"Newcastle UNISON is proposing that all public sector trade unions try to co-ordinate a Day of Action in November 1995 in the run-up to the government setting their budget. We believe that it should be possible to co-ordinate ballots for a day's strike and massive national demonstration across the whole movement. The aim of this would be to ensure that the funding of public services is made into a central issue around the budget." — Newcastle UNISON  
Contact: 0191 232-8520

## WHAT YOU CAN DO

NEWCASTLE UNISON want to get in touch with every public sector trade union in the country about the conference. There are a number of things that all activists should be doing to assist Newcastle in ensuring that they pull off the biggest trade union rank and file conference for years.

1. Get hold of leaflets for the conference and pass them around all the activists you know who will be supportive.
2. Propose that your branch sends delegates to the conference, sponsors the conference. Submit this motion to your union's regional body and to the local Trades Council.
3. Raise the conference in any broad left type body that exists in your union. Propose that a speaker from Newcastle be invited to speak on the platform of fringe meetings at conference and that an advert and article about the conference be placed in its journal.
4. Send Newcastle UNISON details of any trade unions in your area who may be interested.

## On strike for education

IF WE LET them get away with it here no college lecturer will be safe, is the message from strikers at Southwark College, South London, where the lecturers' union NATFHE has been on all-out strike since 14 March against 38 proposed redundancies.

Southwark management want to make teachers and students pay the price for financial mismanagement and for government's anti-working class education policies, and seem prepared to make this a test case for compulsory redundancies.

The NATFHE strikers need your support — make sure they win this important battle. Please send messages of support and donations to: Southwark College Strike HQ, Industrial Mission, Christ Church, Blackfriars Road, London SE1. Invite a NATFHE speaker to your meeting.

# SOCIALIST

ORGANISER

*It will be socialism or barbarism!*

## NUS must defend the grants system!

By Alison Brown, National Union of Students' Women's Officer elect

**T**HIS WEEK'S NUS national conference is important for all students. Labour Students will make their first blatant attempt to get the student movement ready for Blair's incoming Labour government. That is, they will try to disarm it.

The main issue will be their proposal to scrap NUS policy of support for grants for all. Their alternative — "opening up the discussion on student financial support" — is no fighting strategy in the current conditions of extreme student hardship!

Our elitist education system — grants far too small to even pay the rent, and loans leaving students saddled with years of debt — must be challenged! The way to do this is to build strong, active campaigns to defend and extend the grants system.

To judge by the Commission on Social Justice (CSJ) report, which the Labour Party Executive endorses, this is far from the policy of the Labour Party. It proposes the replacement of grants with loans, and expects students to pay a proportion of tuition fees

At the recent Young Labour Conference Labour Students voted against support for grants and opposition to Graduate Tax; at NUS Women's Conference they spoke against any criticism of the CSJ Report. For NUS's Labour Students leadership, defending the Labour Party comes before the fight to defend access to higher education for working-class youth.

As this conference takes place, the Further Education sector is

### Bolton students fight grant cuts

**STUDENTS AT Bolton Further Education College have organised two mass general meetings of over 400 students and also a mass demonstration the council meeting which was discussion the abolition of discretionary grants for further education students.**

The campaign has been extremely well organised: links with the lecturer's union, NATFHE have been made and as many students as possible have been involved in the decision making.

It seems to be a popular trend among student officers to talk of the "apathy" of students and say that nothing can be done. But the Bolton campaign shows that if real efforts are made to involve students who are really affected by the cuts then you can build demonstrations and pickets because students know that these actions belong to them.

We need to spread this kind of activity across the country.



NUS demonstration against grant cuts. Photo: John Harris

being decimated. Many colleges are facing severe financial crisis. Hundreds are closing courses and sites. Some are completely bankrupt. Staff jobs are under threat.

The strike at Southwark College, the first NATFHE branch to begin indefinite strike action in defence of jobs, show that the fightback is beginning. Students there support the strikers. Students and NUS must be fully involved in struggles like this, supporting trade unions and building student action alongside the education workers.

The financial situation of FE students is also worsening. Many local councils have now completely abolished discretionary grants.

The proposed changes in the 21-hour rule attack those studying on the dole, attempting to drive them either out of education or off benefit. This proposal continues a long line of attacks by the Tories on rights to benefits, the most monstrous of which was the removal of 16-18 year olds from the benefits system.

Students must link up with other campaigns to defend benefit rights — disabled groups fighting Incapacity Benefit, Child Support Act groups and Job Seeker's Allowance campaigns. For students to win their most basic demands, NUS needs to link up with everyone fighting Tory attacks.

The left will argue for this united approach in the final debate at conference, the debate on the Welfare State.

Another big issue at the conference will be NUS's liberation campaigns. Years of tokenism towards these campaigns by Labour Students has angered activists. Labour Students talk about equal opportunities and equal access, but they do not support lesbians, gays and bisexuals, and women when they fight against homophobia and sexism. They think NUS should only campaign on purely educational issues.

Recent autonomous NUS conferences — lesbian, gay and bisexual students, and women — passed votes of no confidence in the National President, Jim Murphy, for his role in attacking the liberation campaigns this year. The same motion will be debated at National Conference.

Left Unity will stand a full slate for the elections at NUS Conference. Last week, the Left Unity candidate for National Women's Officer won the first contested position for the National Executive. and we look to do well in other elections.

In the election for VP Welfare, the Labour Students' incumbent, Ian Moss, failed to enter the election by forgetting to sign his nomination form. This leaves Kevin Sexton as the strongest candidate. Labour Students will push for Re-open Nominations and have started a dirty tricks campaign against Kevin. The initial response to this from independent student unionists seems to be contempt, and growing support for Left Unity's record in the Welfare Campaign.

This conference will be the start of a battle in the student movement in the run-up to the next general election. Left Unity's policies must win ground if basic student rights are to be defended.

We say student rights must be defended under any government, Labour or Tory!