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Review

1931

A Tory collapse not a Labour landslide

1945

1974

1997

- *Brown hands power to the Bank of England*
- *The left after the general election*
- *NATO expands towards Russia's borders*
- *Supplement — Middle ground knocked out of Russian politics*

Comment

Albania — a mass, armed anti-capitalist uprising

The mass armed uprising which won control of a third of Albania in March this year showed why the United States and European Union are determined to expand NATO into eastern Europe — because the new capitalist states in the region are too weak to confront a really mass movement of the people and will be even less able to do so if a Communist government comes to power in Russia.

The 6,000-strong Italian-led force in Albania would be equivalent to more than 100,000 troops in a country with Britain's population. Such a large imperialist military operation was the only way to defeat the first popular, mass, armed insurrection against a capitalist government in Europe since the second world war. The insurgents rapidly won control of a third of the country. The Albanian army and police sympathised more with the uprising than with the government. A network of 'Salvation Committees' took control of the south, establishing territorial dual power which was rapidly expanding northwards.

Without outside military intervention Albania's right wing president Sale Berisha would have been overthrown. The goal of the intervention was to ensure that, whether or not Berisha stayed in power as an individual, the capitalist state apparatus was rebuilt.

It was logical that Albania, the poorest country in Europe, should be the first eastern European state in which the impact of the re-introduction of capitalism provoked a mass uprising. The spark which ignited the social explosion was the collapse of government backed pyramid schemes in which virtually every family in the country had invested its savings. A large part of the population was left destitute.

The proliferation of the pyramid schemes was presided over by a government which was the United States' most favoured client regime in eastern Europe. Under the Sale Berisha regime Albania provided air and sea bases for US operations over the former Yugoslavia. In exchange it received significant military aid, the highest per capita foreign aid of any east European state and massive political support.

US and EU ambassadors spoke from the platform of Berisha's election rallies in 1992. They did not object to the jailing of central leaders and the banning of the overwhelming majority of parliamentary candidates of the main opposition party the — former communist — Socialist Party.

Having been prevented from removing Berisha by democratic means, the population took to the streets when the pyramid schemes collapsed. Berisha closed down all opposition media and ordered the military to shoot the demonstrators. Instead, his state apparatus shattered against what turned into a mass insurrection.

The peoples' demands were simple — removal of Berisha, democratic elections and compensation for the victims of the pyramid frauds. Instead of supporting these demands the US and the EU launched an international campaign against 'anarchy' in Albania. They intervened to draw the opposition Socialist Party into a coalition with the regime responsible for jailing their leaders and rigging the elections. On this basis the Socialist Party leaders supported the call for foreign military intervention, called upon the population to give up their arms and disband the Salvation Committees, and rejected demands for Berisha's resignation. Even with this capitulation by the national level leadership of the opposition the population in the south stood firm — refusing to disarm until its demands were met. Their good sense was confirmed when Berisha pushed an electoral law through parliament to maximise his party's advantages. The opposition tried to reverse this by threatening to boycott the 29 June elections but backed down under US and EU pressure.

Albania was not the eruption of anarchy. Whatever direction it now takes, it started as a mass popular movement to remove a government responsible for robbing much of the population of their life savings. All foreign troops should be withdrawn so that the Albanian people can finish what they began.

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Votes on 1 May — A Tory collapse, not a Labour landslide

The 1 May general election did not simply close 18 years of Conservative government. It brought to an end an entire era in British politics — a 111 year-long political party system based on the dominance of the Conservative Party.

This assertion may cut against the grain of the media coverage — which has been mesmerised by the scale of Labour's majority in parliament — but it nonetheless corresponds to the facts.

On 1 May Labour won its biggest parliamentary majority in history — an overall majority of 179 seats. But it did so with a share of the UK vote, at 43.2 per cent, which does not remotely qualify as record-breaking. The party won a larger proportion of the vote in 1945, 1950, 1951, 1955, 1959, 1964 and 1966 — that is in every single general election between 1945 and 1966 (figure 1). That included three elections which it lost and Harold Wilson's 44.1 per cent in 1964 which gave him a majority of just four seats.

What explains the disparity between Labour's relatively modest share of the vote and its enormous majority of MPs, is the melt-down of the Conservative Party. That was the event of truly historic significance which occurred on 1 May. The Tories were reduced to 165 MPs, their lowest tally since 1906 — less than the margin of Labour's overall majority. But even more significant was the Tories' share of the vote. At 30.7 per cent, the Conservatives were reduced to their smallest total since 1832. The fact that it was the collapse of the Tory Party, not Labour's share of the vote, which gave Labour its record number of seats, means the result cannot be attributed to Tony Blair's policy — it would have won as easily under John Smith or even Bryan Gould. That

Comparison of election results

	1997	1992
Labour	43.2%	34.4%
Conservative	30.7%	41.9%
Liberal Democrats	16.8%	17.8%
Others	9.3%	5.8%
Turnout	71.4%	77.7%

it was not enthusiasm for New Labour which produced the landslide in seats is further confirmed by the turnout — overall the smallest since 1935 with nine out of ten of the lowest turnouts in safe Labour seats.

The Tories' electoral collapse was on a scale which simply could not be a one-off event — it marked the end point of an immense long term political process — the 140 year rise and then decline of the modern Conservative Party (figure 2).

The modern Conservative Party came into existence in 1859 — following the split over repeal of the Corn Laws. Its starting point was a landlord core based in the English countryside. Successive layers of every reactionary and archaic force in British society were then added to create an utterly reactionary political party designed to confront the two biggest threats British capitalism faced right up to the first world war — the first working class in the world and mass opposition to its rule in Ireland.

Starting from the southern English countryside the Conservative Party conquered the rest of the country bit by bit — achieving total dominance in the north west and London by the end of the nineteenth century, breaking through into the West Midlands with the split of the Liberal Party over Irish Home rule in 1886 and winning its first majority of Scottish seats in the Boer War election of 1900. Its vote peaked at 55 per cent in 1931.

After 1931 the Tory Party's share of the vote declined inexorably in what became virtually a mirror image of the curve of its ascent. First, the Tories were driven out of the non-English parts of the United Kingdom. The Conservatives' lowest votes on 1 May were in Northern Ireland with 1.2 per cent, Scotland with 17.5 per cent and Wales with 19.6 per cent — compared to 33.7 per cent of the vote in England.

The Conservative and Unionist Party

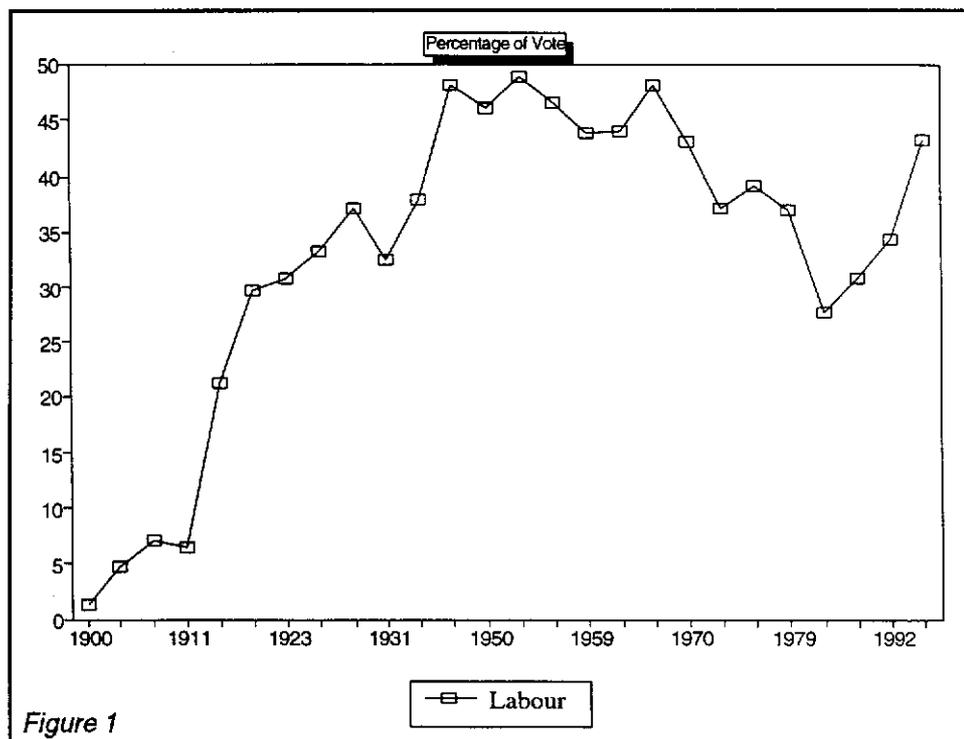


Figure 1

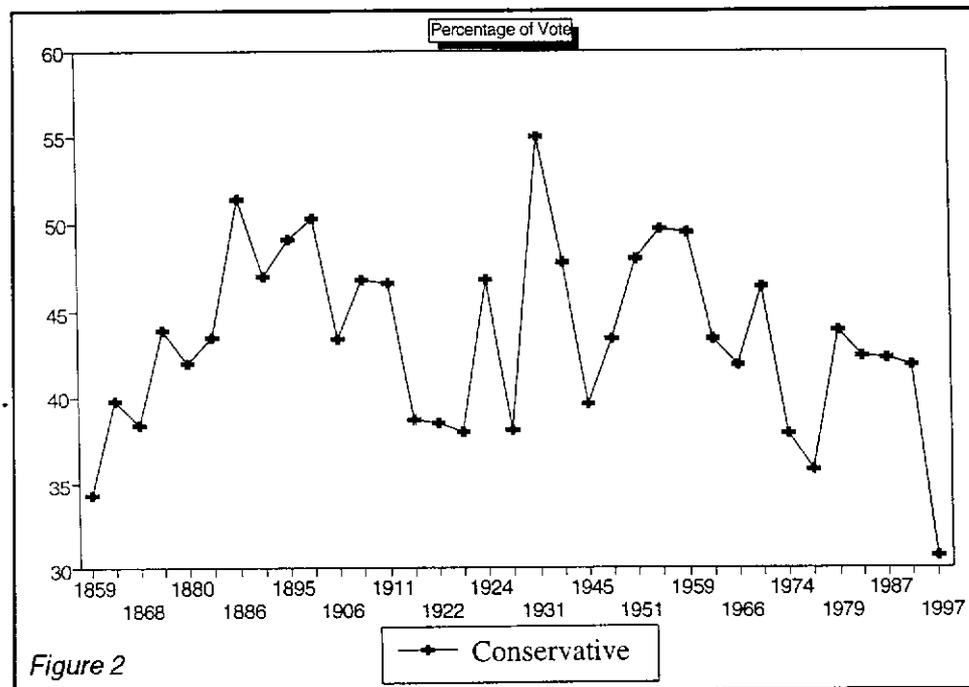


Figure 2

had lost its base in Northern Ireland by February 1974 with the split away of the Ulster Unionists.

On 1 May this year, for the first time in its history the Conservative's did not win a single seat in Scotland and, for only the second time, was also thrown out of every seat in Wales.

Within England, the Tories have been comprehensively defeated in the major cities — leaving them today once again reduced to a party of the English countryside and suburbs.

By 1979 the Tories had lost every seat in Liverpool. They were driven out of Glasgow in 1983, Manchester in 1987 and Leicester and Nottingham by 1992. On 1 May the Tories lost every seat in Leeds, Sheffield, Bristol, Coventry, Newcastle, Plymouth and Wolverhampton. They are left with just one seat in Birmingham and 11 out of 74 in London.

In this historical perspective Margaret Thatcher's abolition of the GLC and the Metropolitan counties can be seen as nothing more than a King Canute-style attempt to stall — by abolishing disagreeable elections — an inexorable historical process of decline.

In terms of the English regions the same process is clear. Today the Tories are the largest party in just three out of the nine standard English regions — the south east (excluding Greater London), the south west and, by a margin of just 0.4 per cent, East Anglia.

The material basis of this curve of the rise and fall of the Conservative Party was the rise and then decline of classical British imperialism based on overseas expansion and an income from overseas investment sufficient to ameliorate many of the contradictions within British society — the real basis of 'one nation' Conservatism. This reached its peak on the eve of the first world war and has been eroded ever since.

During and after the second world war, having lost its position as the leading world power, British imperialism attempted to shore up its imperial orientation by sheltering as a junior partner under the wing of the United States. But the role of the US in pulling the plug on the Anglo-French invasion of Egypt during the Suez crisis of 1956 showed that the fundamental goal of the US was to replace, not prop up, the European colonial empires.

After Suez, British imperialism began its most fundamental strategic reorientation in a century — towards integration into the emerging west European capitalist bloc which has become the European Union. That has inevitably provoked a crisis of the political party which had risen to dominance on the basis of Britain's previous world imperialist role — the Tory Party. It has proven impossible to carry through a fundamental strategic re-

orientation of British imperialism without a total upheaval in the political party system which accompanied it.

After 1964 the Tories were out of power for 11 of the ensuing 15 years. When the Labour governments elected in those years squandered their political support by wave after wave of pay restraint and finally IMF inspired cuts in public spending, Margaret Thatcher came to power in 1979 and made a last ditch attempt to stem the Tory decline. The historical balance-sheet is that she failed. North Sea oil revenues to the tune of £100bn allowed her to slow but not reverse her party's decline — every election from 1979 to 1992 was won with a lower share of the vote than the previous one.

On 1 May this decline finally became an electoral rout. What turned quantitative decline into qualitative collapse was the depth of the recession caused by the Major government's entry into the Ex-

change Rate Mechanism of the European Monetary System. The impact on living standards was such that Kenneth Clarke's efforts to stoke up a consumer boom over the last two years simply could not eradicate its political effects. Exit polls on 1 May showed that 38 per cent of voters thought their living standards had fallen over the previous five years, compared to just 25 per cent who thought they had risen.

The violence of the recriminations which immediately broke out within the Tory party on the night of the vote simply reflected the scale of what had happened.

A long term view of the political party system also makes clear why the Tories' collapse did not produce an equivalent rise in Labour's *share of the vote*, as opposed to seats in parliament, on 1 May.

British capital has not sat idly by while its chief political instrument — the Tory Party — has unravelled. It has started to put in place the elements of a new political party system to carry out the scale of attack on the British working class which will be necessary to make British capitalism competitive within the European Union without dismantling the economic distortions left over from the country's imperial world role. John Major has already shown through the ERM debacle that the Tory Party alone is simply not socially powerful enough to do that.

The goal is to create a new political system in which the fundamental economic orientation demanded by the most powerful sections of British capital is insulated from disruption by any democratic process.

The first element has been to build up new political parties to ensure that the collapse of the Tory Party does not result in Labour becoming totally dominant. As figure 3 shows, since the middle of the 1950s a second directly capitalist party — the modern Liberal Party — has systematically built up its share of the vote, rising from just 2.6 per cent in 1951 to 16.8 per cent on 1 May. In addition, in Scotland, the SNP, which did not exist in 1951, took 22.1 per cent on 1 May.

The Liberals are not a 'middle class' party — as some in the labour movement fondly imagine — they are the party of big capital orientated most firmly to participation in European capitalist integration — the British equivalent of continental parties like the German Free Democrats. The SNP have precisely the same fundamental orientation to the EU.

The Liberal Democrats and SNP have been built up by slicing away chunks of the Labour Party's support locally and nationally. The largest slice to date being the defection of the Social Democrats, which in 1983 gave the Liberal Democrats their larg-

est share of the vote in 60 years. While they are in reality parties of big capital, the Liberal Democrats and even more so the SNP, present themselves as to the left of Labour on issues like the NHS and taxation, in order to chop into Labour's base of support. This will be a major threat to Labour's vote under a government which betrays its voters' expectations.

But what the experience of the SDP split also demonstrated was that, contrary to the media hype of the time, the Liberals do not have a social base powerful enough to replace the Labour Party.

Therefore the second element of the re-organisation of British politics is to attempt to transform the Labour Party itself into a social democratic party on the model of other west European social democratic parties — which means qualitatively reducing the influence of the rank and file and the trade unions over policy and the parliamentary party. This is the goal of the *Labour into Power* project. Its ultimate completion would require the state funding of political parties, ending the union vote within the party and the destruction of the Labour left. This is the battle which

Tony Blair has started.

The third element of the new political system which capital is trying to force onto the agenda is the insulation of crucial areas of economic policy-making from any form of even parliamentary accountability — because policies so harsh are envisaged that any politician subject to democratic election would find them difficult to sustain. Gordon Brown's surrender of the power to set interest rates to the Bank of England is a crucial step in this direction. Participation in European Monetary Union would take it still further.

Finally, the coping stone necessary to cement this emerging new political system in place would be proportional representation. PR would make it possible for the supporters of big European oriented capital — in the Tory, Liberal Democrat, Labour and Scottish Nationalist parties — to concert their votes across party lines in parliament. Tony Blair's manifesto commitment to a referendum on electoral reform gives him an option for hanging onto to government office, in coalition with the Liberal Democrats, by introducing PR when Gordon Brown and Frank Field's policies produce the inevitable denouement with the electorate. The *Economist* and the *Financial Times*, have already joined the *Guardian* and *Observer* in advocating this course. But, by inaugurating a 'European' political system and increased political influence this could also result in both parliamentary representation for the extreme right and for a party to the left of New Labour.

Having helped throw the Tory Party back 165 years, the British working class now faces political challenges on a level it has not confronted this century. The direction politics now takes will be enormously influenced by how rapidly the left wing of the labour movement re-orientates to deal with the scale of political attack it will face with Tony Blair in government.

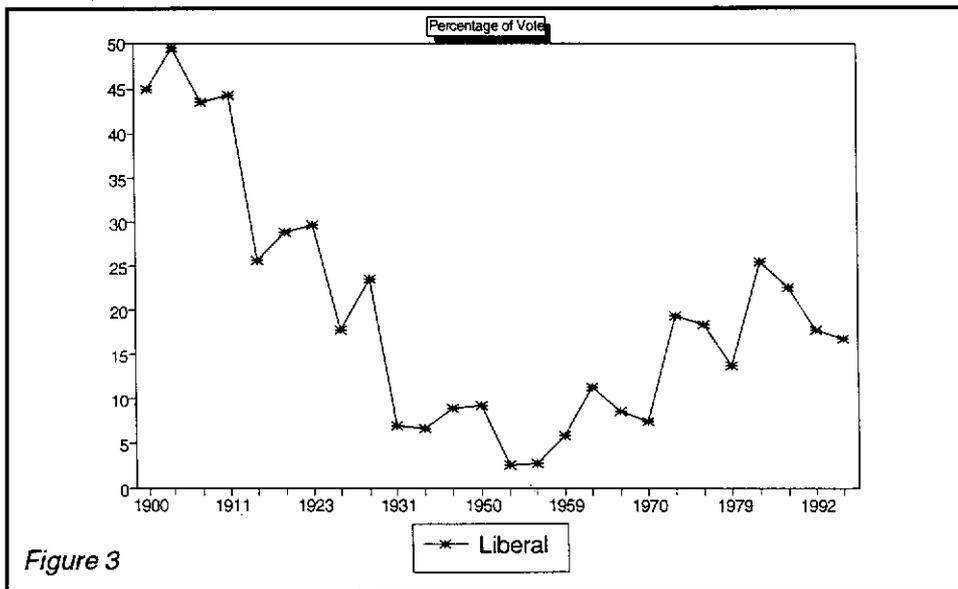


Figure 3

Zaire — imperialism's puppet falls

The fall of Mobutu Sese Seko in Zaire brings an end to a corrupt, reactionary regime which has been a key puppet of western imperialism in Africa for the last three decades. Mobutu, whose seizure of power was organised by the west after the US backed assassination of the left wing Prime Minister Patrice Lumumba in 1961, has presided over the economic destruction of Zaire, a country richer than South Africa in mineral resources. The US, French and British governments were perfectly aware that Mobutu was using his presidency to plunder his country, amassing a personal fortune, estimated by the US Treasury to have reached \$4bn in the mid-1980s. In addition, Mobutu owns property and company shares across western Europe. As Mobutu stole his personal fortune the people of Zaire were plunged into desperate poverty. By 1994 World Bank figures showed that Zaire's economy had shrunk to its 1958 level while the population had tripled to 45 million. With per capita GDP below \$100, living standards were 65 per cent lower in 1993 than 1958. If Zaire had sustained its

growth rate prior to Mobutu, GDP per capita would be \$1,400.

All this was known and backed by western governments, because Mobutu was a ruthless, anti-communist and pro-imperialist stooge in central Africa. Mobutu was used as a base from which to organise war on anti-imperialist struggles across central and southern Africa, particularly in the mid-1970s against the national independence movement in Angola. As Leo Tindemans, ex-prime minister of Belgium, put it 'When Angola was coming under Cuban influence Zaire was considered a fortress that could be trusted. The policy of the west, led by the US, was to help Mobutu as much as possible.' Now Swiss banks, where the bulk of Mobutu's money is believed to be held, have frozen his assets they should be given back to the people of Zaire.

It remains to be seen how the new regime headed by Laurent Kabila will deal with imperialism, but the defeat of the west's prime puppet, Mobutu, is a step forward for the people of Zaire and potentially the entire continent.

SLP lay down a marker

While the number of votes cast for the Socialist Labour Party in the general election was very low overall, at 52,110, at the same time the results confirmed that the SLP is in a position to attract support in the context of an unpopular right wing Labour government pursuing anti-working class policies.

The total SLP vote of 52,110 with 64 candidates, works out at an average 1.85 per cent of the vote. However significantly higher votes were scored in a small number of seats.

In three seats the SLP won more than 5 per cent of the vote, and retained their deposit. The highest vote, in East Ham, was 2,697, or 6.8 per cent, followed by Cardiff Central with 2,230 votes, 5.3 per cent, and then Newport East — where Arthur Scargill fought the seat against ex-Tory MP Alan Howarth — with 1,951 votes, 5.2 per cent of the vote.

In a further 10 seats the SLP won more than 1000 votes, although the percentage share was lower than 5 per cent. In two of these the SLP candidates won more than two thousand votes — Dudley North, with 2,155 and 4.5 per cent, and Ealing Southall with 2,107, and 3.9 per cent.

For the remainder, in 13

seats the SLP won less than 1 per cent of the vote and in 31 less than 2 per cent.

These results underline that for the overwhelming majority of voters in the general election the single goal was to get the Tories out by electing a Labour government. Even with Tony Blair leading the Labour Party anything else appeared to be a distraction from that goal.

That is why the SLP did significantly less well than in recent by-elections.

Refusing to call for the election of a Labour government, even for a Labour vote where there was no SLP candidate, did not help either. The claim in the March/April 1997 issue of the SLP newsletter, *Socialist News*, that New Labour is 'indistinguishable from the original Liberal Democrats' is false. Although Tony Blair's policy is no better than the Liberals, Labour is a social democratic party based on the labour movement. Given that the SLP is far from being strong enough to form a government itself, voting Labour was the only way most voters could reject the directly capitalist parties in the general election.

That is also why the experience of Tony Blair in office is the only way in which the great majority of the labour movement is going to come to see what is

wrong with his policies. As they do so, support for those arguing for a serious socialist alternative inside and outside the Labour Party will be strengthened.

In those conditions, two or three years into a Blair government, some voters are going to reason that it is useful to vote

SLP to put left pressure on Labour which means they may well reach 5-10 per cent in some by-elections. But that was never going to happen in a general election where the issue was ending 18 years of Tory rule by putting Labour into office.

By Louise Lang

SLP votes

East Ham	2,697	6.8%	Newcastle upon Tyne	642	1.5%
Cardiff Central	2,230	5.3%	East and Wallsend		
Newport East	1,951	5.2%	Poplar & Canning	557	1.4%
Dudley North	2,155	4.5%	Town		
Ealing Southall	2,107	3.9%	Sheffield Brightside	482	1.4%
Bradford West	1,551	3.4%	Cunninghame South	494	1.4%
Birkenhead	1,168	3.0%	Manchester Gorton	501	1.4%
Lewisham Deptford	996	3.0%	Bolton North East	676	1.4%
Oldham West & Royton	1,311	2.9%	Colne Valley	759	1.4%
Barnsley East & Mexborough	1,213	2.8%	Blackburn	637	1.3%
Bolton West	1,374	2.8%	Brent East	466	1.3%
Vauxhall	983	2.5%	Ealing Acton & Shepherds Bush	635	1.3%
Manchester Central	810	2.4%	Leicester South	634	1.3%
Camberwell & Peckham	685	2.4%	Coventry North East	597	1.2%
Don Valley	1,024	2.4%	Cunninghame North	501	1.2%
Newcastle under Lyme	1,082	2.2%	Southampton Itchen	628	1.2%
Swansea West	885	2.2%	Birmingham	483	1.2%
Motherwell & Wishaw	797	2.2%	Sparkbrook & Small Heath		
Cannock Chase	1,120	2.1%	Hornsey & Wood Green	586	1.1%
Wythenshaw & Sale East	957	2.1%	Leicester West	452	1.1%
Wolverhampton SE	689	2.0%	Lewisham West	398	1.1%
Doncaster Central	854	2.0%	Leeds North East	468	1.0%
Llanelli	757	1.8%	Sedgefield	474	1.0%
Maidstone & The Weald	979	1.8%	Leicester East	436	1.0%
Leeds Central	656	1.8%	Scunthorpe	399	1.0%
Ilford South	868	1.7%	Bethnal Green & Bow	413	0.9%
Coventry North West	940	1.7%	Norwich North West	482	0.9%
Knowsley North & Sefton East	857	1.7%	Pontypridd	380	0.8%
St Helens North	832	1.7%	Erewash	496	0.8%
Bristol East	766	1.6%	Oldham East & Saddleworth	470	0.8%
Cambridgeshire NE	851	1.5%	Brighton Kemptown	316	0.7%
			Leeds North West	335	0.7%
			Stockport	255	0.6%
			Bristol West	244	0.4%
			Newbury	174	0.3%

Gains for women could prove short lived

In addition to electing an historic number — 101 — women MPs, Labour succeeded in closing the gender gap in voting in this general election. In 1992 exit polls showed that only 35 per cent of women voted Labour. This compared with 37 per cent of men.

The increased number of women MPs still leaves the Parliamentary Labour Party made up of only 24 per cent women members and the House of Commons as a whole with 18 per cent of MPs being women, lower than parliaments in Spain, Germany, Austria, Holland, Denmark and Sweden. At least 33 of the new women MPs elected were originally selected through an all-women shortlist. However, follow-

ing the failure to appeal the Leeds Industrial Tribunal ruling, this policy was dropped and has not been replaced with any other mechanism.

In addition, a large number of the new women Labour MPs were elected in seats which experienced some of the biggest swings from the Tories. These included Basildon, Blackpool North, Castle Point, Romford, Swindon South, and several others, where there were swings of more than 14 per cent. That is, much higher than the average swing, in England, of 10 per cent. So some of the women elected are in the most vulnerable seats, and with women-only shortlists gone there is no longer any mechanism to force up the

number of women candidates.

Tony Blair's policies are going to hit women particularly hard. This is the meaning of a low national minimum wage with women constituting the bulk of low paid workers, Frank Field's 'radical reform' of the welfare state threatening to deny single mothers unemployment benefits when their youngest child reaches four and attacks on the state pension. Women live longer on average than men to find their pension entitlements undermined by low pay in their working lives and interruptions to care for children: millions of women will be unable to afford the private pensions advocated by Field.

One of the newly elected 101, Patricia Hewitt, called for the extension of Labour's 'welfare to work' policies to lone mothers, partners of unemployed men and those on family credit...[who] live off benefit', adding 'why

shouldn't Welfare to Work embrace anyone now on welfare who is able to work?' (*Guardian* 13 May).

Such policies promise a nightmare for millions of women. This will provoke a reaction from women in society, in the unions and Labour Party, and even in the PLP. But the Labour right has steadily attacked the self-organisation of women in the party's ranks, making the women's conference biennial, and organising 'training' events instead. The *Labour into Power* proposes to abolish the women's section of the NEC.

But women are not an insignificant social force — as Labour's defeats in every election from 1979 through 1992 forced it to understand — they are the majority of society. Opposition to attacks on women's wages, welfare rights and social position will inevitably find political expression.

Referendum Party fragments edges of Tory support

Seats won by Liberal Democrats from Conservatives

Constituency	No. of votes by which Conservatives lost	Referendum Party vote
Winchester	2	1598
Kingston and Surbiton	56	1470
Somerton and Frome	130	2449
Eastleigh	754	2013
Weston-Super-Mare	1274	2280
Lewes	1300	2481
Colchester	1581	1776
Taunton	2443	2760

Anti-abortionists' election push flops

Although the ProLife Alliance (PLA) gained substantial publicity during the election campaign, their media manipulation did not succeed in furthering their anti-abortion crusade. Some of the new MPs will refuse to support a woman's right to choose, but anti-abortionists have nonetheless lost some of their most vociferous supporters. The *Catholic Herald* said that 'Pro-life groups differ in their estimates of those MPs who could be expected to vote against abortion to have lost their seats, from over 200 to perhaps just 30'.

The ProLife Alliance lost their deposit in every one of the 55 seats where they stood a candidate, receiving 19,000 votes in total. Their highest vote was in East Kilbride (2.4 per cent, 1170 votes), and their lowest in Southampton Itchen (0.2 per cent, 99 votes). In Holborn and St Pancras, where Bruno Quintavalle, chair of the PLA stood, they polled just 0.3 per cent.

The ProLife Alliance stood 55 candidates in order to get an election broadcast. They attempted to use the broadcast to show what they claimed was footage of aborted fetuses in hospital dustbins, which the broadcasting channels refused to transmit, saying it breached their taste and decency guidelines. The PLA's claim that this infringed their freedom of speech was supported by the civil liberties group Liberty, which provided lawyers for their high court appeal against the decision, thus giving financial aid to a political party that would deny women the basic right of control of their own fertility. The appeal failed, and the broadcast

went out with the parts blanked out and a commentary claiming that if the scenes were so terrible, surely something should be done about it. Despite the ruling, the broadcast still contained offensive and inaccurate information, and claimed that women who had abortions lost their decency and integrity.

The broadcasters' decision to refuse to transmit parts of the ProLife Alliance broadcast was welcomed by the National Abortion Campaign. As they explained, a party which would remove women's rights over their own bodies is not in a good position to argue about their own civil rights to show offensive and degrading images.

To counteract the media coverage gained by the PLA, prospective parliamentary candidates were sent over 30,000 pro-choice postcards during the election. NAC received a very positive response to this, with candidates finding themselves deluged with postcards saying 'I'm pro-choice, and I vote'.

Contrary to the impression the PLA seeks to create, the majority of public opinion favours increasing choice for women, rather than restricting it further. A survey for the National Abortion Campaign showed a clear majority in favour of changing the law to allow abortion on request. With the Labour government looking to make cuts in the welfare budget, and many NHS trusts adopting severe selection criteria for abortions, the pro-choice movement has to ensure that cuts in NHS abortion services are strongly challenged.

By Rachel Garvey

The Referendum Party's 547 candidates polled 811,831 votes in the general election. In 18 seats their vote was greater than the margin by which the Tory candidate lost.

In some other seats Referendum Party votes made a significant contribution to the defeat of the Conservatives. These included Enfield Southgate, where Michael Portillo

lost by a 1433 margin, with the Referendum Party polling 1342 votes.

In 39 seats the Referendum Party won more than 5 per cent of the vote. Its highest vote was 9.2 per cent in Harwich.

The Referendum Party was the first significant splintering from the Conservative Party. There may be more in the aftermath of this election.

Seats won by Labour from Conservatives

Constituency	No. of votes by which Conservatives lost	Referendum Party vote
Kettering	189	1551
Milton Keynes North East	240	1492
Romford	649	1431
Northampton South	744	1405
Castle Point	1116	2700
Harrow West	1240	1997
Lancaster and Wyre	1295	1516
Norfolk North West	1339	2923
Braintree	1451	2165
Falmouth and Camborne	2688	3534

Turn-out worst in safe Labour areas

The turn-out in the general election was 71.4 per cent, the lowest since 1935. The lowest turn-outs were concentrated in safe Labour seats. Many Yorkshire Labour MPs, for example, were returned with lower votes than in 1992. Within individual constituencies, canvassers re-

ported the lowest turn-outs in the most depressed working class areas.

This is consistent with a massive swing of young voters, skilled manual and white collar workers away from the Tories, while some of the poorest sections of Labour's core vote were turned off by New Labour.

Council tenants at odds with trend

Labour's vote appears to have fallen slightly among tenants in local authority housing for the first time since 1983. According to an NOP/BBC exit poll, Labour was supported by 63 per cent of voters who lived in local authority hous-

ing, down from 65 per cent in 1992. The proportion of such voters who had supported the Labour Party had risen consistently since 1983, from 51 per cent in that year, to 58 per cent in 1987 and 65 per cent in 1992.

Labour's vote declines among pensioners

The only age group among which Labour's support declined in the general election was the over-65s, indicating discontent with the Labour leadership's policies on pensions. An NOP/BBC exit poll showed Labour's support declined among the over-65s from 37 per cent in 1992 to 35 per cent in 1997. Labour

had gone into the 1992 election pledging an immediate increase in the state pension. Support for the Conservatives among the over-65 age group was 41 per cent, down from 44 per cent. The Liberal Democrats saw a slight rise in their support among over-65s from 16 to 17 per cent between 1992 and 1997.

Gordon Brown hands power to the Bank of England

The decision to hand over control of interest rates to the Bank of England will set the entire economic framework of Tony Blair's government. As the *Economist* observed perfectly accurately: 'After waiting 18 years for power, Labour's first step is to hand the larger part of its ability to steer the economy to somebody else.'

While the *Economist*, *Financial Times*, Will Hutton and the money markets applauded, and Bank of England governor Eddie George described the decision as 'terrific', even middle of the road Keynesians who had hoped for some progressive economic reforms from Tony Blair were horrified.

The *Observer's* William Keegan caught the mood in an article entitled 'Help! Labour's lost its monetary marbles' describing Brown's announcement as: 'the biggest economic policy mistake of the decade — leaving aside the exchange rate mechanism episode... To leave interest rate policy to unelected officials is an insult to democracy... if monetary policy is best left to technicians, what about fiscal policy, defence, the environment and everything else. Why don't the Blairs enjoy a good holiday at No 10 and then come back to sunny Islington.'

Anatole Kaletsky pointed out: 'to say that economics is not the essence of government is not the same as saying that governments are immune from

the laws of economics. While there is much that a modern government can achieve without touching the economy, all of its achievements will turn to dust if the economy goes wrong. So when the Queen came to the new government's economic proposals all my enthusiasm turned to foreboding and regret... it seems that the Blair government has quite deliberately passed up the chance to do anything about unemployment and the associated social ills.... The demand for labour will only increase in the context of faster economic growth. But Labour's economic package gives no reason to expect an acceleration of growth. On the contrary, the Bank of England stated explicitly in Tuesday's *Inflation Report* that "action must be taken to slow the pace of expansion" and the querulous Old Lady of Threadneedle Street (sic) is now in a position to make good her threats.'

In his letter to the Governor of the Bank of England handing over operational control of interest rates, Gordon Brown



Eddie George — who elected him?

set out the *Objectives of the Bank of England* with total clarity: 'the monetary policy objective of the Bank of England will be to deliver price stability'. All other aspects of economic policy will be pursued by the Bank 'without prejudice to this objective' — which means economic growth, employment and living standards will be subordinated to price stability.

The decision establishes a Euro-monetarist framework for the government's economic policy — precisely the approach which has resulted in 12 per cent unemployment in France and Germany. Because its consequences are so devastating, such a policy has to be insulated from democratic accountability — otherwise the

electorate would use their votes to change it. Hence, the moves towards independent central banks on national and EU levels.

Whether or not he takes the pound back into the Exchange Rate Mechanism of the European Monetary System, Gordon Brown has re-established precisely the monetarist framework from which John Major had to retreat by withdrawing from the ERM after a million jobs were lost and interest rates soared in 1992.

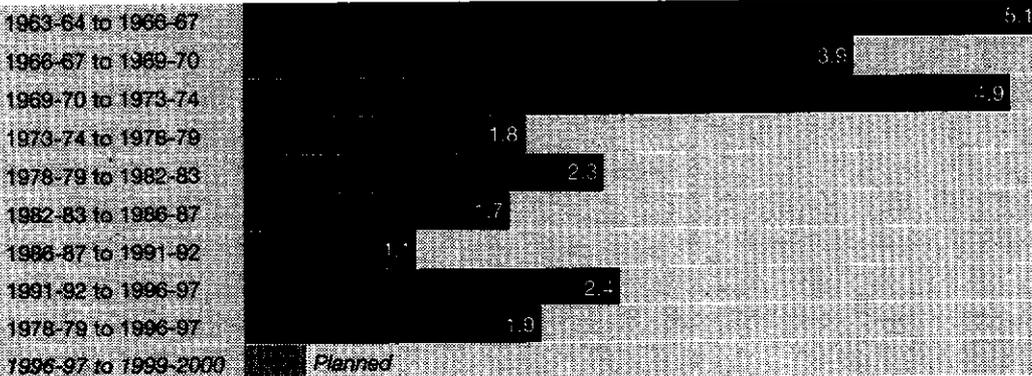
Kenneth Clarke pointed out that interest rates would have been two per cent higher had the last government taken the Bank of England's advice.

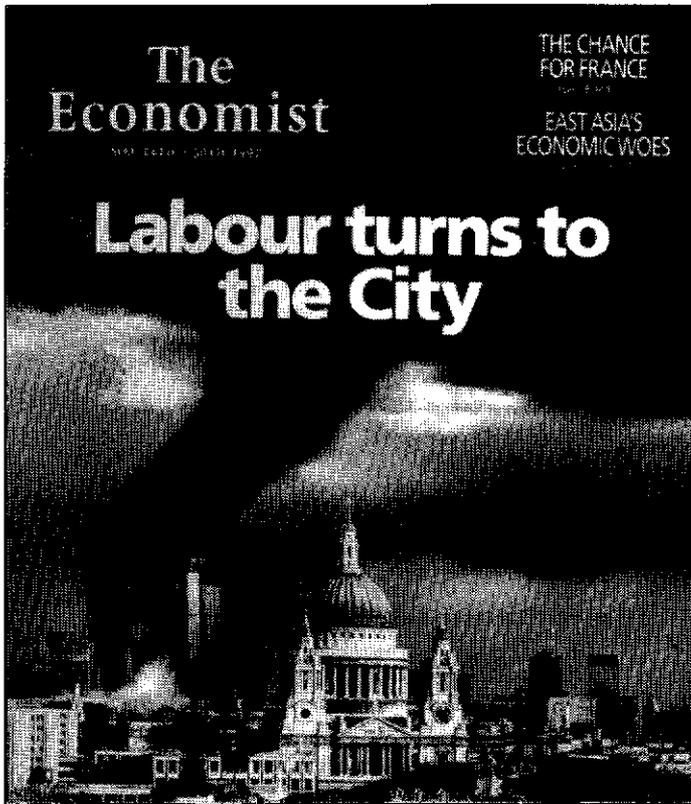
True to form, within 10 days of Brown's announcement, the Bank of England announced that earnings were growing too rapidly and so interest rates would have to be raised in the coming months — pulling down the rate of economic growth by making borrowing more expensive and pushing up the exchange rate of the pound. Manufacturing output actually fell in March this year as the high exchange rate of sterling priced exports out of overseas markets and made imports more competitive in Britain.

The knock-on effect of slower economic growth will

Public spending growth

Average annual real % growth in general government expenditure





be to make the incipient crisis of public spending which the Tories have already bequeathed to Labour still worse. Brown has already made clear that he intends to deal with this situation, not by reversing the vast increase in dividends and consumption by the rich under the Tories, but by attacking the welfare state and public sector pay.

Furthermore, as figure 1 shows, cuts to meet a crisis of public spending triggered by slower economic growth, would be in addition to Gordon Brown's commitment to stick to unrealistic Tory spending limits. The latter will mean cutting the growth of public spending to less than a quarter of its average over the last 18 years of Tory rule — lower than anything in the entire post-war period.

That is the context of Tony Blair's appointment of Frank Field as number 2 to Harriet Harman at the Department of Social Security — a clear signal that the poorest people in the country are in the firing line. Field stands for cutting benefits to single parents if they don't take jobs when their youngest child reaches the age of four, compulsory second pensions, the universalisation of the Tories' workfare schemes and the demonisation of many benefit

recipients as fraudsters.

Alongside Field, Blair has also appointed Martin Taylor, chief executive at Barclays Bank, to spend two days a month heading a taskforce on tax and benefits reform. The appointment was warmly welcomed by business.

Similarly, Blair's new minister for higher education, Baroness Blackstone, is on record as favouring not only the abolition of grants, but also charging students tuition fees.

On public sector pay, Tony Blair's office has been briefing the press that the government will 'take a tough line' even though the growth of public sector earnings has fallen to half the rate of the private sector.

On the minimum wage, the government is tipped to appoint Peter Jarvis, retiring head of Whitbread's, to chair the low pay commission. Jarvis' qualification for the job is that he will 'reassure business' — having written to the Labour Party in September 1995 opposing the principle of a national minimum wage, and suggesting that his own company could only sustain a level of about £3 an hour inclusive of bonuses and benefits in kind.

Thus, Tony Blair and Gordon Brown within days of being elected launched the

government on an economic policy course which will result in higher interest rates, slower economic growth, higher unemployment, deeper attacks on public spending and all of the political consequences of those things — Labour's support will fall and racism will rise.

They had no mandate to do so. The official story that Gordon Brown did not decide to give the Bank of England control of interest rates until the eve of polling day is simply absurd. In reality such a momentous step had to be planned months in advance. Tony Blair himself described it as 'the biggest step in economic policy-making in Britain since World War Two.'

But it was concealed from the Labour Party and the electorate. It was never put to a party conference, national executive, parliamentary party nor even the cabinet. It wasn't in the manifesto and it was announced before the new parliament even met. Even the *Economist* observed: 'even enthusiasts cannot but be disconcerted by the manner of its coming... the idea was not in the party's manifesto. There are principled objections to it. One might have expected consultations, debate. But the City, which the Chancellor was chiefly aiming to please, didn't mind.'

Yet this policy will undoubtedly be rammed through par-

liament on the basis of a three line whip — with any Labour MPs voting against facing disciplinary action. The well-publicised threat to expel party members and de-select Labour MPs who campaign against the Welsh Assembly is merely a softening up exercise for the way in which the leadership will seek to repress opposition on the central field of economic policy.

But with a 179 seat overall majority in parliament Blair and Brown are going to be unable to deflect the blame from themselves as the consequences of that economic policy make themselves felt. For the 12 years since the defeat of the national miners' strike in 1985 the right wing has been on an unrelenting offensive in the labour movement. Now its policies are finally going to be put to the test — and they will fail as disastrously here as they did in France, Italy and Spain. On the basis of that experience growing minorities in the trade unions, Labour Party, among women, the black communities, the student movement, and elsewhere are going to start looking for political alternatives. Whatever the short-term honeymoon for Blair, the 12-year period of advance by the right and retreat of the left within the labour movement is coming to an end.

By Joe Clarke



Field 'thinks the unthinkable' on the welfare state

The left after the general election

Labour's 179 seat majority in parliament will not be taken by Tony Blair as a mandate for progressive social reform. Instead it is going to be used to impose the most right wing economic policy of any Labour government in history.

In the period between now and when the voters, trade unionists and party members start to realise this, Blair will use the good will he starts out with to move as fast as possible — starting at this year's conference — to suppress the mechanisms whereby alternative policies could be expressed within the Labour Party.

The left wing of the Labour Party, centred on the Socialist Campaign Group in parliament, some of the trade union lefts and campaigns like the Campaign for Labour Party Democracy and Labour Women's Action Committee, have already made clear that they are not going to go along with such policies. That is already a step forward.

At the very first meeting of the new Parliamentary Labour Party, Dennis Skinner pointed out the double standards of a leadership which says MPs must stick to the letter of the manifesto but then pulls Gordon Brown's move on the Bank of England out of its hat. Ken Livingstone made the same point on the front page of *Socialist Campaign Group News* and as did Diane Abbott on *Newsnight*.

No matter how isolated this left may appear in the first aftermath of the election, sooner or later it is going to be joined by ever-widening layers of allies in all those sections of society who will suffer as a result of the government's policies.

A harbinger of what is to come was seen at some of this year's trade union conferences where the bureaucracy's efforts

to keep in step with Blair for as long as possible already started to meet serious resistance from the ranks. The Communication Workers' Union — which has lost Blairite general secretary to the House of Commons — threw out the *Labour into Power* document and the civil service union PTC rejected the Maastricht convergence criteria.

Fire Brigade workers had already continued their industrial action in Essex through the general election campaign.

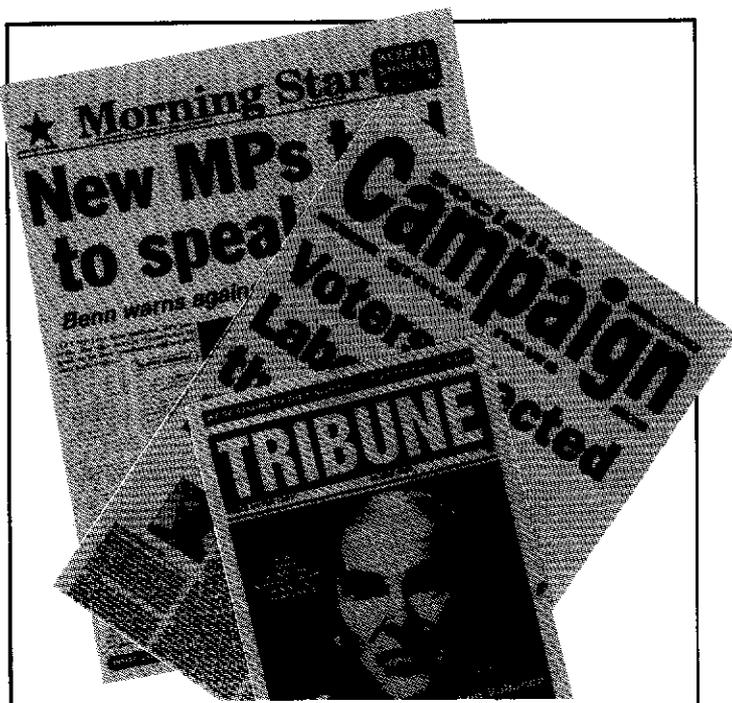
The student movement, which voted massively for Labour, will enter a period of enormous political upheavals once students grasp that Blair is going to abolish grants and try to impose tuition fees.

Women, who closed the gender gap between Labour and the Tories on 1 May, will now find Frank Field equally, or more, reactionary than Peter Lilley in his attacks on single parents and on pensions.

Scotland, with the lowest Tory vote in the UK, will become an immense thorn in Blair's side because the Scottish Assembly will create an independent base of political activity for the Scottish labour movement.

The black communities will be horrified when Blair's economic policies not only slam into the poorest people in Britain but also create a base for a new rise of racism and fascist groups like the BNP.

Blair's right wing policies will also meet opposition from pensioners — the only group who swung away from Labour on 1 May — in Ireland, and



amongst every other group whose hopes he betrays.

Obviously, however, realisation of what Blair will mean to peoples' lives will take time to sink in. Having ended 18 years of Tory rule, Labour supporters will give the government a period of grace.

That is why Tony Blair will be looking for an early opening to show the media and money markets that he will crush left wing opposition — before the left is reinforced by extra-parliamentary movements in all these areas of society. This will pose tactical problems for the left in parliament. But before very long, the left MPs will be facing issues where millions of Labour voters understand that Blair or Frank Field or Alan Howarth are attacking their vital interests.

Because the right around Blair will rapidly exhaust whatever credit it retains in the unions, the soft left around Peter Hain and Clare Short — organised in the *What's Left* group of MPs — is going to play a vital role as Blair's ambassadors and left cover. They will be supported in this by John Prescott and Robin Cook — who is manoeuvring himself into the position of the next 'left' leadership candidate.

But this soft left starts out so far to the right that it has already suffered a series of splits to its left. These started with Bryan Gould's resignation — which Hain publicly opposed

— over front bench support for Britain joining the ERM. They deepened with the shift of *Tribune* newspaper to the left, under the editorship of Mark Seddon.

The debate around the *Labour into Power* document, which in essence gives the Prime Minister control of both policy-making at conference and the NEC, resulted in a further split — and also illustrated the cleavages likely on other issues.

The class struggle left — organised in the *Keep the Party Labour* umbrella group and the Socialist Campaign Group of MPs — took a clear position against the document and adopted tactics to maximise unity with any part of the soft left prepared to defend any aspect of party democracy. This meant, for example, calling for the vote to be delayed until 1998 to allow proper discussion.

The soft left split. The *Labour Reform Group* which supported OMOV and revision of Clause IV, rejected many of the attacks on party democracy and, in particular, launched a campaign for the vote to be delayed.

Peter Hain and Derek Fatchett, on the other hand, welcomed the document and gave it a left cover in the party. When the *What's Left* group of MPs rejected *Labour Reform's* proposal to defer decisions to allow proper consultation, *La-*

bour Reform issued a press release announcing their withdrawal from the *What's Left* group. They are now working closely with *Keep the Party Labour* on those issues on which they agree.

The same political division appeared in *Tribune* newspaper — though without a split. Front page articles by John Blevin extolled the virtues of *Labour into Power* claiming the document was 'a genuine attempt to strengthen and extend internal democracy' (7 February) which 'has come down firmly in favour of a rebuilt partnership between membership and leadership' (31 January).

In contrast to its own front page, *Tribune's* editorial said *Labour into Power's* aim was to 'effectively downgrade the NEC' and 'neuter Labour's annual conference' turning it into 'a rubber-stamping jamboree'. The editorial called for decisions to be deferred to 1998.

Adopting the appropriate tactics towards the soft left — to distinguish between those, like Hain, who provide a left cover

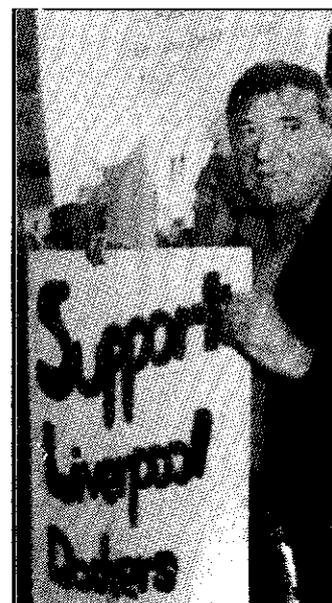
for the right and those, such as at present *Tribune* newspaper or *Labour Reform*, opposing such attacks — is absolutely vital for the class struggle left. Winning over the middle ground is the only way to win majorities in the trade unions and Labour Party on individual issues. If the class struggle left does not do this, it will find the tables turned upon it with the soft left tending to peel away sections of its support.

In this context any concessions to ultra-left sectarian currents, at present notably *Workers' Liberty*, will simply aid the right against the left. For example, through their front organisation *Keep the Link, Workers Liberty* simultaneously gave a left cover to trade union leaders who were pushing support for *Labour into Power* and, at the same time, opposed precisely the proposal — to delay the vote on rule changes — which cemented relations with the soft left in defence of party democracy.

The tactics of the class struggle left which flow from this situation are clear. It is the

only current in the labour movement which supports virtually every progressive struggle. It must therefore itself remain organised and resist any pressure to dissolve into the soft left, because its support is vital to people fighting imperialism, black people fighting racism, women protesting against the assault on the welfare state, workers on strike and every other progressive struggle. Central to the support it can provide is to fight for a coherent alternative to that of Blair, knitting all of the individual issues together around an alternative economic policy to reverse, rather than continue, Thatcherism.

But the class struggle left is, and will remain, very much a minority — and a minority which Tony Blair will try to eliminate. By far its largest and most influential component remains in the left wing of the Labour Party. It should try to stay there because this provides a more powerful platform to fight for a majority in the labour movement than anything which exists outside. The Labour left represents a third of



the constituency membership. has significant support in the unions and a smaller minority of Labour MPs.

The first priority is to maximise the forces who understand and oppose the *Labour into Power* proposals.

By Joe Clarke and Louise Lang

Challenges for union organisation

Over the past 18 months there has been a distinct rise in union activity in Britain. This has taken the form of an increase — from an historically low base — in strike days lost and an expansion of policy debates within unions.

The primary source of this revival is an expansion of the economy with some consequent improvement in union bargaining position. The *Financial Times* reported (April 4) 'a survey showing activity in the service sector accelerating sharply last month, with shortages of skilled labour pushing wages higher and exerting pressure on costs.'

From 1996 industrial action has included, in particular, the national strikes in rail, the postal service, and higher education. These strikes were partially successful.

However, the break up of national bargaining, instances of derecognition, and a growing segregation of the labour market have taken their toll mostly among smaller employers

where union presence is often weak or absent. There have recently been examples of desperate action by small groups of workers.

The most notable is the long struggle of the Liverpool dockers. In former times it would have been relatively easy to bring such a dispute to a successful conclusion by calling on support from dockers in other ports. The casualisation of the ports prevents this. Despite such an unfavourable position the Liverpool dockers have carried through an inspiring campaign of international and national action.

Alongside the dockers, the struggles by workers at Hillingdon Hospital, Magnet, Project Aerospace, Critchley Labels and others, are indicative of the new problems unions face. How can small groups of organised workers defend themselves in a deregulated labour market? How far the unions are able to sustain such members is a good indication of whether 'New unionism' will amount to anything.

In anticipation of a more favourable situation under a Labour government the TUC is preparing an organising drive under the theme of 'New unionism'. However, the TUC is locking itself into making substantial concessions with no guaranteed returns.

Gordon Brown has indicated that external arbiters will be used to define whether workers actually deserve recognition when this is disputed by an employer. Such a retreat promises lengthy legal battles, as experienced by unions in the USA. Further, Labour leaders have indicated that the 'bargaining unit', that is workplaces to be covered by a recognition settlement, will be subject to the sort of legal scrutiny which will allow employers to isolate and intimidate workers.

With union membership having declined by more than a third since its post-war peak huge areas of the economy are unorganised.

Deregulation of the labour

market has been utilised by British capital to drive down living standards and harness 'new management' techniques which accelerate the rate of exploitation. The creation of a new cabinet post of 'minister for employment and labour market flexibility', with a brief to urge deregulation on the EU, promises to keep in place the worst contemporary practices in the workplace.

The preferred definition of 'New Unionism' appears to be the organising drives underway in North America. A large grain of salt should be added to recent US experiences. Only around 14 per cent of American workers are currently in unions.

While many workers face dismissal for joining a union, and others face legal discrimination for belonging to a union, it is absurd to believe that 'new' organisation is simply a matter of technique. Above all it will be a matter of struggle

By John Church

How the BNP needs to be fought

The doubling of the vote for fascist candidates in the general election should set the alarm bells ringing about the risk of a rise of racism and fascist activity under a right wing Labour government. While the extreme right, concentrated mainly in the BNP, remains a tiny political force, such an advance — in a general election characterised by a massive swing to Labour — should not be taken lightly. A right wing Labour government which presides over the further dismantling of the welfare state, drives down wages and attacks the most vulnerable in society will create exactly the conditions which led to the breakthrough into mass politics of fascist and far right currents in France, Italy, Austria and elsewhere in Europe.

The BNP's election manifesto explained it was making 'its strongest ever challenge, fighting seats in almost every part of Britain'. Eighty-three extreme right candidates stood in the election, fifty-four of them from the BNP. The average 50 per cent rise in the vote masks a much greater rise in a few specific pockets. It also has to be taken together with the rise in the number of candidates, up from 29 in 1992. Therefore, while in this year's election the 83 extreme right candidates secured an average 1.4 per cent of the vote compared with 0.9 per cent in 1992, candidates in east London consolidated a base of fascist support, and in parts of the West Midlands and West Yorkshire won substantial numbers of votes.

In the two Tower Hamlets seats — taking in the area where the BNP's candidate Derek Beackon was elected as a councillor in September 1993 — the BNP won 7.5 per cent of the vote in the Bethnal Green and Bow constituency, or 3,350 votes, and in Poplar and Canning Town the BNP won 7.3 per cent of the vote, representing 2,849 votes. In 1992 the BNP had taken 3.6 per cent and 1.1 per cent of the vote respectively in these seats.

In other parts of east London surrounding Tower Hamlets the BNP won 2.7 per cent of the vote in Barkings, 2.4 per cent in Chingford, 2.5 per cent in Dagenham, 3.2 per cent in East Ham. In West Ham the BNP candidate won 3.6 per cent of the vote. In Dagenham and East Ham the fascist National Democratic Party took a further 0.5 per cent and 0.73 per cent of the vote respectively.

Outside London, votes of particu-

lar note were Dewsbury where the BNP candidate won 5.2 per cent of the vote, and West Bromwich West, where the National Democratic Party took 11.4 per cent of the vote.

These votes put into context the BNP's success in getting its racist politics broadcast on the media and circulated in the free election mail during the election campaign and underline the importance of anti-racists having created a national campaign in protest.

Like its counterparts elsewhere in Europe, the BNP is seeking to render itself respectable and to argue that it is a political party just like any other. It argued along these lines in defending its right to an election broadcast. Attempts by the extreme right to legitimise itself have been aided elsewhere in Europe by the adoption of increasingly racist policies by mainstream political parties.

Following the election, the BNP's potential for growth will also be helped by the degree to which Tony Blair imposes the kind of economic and social policies imposed or sup-

ported by other European social democratic parties, the consequences of which have aided the rise of the extreme right — the maintenance of mass unemployment and the dismantling of the welfare state.

Following the election it will be even more necessary for the anti-racist movement to base itself on the understanding that stopping the rise of the fascists means defeating the racism on which they feed.

The BNP's election manifesto could not be clearer on the assistance the fascists get from racist policies and rhetoric from within the mainstream parties.

The manifesto approvingly quotes Nicholas Budgen, the former Tory MP for Wolverhampton South East who, just before the election was called, attacked Labour for being 'lax' on immigration and in his election address stated that immigration has brought 'substantial social problems'. The BNP applaud Budgen for being 'in a minority of MPs of his party in being prepared to state it [racist anti-immigration views] openly' and for arguing his views against 'the frantic efforts of his party's hierarchy to suppress debate on immigration'. Budgen is quoted as saying: 'In their schools, in their pubs and in their shops, the British have felt like strangers in their own land'. The BNP describe this as 'nothing more nor less than the truth' and that 'In fact, his words are representative of a viewpoint which the BNP has held since its

'The BNP's election manifesto proposed the compulsory expulsion of all black people from Britain — a policy which could only be carried out by mass fascist terror'

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foundation 15 years ago'.

For his part, Budgen, during the election campaign, explained 'It's better for a half-respectable politician like me to raise the issue than leave it to the National Front and others who will discuss it in far less measured terms' (*Guardian* 14 April).

The BNP's manifesto implicitly agrees, noting that the impact of Budgen's push on immigration was that the 'Tory Party hierarchy... grudgingly consented to individual Tory candidates venturing into the immigration field to the extent of criticising Labour's latest proposals for even further relaxation of the immigration rules'. Part of Budgen's aim was to head off any fascist candidate standing against him and taking away racist votes. Although he succeeded in this, he was defeated by Labour's candidate on a 9.9 per cent swing.

Those in the liberal establishment who defended the BNP's right to a media broadcast did so on the basis of defence of 'free speech' and opposition to censorship. *Workers Liberty* added the twist that calling for a ban on the BNP's broadcast would mean putting faith in the 'establishment', when in fact it was the 'establishment' which was defending the broadcast and the black and Jewish communities and anti-racists who were mobilising against it.

Defending the BNP's right to broadcast means elevating the interests of a fascist organisation which would ban not only freedom of speech but the right to exist of black and Jewish people, gay men and lesbians, trade unions, would reverse the social gains made by women and so on. As National Assembly Against Racism vice-chair Lee Jasper pointed out in a letter in the *Guardian*, 'freedom of speech' is already limited by the Public Order Act by 'prohibiting incitement to illegal acts including racial hatred'. Indeed, he added, the 'British government claimed in a 1997 paper presented to the UN Committee for the Elimination of Racial Hatred that the Public Order Act is a sufficient instrument to control racist parties in Britain', yet no action was taken against this blatantly racist propaganda.

Or as *Guardian* journalist Mark Lawson argued, offensive sections of the anti-abortion group, the 'ProLife Alliance', had been cut by the BBC but 'nothing of Tyndall's poisonous address had been threatened'. Therefore those who ran it



'might like to explain the reasoning by which viewers are protected from upsetting images but exposed to racist rhetoric' (*Guardian* 29 April).

The BNP's explicitly racist broadcast followed the themes of their manifesto. This calls for forcible repatriation of all 'non-White' people living in Britain and a total end to asylum rights. It states: 'Future immigration of non-Whites must be stopped';

'Non-Whites already here must be repatriated or otherwise resettled overseas and Britain made once again a white country'.

The manifesto continues:

'BNP policy with regard to immigration is simple and straightforward. We place applicants to settle here in three basic categories:

'(a) Those who can prove wholly white and predominantly British ancestry and are of sound health and good character should be allowed to settle here as they please.

'(b) Those of wholly white but not British ancestry should have their applications to settle here treated each on its individual merit, but in most cases should be accepted, provided the same rules of health and character are observed.

'(c) Wholly or partially non-white applicants to settle in Britain would be refused except in cases where they can provide evidence of some strong occupational necessity to reside in this country, such as membership of some diplomatic corps or positions of representatives of foreign countries trading in the UK.'

Attempts
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'They propose a 'resettlement' scheme for all 'ethnic minorities'. This would 'begin on a voluntary basis' but 'it would be made clear to the ethnic minority members that it was the first part of a two-part programme of resettlement, the second part of which would be organised on a compulsory basis'.

That is, the BNP stand for the expulsion of millions of black citizens from Britain. Such a policy could only be imposed by massive fascist terror of the kind Hitler employed after 1933 in Germany.

The section dealing with refugees is entitled 'Refugees no exception' and explains 'It would not matter to us whether 'refugee' claims were genuine or not; we would make the decision as to whom to admit to this country on the basis of whether the claimants in question were the kind of people we wished to welcome here and integrate into our population. Non-Whites of all categories would not be admitted'.

The way in which the manifesto is able to exploit much of the racist rhetoric about 'bogus' refugees used by government and mainstream party political spokespeople during the debates on the Asylum and Immigration Act illustrates the impact of such debate in legitimising the views of fascist and far right groups. In much the same way as government ministers motivated the Asylum and Immigration Act and defended their treatment of refugees in Rochester Prison, the manifesto states that 'the vast majority of so-called "refugees" pouring into Brit-

ain every year are not real refugees at all but simply people seeking to better their living standards'. Its talk of 'illegal immigrants' and 'genuine' or 'bogus' claims has been rendered more commonplace by the racist tenor of mainstream debate.

The experience of the fascists and far right growing on the back of racist policies and rhetoric from more mainstream political parties has already advanced much further elsewhere in Europe.

In France the National Front's election win in Vitrolles in February secured the fourth town hall controlled by the Front, adding to Toulon, Orange and Marignane. In the parliamentary elections called for 25 May and 1 June, the National Front plans to stand 566 candidates for the 577 assembly seats and hopes to poll the 12.5 per cent necessary to proceed through to the second round. Le Pen says he is aiming for a parliamentary group of 20 deputies.

The Front has risen to prominence in the context of record unemployment in France — currently 12.8 per cent — and the implementation of brutal racist legislation, most recently the attempts by the French government to conduct mass deportations under the racist Pasqua laws of non-EU citizens refused a renewal of residence or work permits, which provoked the 'Sans Papier' struggle.

In Italy, while the local elections in April saw advances for Communist Refoundation, the extreme right National Alliance also advanced, taking votes from Berlusconi's Forza Italia.

The electoral advance of the extreme right took place after the decision in early April by the Italian parliament to send troops into Albania and the killing of at least 90 Albanian refugees when a ship in which they were fleeing was sunk by an Italian naval vessel, which have helped continue to legitimise racism. Irene Pivetti, a former speaker of the Italian house of deputies, followed the death of the Albanian refugees by saying that refugees should be 'thrown back into the sea' and that Albanians were 'invading' Italy. She added that 'the government has done nothing. Fortunately the navy is doing an admirable job.'

The centre-left parties are whipping up racism to divert attention from the impact of their economic policies, particularly the impact of trying to secure Italian membership

of EMU, which has necessitated the imposition of a 'Euro-tax' and attacks on the welfare system by Romano Prodi's Olive Tree government.

The rise of racism and of the extreme right on this scale demands an anti-racist movement that is as broad and united as possible and which bases itself on fighting not only the fascists and far right but the racist policies from the mainstream which give them greater purchase. In the general election campaign this political approach, together with unity on the basis of leadership of those most affected by racism, was developed further through the National Assembly Against Racism.

The National Assembly Against Racism's campaign against the BNP and the decision to allow it broadcast time — including pickets of the BBC and independent channels in London and cities across Britain — was conducted alongside campaigning against Budget. The anti-BNP campaign, furthermore, took place after the National Assembly Against Racism had led the national campaigning against the Asylum and Immigration Bill — establishing the central campaign against the bill — and had focused national public opposition to the government's inhumane treatment of asylum seekers held in Rochester and other prisons.

In conjunction with this campaign the National Assembly Against Racism had, over the last year, formed a national alliance against black deaths in police custody — Operation Justice — involving MPs, Liberty, Inquest and religious organisations. The black leadership of the National Assembly Against Racism had set an agenda of demands for the general election campaign by launching the Black Manifesto at the highly successful National Assembly Against Racism conference on 1 March. Support for the National Assembly Against Racism and for the protests against the BNP's campaign were secured at the TUC Black Workers Conference in April. The campaign's student wing led the formation of a new alliance of black and Jewish students which precipitated a breakthrough on NUS policy on racism.

This orientation responded to the priorities of the black communities, combated racism in the political mainstream and helped strengthen the core alliance needed in the leadership of the anti-racist communities — that between the black and Jewish communities and the most

anti-racist elements of the labour movement. As a result all these components came together in the campaign against the BNP. The pickets were led by representatives of black and Jewish organisations alongside trade unionists, students and others in the National Assembly Against Racism. Black and Jewish activists, along with representatives of the churches and trade unions, were central to the National Assembly's legal action against the BNP broadcast. The racist tenor set by the government's whipping up of racism through its asylum policies had been met by mass campaigning, thus weakening the racist ground for the fascists to build upon.

The alternative approach, proposed previously by the ANL to focus solely on the fight against the 'nazis' and to try to separate the 'soft racists' from the fascists, would have been disastrous. The experience of the last year, with the National Assembly Against Racism taking the anti-racist movement onto a new, much more mass and united level, underlined once again that the only way to halt the fascists is to attack the racism on which they base themselves.

The election of a Labour government poses the challenge of ensuring that the anti-racist movement continues to be led by this orientation, and in this framework that the priorities of the movement are informed by those subjected to racism. This means an anti-racist movement which continues to meet every manifestation of racism head-on, from whatever quarter and avoids the pitfalls, for example, of SOS Racisme in France which, at the crucial moment subordinated the anti-racist struggle to the interests of the Socialist Party government.

The results of the BNP in the election campaign show they remain a tiny force. But to ensure that this remains the case and the experience of France, Italy, Austria and Germany — in all of which a rise of mass support for fascists would, a few years ago, have seemed remote — are not repeated in Britain, the unity of the last year must be built on as rapidly as possible. The anti-racist movement must be ready to tackle the prospect that Tony Blair and Gordon Brown may provoke just the sort of racist and extreme right backlash already on the march elsewhere.

By Anna Samuel

'The only way to halt the fascists is to fight the racism on which they feed'

Black and Jewish students unite against racism

This year's National Union of Students (NUS) conference on 24-27 March marked a change in the politics of the students movement, with student politics continuing to be churned up by the looming threat of the replacement of grants by a graduate tax as well as tuition fees. A new alliance based on black-Jewish unity against racism began to emerge. This breakthrough creates the potential to link NUS with the most progressive developments in society. The second main debate at the conference — on education funding — showed that the impending massive economic attacks on students are churning up the entire political framework of NUS. The combination of the breakthrough on the anti-racist issue — via a new alliance of black and Jewish students — and the pressure to develop a strategy to defend students against unprecedented attacks on their living standards are two manifestations of a gigantic process which is starting to transform student politics.

The significance of the development of an alliance between black and Jewish students to fight racism, anti-semitism and the extreme right and increase black representation cannot be over stated. Previously differences on Israel/Palestine had prevented those most threatened by racism and the fascists from allying as the core of the movement necessary to defeat them.

Conference voted, virtually unanimously, for motions which stated 'that defeating racism and the extreme right will require the broadest possible unity of the student movement: black communities, Jewish groups, trade unions, religious groups and all other anti-racists, as advocated by the 1995 and 1996 Student Assembly Against Racism conferences.'

A further motion, described as dealing with 'black-Jewish unity', welcomed the Student Assembly Against Racism (SAAR) and agreed to work with 'genuine anti-fascist and anti-racist organisations .. such as the National Assembly Against Racism'. It asserted that those who suffer racism — the black and Jewish communities — 'ought to be at the forefront of the struggle', stressing the need to strengthen dialogue between religious groups and others. It outlined a strategy for fighting all forms of racism, not choosing just one aspect. It also stressed the need to bring 'together minority communities on a basis of tolerance, understanding and mutual respect'.

The debate committed NUS to campaign for a comprehensive set of measures: repeal of the Asylum and Immigration Act, for a public inquiry into black deaths in custody, making racial violence a specific criminal offence, outlawing religious discrimination and for the can-

cellation of the third world debt. It agreed to wage a strong campaign against the BNP in the general election, calling for a ban on the BNP election broadcast and supporting NAAR's Vote Against Racism campaign. Delegates agreed to an NUS Week of Action against racism.

The principle that the movement against racism and the extreme right should be led by those who experience racism, incorporating an alliance of the black and Jewish communities, in alliance with the labour movement and the widest anti-racist sections of society had been promoted by the National Assembly Against Racism, and spelt out in its *Anti-racist Charter for the New Millennium* and more recently the National Black Alliance's *Black Manifesto*.

This outcome to the debate was a change in NUS' approach to anti-racist policy. Previously instead of



taking part in the broad anti-racist movement against the Asylum and Immigration act, racist murders and the activities of the BNP, NUS' emphasis was concentrated on tiny Islamic fundamentalist groups, specifically Hizb-ut Tahrir. As a result NUS had placed itself outside the rise of mass opposition to racism which has developed in the last few years. Even the Executive Committee's 1997 report, in the section on anti-racism, opened with the statement that: 'Islamic extremism continues to be a problem on our campuses. Various incidents occurred at freshers' fayres which demonstrated the remaining prevalence of such groups at Hizb ut-Tahrir. *Our work has been dominated by the education of sabbatical officers in combating these threats* whilst maintaining the status quo with the majority of Muslim students' [our italics]. Hizb-ut-Tahrir's politics are reactionary and must be opposed. But by far the most dangerous manifestations of racism have been racist attacks by whites on blacks, racist government legislation and fascist groups like the BNP. This conference represented NUS re-gaining a sense of proportion on these issues.

NUS' failure to participate in the broad anti-racist movement had also been accompanied by the marginalisation of black students — the most under-represented group within NUS, despite the massive growth of black student numbers in further and higher education. Black students' demand for an elected black officer on the national executive was previously defeated by the right wing of Labour Students and economic groups like *Workers' Liberty*, which operates under the name of Left Unity in NUS. Therefore perhaps the most significant decision in this year's conference was to: 'create a part-time position of Black Students' officer on the NEC'. Support for this proposal was moved by a member of the Union of Jewish Students on the NUS national executive and represents a serious step forward for black representation.

Labour Students put out a leaflet calling for support for the main motion and first two amendments, including support for SAAR.

The only current to oppose key parts of these motions was *Workers' Liberty/Left Unity*.

Left Unity opposed calling for NUS to 'lobby the government to remove the right of the BNP to free party political broadcasts and election literature'.

NUS Women's Campaign under attack

The NUS Women's conference on 9-11 March celebrated the campaign's tenth anniversary against the background of a year of attacks on the very existence of the campaign from the right wing Labour Students leadership of NUS.

Staff had been removed from the women's unit and women's campaign material was subject to vetting by other members of the NUS NEC. This attack required a vigorous defence of the women's campaign's autonomy, that is of the right of women students to self-organisation. Such a campaign could unite a broad range of women against such an attack. Instead potential support was narrowed by tying defence of the women's campaign to support of education funding, and specifically with support for the Campaign for Free Education.

This year's conference discussed three areas of policy — on education funding, women and work, and the resolutions from student unions defending the women's campaign under the heading of 'ten years of the women's campaign'. Although anti-racism was not discussed on the conference floor, a fringe meeting organised by the Student Assembly Against Racism was very successful.

The main policy debate, on education funding, reaffirmed the strong policy adopted in 1996 in support of a return to state funding of grants for further and higher education. This is in line with previous women's campaign conferences, which have taken decisions to the left of NUS nationally. Women will suffer disproportionately from the removal of grants, as has been shown in Australia. Yet instead of using these policy decisions to broaden support among women students against the attacks on education funding by demonstrating their impact on women, campaigning was linked to the Campaign for Free Education (CFE). In NUS as a whole, the CFE's tactics have narrowed potential opposition to attacks on student grants and proposed tuition fees by relying on ultra-left rhetoric and failing to argue any realistic economic alternative to fund education to that presented by the right wing of Labour Students.

The lack of commitment to defending the women's campaign was the result of the politics of *Workers' Liberty*, who oppose self-organisation for women, and in the past had opposed the creation of a women's officer in NUS by claiming that this would create a female bureaucracy or 'femocracy'. *Workers' Liberty* proposed a 'Vice President Women' who would be elected by the whole of conference, that is, not by women themselves.

At this year's conference, although a candidate who supported *Workers' Liberty* succeeded in defeating the right wing Labour Students' alternative and being elected as women's officer, a vote of censure on the outgoing women's officer was passed. This censure was motivated by the failure of the officer to give support to women fighting against threats to remove women's officers. There have been an alarming number of such attacks in student unions.

It is simply a sign of how out of step NUS politics have been with those women in the labour movement that a current with these types of politics has been able to pose as the left and control the women's campaign. A false polarisation of the leadership of the NUS women's campaign between the Labour students' right wing and the *Workers' Liberty* has led to a distinct weakening of the campaign's feminist agenda and produced some bizarre debates.

The attacks on the women's campaign is connected with the attacks women are facing in wider society. Specifically, in the Labour Party, the women's conference has been made biennial, women-only shortlists abandoned and now the NEC women's committee is threatened with abolition in an attempt to silence opposition to the impact of attacks on the welfare state, wages, employment and so forth on women.

It is with women organised against these attacks which the NUS women's campaign should ally. To do this, and create a campaign capable of resisting the attacks on women students, next year's conference must allow women a real choice of voting for a candidate who represents the left the women's campaign needs.

By Rachel Garvey



Middle ground knocked out of Russian politics

Since the beginning of March this year the middle ground has been smashed out of Russian politics. On one side, at the beginning of March President Yeltsin re-organised his government around the neo-liberal politicians closest to the United States — notably the architect of the corrupt privatisation program, Anatoly Chubais, and the governor of Nizhny Novgorod Boris Nemtsov. The new government immediately announced plans for a second wave of economic shock therapy — to remove state subsidies on housing, heating, electricity and transport while simultaneously acceding to US demands to attack the power of Russia's remaining giant monopolies.

On the other side, all of the classical signs of a rising mass radicalisation of the population are apparent. Millions participated in the trade union day of action against non-payment of wages on 27 March. Given their limited economic muscle, workers are resorting to more and more desperate tactics ranging from hunger strikes to seizing local officials and buildings, blocking roads and railways and in parts of Siberia setting up local 'salvation committees' — embryonic soviets.

The radicalisation is reflected on the electoral level with a string of defeats for the regime in regional elections and politically in a sharp shift of the main opposition party — the Communist Party of the Russian Federation — to the left, as well as the strengthening of more radical left wing communist currents inside and outside the party.

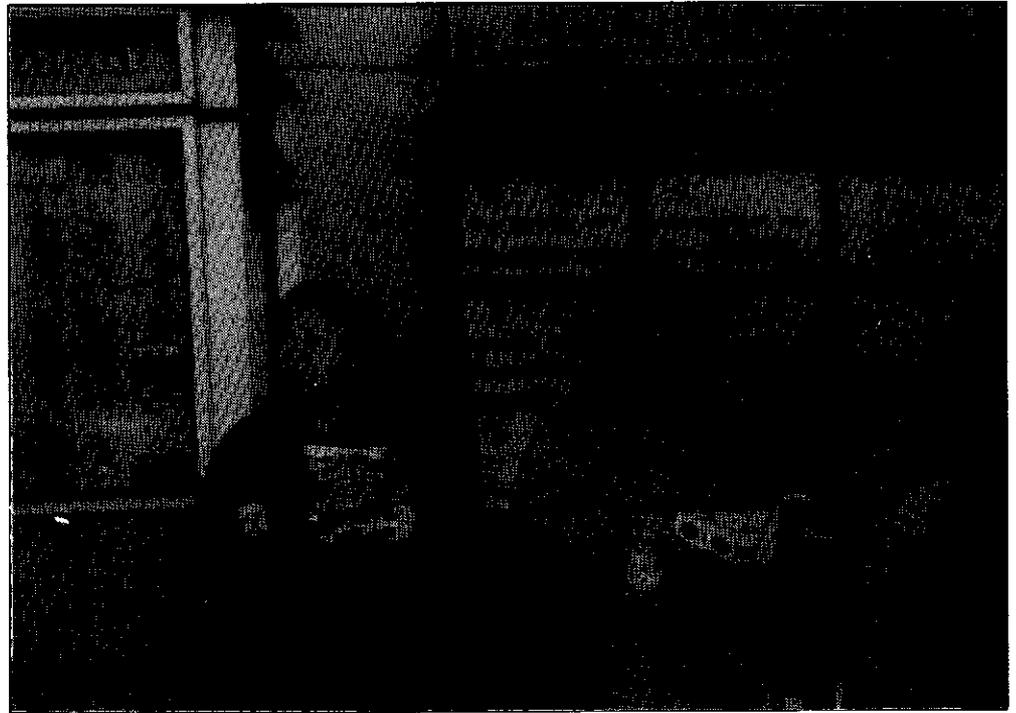
Underlying the political polarisation is the continuing collapse of the economy and the resulting meltdown of state finances. With output at half its level prior to the capitalist economic course, it fell another six per cent last year. The International Labour Organisation reported this year that: 'There should be no pretence. The Russian economy and the living standards of the Russian population have suffered the worst peacetime setbacks in any industrialised nation in history.'

An attempt by the state statistics office to claim that output had started to rise in the first quarter of 1997 was discredited when it was revealed that the books had been cooked to include a larger estimate for the shadow economy this year, without revising the corresponding figures for previous years — thereby creating a false impression of economic growth.

Any idea that foreign investment might revive the Russian economy is simply laughable. In 1996 foreign direct investment totalled \$2.2 billion — less than Peru and a drop in the ocean compared to the estimated \$38.5 billion capital outflow last year. With various studies indicating that nearly half of the economy is controlled by criminals who are draining resources and transferring the proceeds abroad, the World Bank estimates the total 'unexplained residual' outflow since the beginning of capitalist economic reform in January 1992 to be \$88.7 billion.

As the economy has continued to collapse many companies have run up months-long backlogs of unpaid wages and taxes, while the government is facing what First Deputy Prime Minister Anatoly Chubais described in April as 'a monstrous budget crisis which calls into question the ability of the state to perform its functions'. According to the government, only 57 per cent of budgeted tax revenue was collected in the first quarter of 1997. It is therefore proposing even more savage cuts in public spending — totalling \$19bn

For the population, this situation manifests itself in the non-payment of pensions and wages for months at a time. Workers in many regions are owed three to six months back pay, in a country where the majority of the population has already been reduced to abject poverty and the average wage is £93 a month. Immediately after the presidential election in July last year, Yeltsin issued decrees reneging on his elec-



'The Russian economy and the living standards of the Russian population have suffered the worst peacetime setbacks in any industrialised nation in history — ILO'

tion promises to clear wage and pensions arrears.

Following the presidential election the regime debated how to deal with the situation. Anatoly Chubais, who is linked to the banks which have benefited from astronomical interest rates and the privatisation of state assets, argued for a rapid confrontation with the Communist dominated lower house of parliament. This would have included calling off the elections of regional governors and dissolving parliament. Chubais had strengthened his position by organising Yeltsin's presidential election campaign and by provoking a purge of the more nationalist wing of Yeltsin's entourage.

Nonetheless, Chubais' tactics were opposed by Prime Minister Victor Chernomyrdin, who is based on the energy sector — the most powerful section of Russia's capitalist class. Chernomyrdin argued that Yeltsin's election had cost up to \$30 billion in tax breaks, wage and pension payments and subsidies. With payments on loans taken out at 200 per cent annual interest rates falling due, that effort was unrepeatable. Furthermore, if it came to clashes on the streets, the army was disintegrating and could not be relied upon to defend the regime which had systematically starved it of funds and humiliated its officer corps. Therefore, Chernomyrdin argued, the regime had to compromise with, not confront, parliament — which effectively means the Communists.

The terms of the deal were straightforward. Regional elections would be allowed to take place and

parliament would not be dissolved — by the time of the budget vote President Yeltsin had the constitutional power to dissolve parliament and call fresh elections. In exchange, the Communists would allow the budget to get through parliament.

The chair of the Communist Party of the Russian Federation (CPRF), Gennady Zyuganov evidently reasoned that in these circumstances the Communists should ally with the section of the regime prepared to allow events to proceed democratically — Chernomyrdin. In this way it could block a premature dissolution of parliament designed to consolidate Yeltsin's victory in the presidential elections. Zyuganov argued that the government was split between puppets of the US like Chubais and more national groups led by Chernomyrdin — while also stating that he saw Chernomyrdin as a 'temporary fellow traveller' not a strategic ally. Some on the left of the CPRF accepted this approach because they said the opposition needed a couple more years to consolidate its forces and come to power. In the meantime they believed it made sense to ally with the wing of the regime maintaining a democratic framework of politics.

The CPRF therefore agreed to vote for the budget. At the same time the elections of the regional governors proceeded with the regime's candidates losing in the majority of regions, the Communist Party and its allies winning a third and the rest going to capitalist independent candidates backed by the Communists.

The alliance with Chernomyrdin

was given more strategic significance by the most right wing of Zyuganov's close advisors, Alexei Podberyozkin, leader of well-funded Spiritual Heritage and a chair of the National Peoples Patriotic Front.

Although Podberyozkin attends their parliamentary fraction he is not a member of the Communist Party. He is a bourgeois nationalist who states: 'the class interest is but one of many interests. There are interests enjoying higher priority, e.g. state (national) interests'. He calls for a coalition between the Communists and the 'patriotic' wing of the capitalist class — often conceived as led by Chernomyrdin. Voting for the budget, Podberyozkin argued: 'The opposition has entered the ruling power, it has become a part of that power, albeit not yet the decisive part.'

Podberyozkin's line is, however, rejected by the left wing of the Communist movement inside and outside the CPRF — who criticise Zyuganov's tactics and believe that the job of the party is to overthrow the government, not collaborate with it. And the rising radicalisation of the population has strengthened these currents. They argued that the negative effects of disorganising the working class supporters of the Communists by backing the budget outweighed any immediate tactical advantage of keeping the Chubais wing of the regime at bay.

The Russian press reported that 23 out of 26 speeches at the Central Committee plenum before the vote on the budget were directed against Podberyozkin so that Zyuganov had to step in to defend his adviser. In parliament, only 54 Communist MPs actually carried out the party line and voted for the budget in December, while 45 voted against and the rest abstained.

Symptomatically, the calls for disciplinary action against the left-wing rebels came to nothing, while, on the other hand, a dozen or so right wing Communist MPs who formed a group to link up with Lebed were summarily expelled from the party.

Similarly, the Communist supporting press — *Pravda*, *Sovietskaya Rossiya* and the extreme nationalist *Zavtra* — while broadly supporting Zyuganov, also began to carry reports critical of the budget vote and de facto alliance with Chernomyrdin. *Zavtra* took the tone of trying to save Zyuganov from himself. For example, in an article on why the CP should vote against the budget they explained it as a plot

to split the CP from the masses.

Sovietskaya Rossiya is very pro-Zyuganov but told him during an interview before the CPRF congress 'many letters from the provinces criticise the [parliamentary] fraction because the deputies supported Chernomyrdin for the premiership and adopted the state budget'. The paper has opened itself up a bit to the left, but not the right, opposition in the CPRF.

Pravda has run articles warning Communist MPs to be more concerned about their voters than their own parliamentary seats.

Also, for the first time a small minority, but not marginal, group within the party called for the removal of Zyuganov as party leader in an open letter in the newspaper of the 21,000-strong Communist Union of Youth — the official youth wing of the party. This is not the dominant view on the left — which is against voting for the budget but for putting pressure on Zyuganov to change course, rather than calling for his removal. Following the April congress of the CPRF, at which their leader was unable to speak, the Young Communists have gone further and declared their organisational and political independence from party.

Outside the CPRF, the Communist groups to its left have also become more coherent. The Russian Communist Workers Party (RCWP), which has roughly 50,000 members and took 4.6 per cent of the vote in the parliamentary election of December 1995, expelled its best known leader Anpilov, following the condemnation by the party of an electoral platform he had signed in Moscow which included concessions to anti-semitism.

Criticism of the course of allying with Chernomyrdin became stronger as the budget inevitably failed to solve any of the problems of the economy and the wage and pension arrears mounted — accompanied by more and more desperate protests. The mood on the most extreme wing of the alliance of forces around the Communist Party was exemplified by the front page exhortation of *Zavtra* following the armed uprising in Albania: 'Russian workers — study Albania!'

But if Zyuganov was coming under mounting pressure from the left, the most United States-aligned wing of the government was also chafing against the *modus vivendi* with the Communists. From the point of view

The new government has announced plans for massive spending cuts and four to five fold increases in rents'

of the regime, the agreement only made sense if it was a question of gaining time while the economy recovered and then allowed them to regain popular support. But in the absence of any economic recovery, what actually happened was that the Communist Party continued to advance under the momentum of the radicalisation of the population, in particular, winning a series of elections for regional governors. Given the size of Russia these are immensely powerful positions. Furthermore, the Upper House of parliament is composed of each regional governor plus a representative of each regional legislature. With elections for the latter due this year and the Communists certain to do even better in those contests, Chubais et al argued that there was a real threat that the Communists would win control of both houses of parliament. Even given Russia's autocratic constitution that could make Yeltsin's position untenable — and without governmental power the capitalist political forces would be utterly helpless, Yeltsin's concern on this score was underlined by the fact that he spent more time attacking the regional governors than even the CP-dominated parliament in his state of the union address in March.

Thus the middle ground occupied by the agreement between Zyuganov and Chernomyrdin became increasingly untenable, and Yeltsin used his state of the union address to signal a sharp change in tactics. With everything moving against them the regime resolved upon a course of drastic action to try to break up the dynamic of the situation.

All government ministers, except Prime Minister Victor Chernomyrdin, were dismissed. Anatoly Chubais was charged with reconstructing the government as first deputy prime minister in charge of economic policy. Chubais is one of the most hated politicians in Russia — only slightly more popular than Hitler according to one deputy. A nationwide opinion poll published in *Vek* in March showed that 85 per cent of people disapproved of his previous activity as Yeltsin's chief of staff and 99.5 per cent of people would vote against him if he were to run for president.

In these circumstances, the neo-liberal governor of Nizhny Novgorod, Boris Nemtsov, was given the same rank as Chubais, to broaden the regime's regional support. Nemtsov was charged with re-

moving subsidies on domestic housing and utilities and breaking up Russia's remaining natural monopolies, including in the energy sector.

Chubais' first announcement was that the government would have to cut \$19bn from this year's budgeted spending because of the shortfall in tax revenue. Under the terms by which parliament approved the budget any cuts have to be approved by parliament and certain items — wages, pensions, healthcare, nuclear facilities and the financing of government debt — are supposed to be protected.

The cuts are due to come before parliament towards the end of May. That means the Communists will again be faced with the issue of whether to back the government over the budget or risk an attempt to dissolve parliament — only this time any deal with the government will be even more unpopular and meet even stiffer resistance within the CPRF.

Furthermore, the threat to dissolve parliament carries less weight given that new elections would probably result in a still more left wing body of MPs.

The new government's programme was worked out in close collaboration with the IMF. It boiled down to trying to eliminate the deficit in public finances by massively reducing the government's spending commitments. The key proposals are:

- to end subsidies on domestic housing, heating, electricity, transport and other utilities — which would have a shattering affect on living standards. At present citizens pay an average 27 per cent of the cost for housing and municipal services, including water and heating bills. Under a decree signed by Yeltsin on 28 April the public would pay 35 per cent of the cost of housing and services this year, 50 per cent by 1998, 70 per cent by 2000 and 100 per cent by 2003.

- to reduce the state's pension and wages bills by allowing sections of industry to go bankrupt and cutting state provision of pensions;

- to cut spending on an army whose officers are not paid for months on end;

- and, at the behest of the United States, an attempt to weaken the giant natural monopolies which dominate the gas, electricity supply and transport industries — in order to facilitate the entry of foreign companies into those sectors — and action to strengthen the position of foreign

share-holders within Russian companies.

The effect of trying to remove subsidies on housing and municipal services (heating, water, electricity, etc) is likely to be a big increase in support for the Communists in the cities given how far living standards in Russia have already fallen since 1992. The government is planning to make the regional executives the instrument for carrying through this attack to try to shift the political blame onto them. But this could backfire. Yuri Luzhkov, the pro-Yeltsin Mayor of Moscow has not yet implemented the cut and warned that sharp rises in rents and utility charges may cause 'gigantic upheavals and the dismissal of the government.'

The St Petersburg city government which earlier announced its own plans to phase out subsidies over five years — which means a five-fold rent increase — now faces a major political revolt. Daily demonstrations of 5-10,000 people took place for the three weeks following the announcement and there is growing momentum behind initiatives to remove the governor. The St Petersburg demonstration on 27 March was even bigger than that in Moscow — where 100,000 demonstrated — because the communal reform has been enacted in the city. The decree detailing when the reform will be implemented has repeatedly been delayed in publication, indicating tensions in the regime.

At the same time, moves to attack the natural monopolies threaten to push the government into a collision with the most powerful capitalist groups in Russia. The oil industry has already been broken up into separate companies and opened to foreign competition, with the consortium exploiting the gigantic oil fields in the Caspian Sea 40 per cent US owned and now planning a pipeline to ship oil which does not have to pass through Russia. But the same does not apply to gas, electricity and rail.

With a third of the world's known gas reserves, supplying half of Europe and accounting for eight per cent of Russia's GDP, Gazprom, for example, is an immensely powerful company with controlling interests in its own banks, newspapers and other media. Talk of tightening government control over Gazprom, forcing it to pay its own tax bills and bankrupt many of its customers by demanding prompt payment, as well

as opening up the gas industry to foreign multinationals and possibly breaking the company up led the chair of the company, Rem Vyakhrev, to immediately seek allies among the opposition in parliament. He pointed out that the company effectively subsidised many companies and regions — having been paid for only 45 per cent of the gas shipped in the first quarter of this year and paid in cash for only 5.7 per cent.

Zyuganov and the Communists argued that to break up the natural monopolies and allow US and other capitalist companies to move into the gas, rail and electricity industries would accelerate the break up of the country which is so vast that it requires powerful state controlled transport, electricity and energy industries. The Communist parliamentary speaker suggested that Russians would take US concern about promoting free competition more seriously if Washington started breaking up Boeing, General Motors, Intel, Microsoft and other US giant monopolies.

There were also signs of divisions in the government. Victor Chernomyrdin, former head of Gazprom, told journalists: 'Natural monopolies and primarily the United Energy Services of Russia and Gazprom are the spine of the Russian economy which we will keep as the apple of our eye.'

But the biggest problem facing the new government is that its plans to dismantle the last elements of the Soviet system of social security — cheap heating, housing, electricity and water — threaten to ignite what is already a massive anti-government radicalisation. This poses a qualitative extension of the opposition to Yeltsin within the cities, which up to now have been relatively economically cushioned and where support for the regime has been greater than elsewhere.

The most clear-cut expression of this on the streets was the scale of the 27 March day of action. These were the most significant mass demonstrations in Russia since the attack on parliament in October 1993. Although not on the same level of militancy, they were far larger, and, for the first time, distinguished by the overwhelming preponderance of the working class on them. They lent a clear class character to the opposition to the government.

The Ministry of the Interior underestimated the turn-out — claim-

'Russians would take US concern about Russian monopolies more seriously if it took action to break up Boeing, General Motors, Intel and other US giant monopolies'

ing that *only* 1.8 million took part in marches.

But even if the government's figures were correct, they would be equivalent to demonstrations involving 600,000 people in a country with the population of Britain. No-one would seriously suggest that such a scale of mobilisation was insignificant.

The CPRF and Zyuganov campaigned flat out in support of the 27 March — pushing a resolution in support of it through parliament and calling upon every single party member to personally participate in building for it. The Communist influenced press ran blanket campaigns in support of the actions — *Sovietskaya Rossiya*, for example, ran it as its main headline in every issue for three weeks.

The day of action was a massive political event in the country. It was the first item on the television news for three days beforehand and a big item for the preceding week. The government and media did everything in their power to demobilise people. They warned of bloodshed, conspiracies by armed groups, the threat of riots, chaos and so on. Some 'independent' trade unions close to the government even issued a last minute appeal not to take part because of the danger of violence. Sixteen thousand paramilitary police armed with sub-machines were deployed in Moscow. Chubais went to the mining areas with the firm promise of billions of roubles in back pay — which did succeed in temporarily demobilising most of the miners.

Nonetheless, there were huge demonstrations of workers throughout the country — with 100,000 marching in Moscow — and instead of intimidating the marchers the police on duty were totally sympathetic, mingling and joking with the crowds. The majority of the demonstrators were organised by the trade unions with between a quarter and a third organised by the Communists. Although the top leaders of the unions made anti-communist statements (Mikhail Shmakov the chair of the Federation of Independent Trade Unions of Russia is close to the Mayor of Moscow and a supporter of Yeltsin) there was no animosity at all at a rank and file level between trade unionists and Communists.

The general mood of the marchers can be gauged by the fact that General Alexander Lebed was pushed out of the demonstration in Moscow — because he is correctly

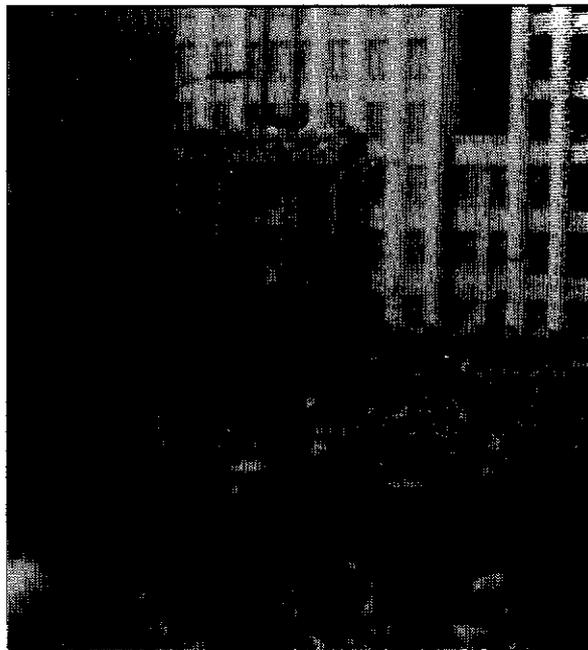
seen as in cahoots with Washington — and had to be rushed away by his bodyguard. Boris Nemtsov was booed down in his hometown of Nizhny Novgorod.

Most importantly, 27 March, marked a new qualitative development for the Russian opposition because for the first time it was very, very explicitly a working class demonstration. It was a great step forward because it began to pose the solution to the key question to which Zyuganov, for example, does not give a clear answer — which *class* will lead the struggle to save Russia from capitalism. This was also very much the view of the left wing of the CP. The MPs who had voted against the budget clearly felt that it strengthened their position. It had an enormous impact. Zyuganov, for example, when asked on the eve of the CPRF congress what had struck him most in the four years since the previous congress replied: 'The 27 March protest action'.

The march had been preceded the week before by a string of election defeats for the government. They lost five out of six regional legislative elections, a Communist was elected governor of Amur and an unrepentant leader of the August 1991 Brezhnevite coup was elected governor of the key military region of Tula, with 62 per cent of the vote in a field of 11 candidates. It was a kind of Russian equivalent of the Wirral South by-election. One of the right wing newspapers, *Segodnya*, summed it up with the headline: 'Red Sunday comes before Red Thursday'.

This elimination of the middle ground in Russian politics — with the regime planning a new wave of shock therapy and rising radicalisation of the population — was the context in which the congress of the Communist Party of the Russian Federation met, in Moscow in the middle of April. The changing relation of forces was shown by the fact, that whereas in 1994 Zyuganov's alliance with Chernomyrdin (including voting for the budget) had lasted nine months and seriously set back the CPRF, this time it lasted little longer than two months and the Communists continued to advance, particularly on a regional level. The left-wing of the Communists also grew significantly.

The breakdown of the agreement between Zyuganov and the government, symbolised by the promotion of Chubais, together with the scale



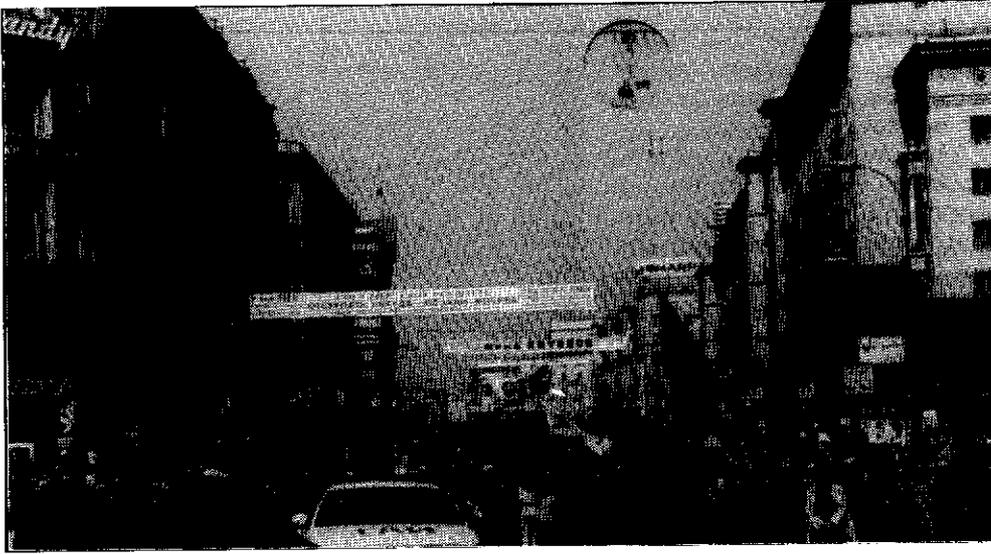
'The overwhelming working class character of the 27 March demonstration began to show the solution to the question of which class will lead the struggle to save Russia'

of the 27 March actions, set the scene for a shift to the left in the CPRF's tactics at its congress. This in turn defused the growing discontent with Zyuganov's strategy within the party — so that he was re-elected party chair with just one vote against and the action of the parliamentary fraction was endorsed. Even so there were sharp criticisms of Zyuganov's tactics, particularly his support for the budget. MP Tatyana Astrakhankina, for example, condemned what she called Zyuganov's 'pernicious policy of compromise' with the government. She also attacked Podberyozkin as an 'ideological saboteur'. Following the Congress, criticising the leadership from the left, the Komsomol youth organisation announced its political and organisational independence from the party. But overall the party emerged united precisely because the congress signalled a shift to the left.

Zyuganov told the congress that the time for compromise with the Yeltsin administration was over and that the party would have to go onto the offensive including by a campaign of extra-parliamentary mass protest.

A message of 'reconciliation' sent by Yeltsin to the congress was met by whistling and jeering. Zyuganov told reporters 'We do not agree with this. We do not trust a man who has betrayed his country'. The congress announced a campaign of 'extra-parliamentary protests within the framework of the law' against the Yeltsin regime.

A resolution 'On attitude to the ruling political regime in Russia' said the Russian Communist Party 'can only be in irreconcilable oppo-



sition to the ruling political regime in Russia'. This means 'to oppose the anti-people policy of the authorities, capitalisation and colonisation of the country'. At the same time the document says the party is 'a responsible opposition' which stands for integrity of the country and against 'an offensive of private capital on rights of the working people'. The congress proclaimed the party's key task to be to fight for 'a change of the ruling regime, the social, economic and political course' and for creation 'of a government of national interests and people's confidence.'

The resolution summing up the Central Committee's political report said that Communists are going to adopt non-parliamentary methods of opposition, and, in particular, prepare a national political strike.

The congress issued an appeal 'to the peoples of Russia'. Calling for a campaign of extra-parliamentary opposition and declaring 'It is time to act, act and act again; to unite and establish salvation councils, strike committees and other public bodies in villages and towns,' and prepare for nationwide political demonstrations 1 and 9 May.

A resolution was adopted calling for a national political strike. It urged local Communist Party branches to 'evolve into centres cementing all progressive forces, and be active in the preparations for the national political strike, and in the strike itself'.

Another resolution said: 'Political manoeuvring by the government, changes of ministers, endless promises and assurances cannot conceal the essence of the authorities' actions — any government created by this regime will serve its goals of robbing the people'. The main task, it added, was 'to save Russia's state-

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hood and the country itself which is being turned into a semi-colony in accordance with the will of international capital.'

In line with this activists were instructed to start collecting signatures on petitions in favour of ousting Yeltsin from power and to change the constitution to increase the powers of parliament vis a vis the presidency. Although such petitions would have no legal authority, they would be a means of mass campaigning by the party.

The congress decided to press for radically amending the Constitution of Russia and redistributing powers in favour of the parliament. It instructed the CPRF Duma faction to raise the question of no confidence in the government. However, a proposal for an immediate no confidence vote was deleted after Zyuganov pointed out that this could simply backfire allowing the government to choose the time most favourable to it to dissolve parliament. Under the constitution, the president can respond to a vote of no-confidence in the government by *either* appointing a new government or dissolving parliament.

In his closing address to the congress Zyuganov argued that the Communists would need a threefold numerical superiority over the reformers to come to power. In these circumstances the CPRF's tactics should be designed to increase its own forces and attract new allies. He said that the Communists need to win the support of the working class and peasantry, and to create an alliance with the trade unions — whose leadership has given de facto support to Yeltsin. Zyuganov argued that such unity would be among the pivotal issues for the left movement.

Overall, the first three months of 1997 have brought the organised working class into the leading role in the opposition to the government. An attempt by the CPRF to go along with Chubais' budget cuts, and still less the government's next budget in the autumn, will be even more difficult to agree within the parliamentary fraction.

Within the Communist Party of the Russian Federation the basis has been laid for a deeper political clarification. The left has been strengthened numerically and politically. Zyuganov's line of uniting and leading the patriotic opposition to the destruction of Russia has been vindicated. But his calls for a coalition with a non-existent 'patriotic bourgeoisie', or progressive wing of regime, have resulted in a series of centrist zig zags.

In fact, the distinction between more 'national' sections of Russian capital on the one hand and to different degrees forces such as Chernomyrdin, Luzhkov and Yeltsin's former bodyguard Khorzhkov, who, for example, support a union with Belarus and oppose NATO expansion, and, on the other hand, Chubais, Nemtsov and Gaidar (and also in reality Lebed) who are simply agents of western imperialism, is a real one — and at times of the utmost importance. On individual issues, such as union with Belarus, NATO or western attempts to break up powerful Russian companies to better colonise the economy, it is necessary to ally with national capitalists when they take the same side as socialists. But *strategically*, no section of capital is capable of defending Russia — because that requires socialist measures — and even 'patriotic' capitalists will put class before nation. That is why no real bourgeois opposition to the Yeltsin regime exists in Russia today. As the Sandinistas put it, only the workers and peasants will go the whole way.

Capitalism has always brought catastrophe to Russia and always will bring catastrophe to Russia. All sections of the capitalist class will betray the country. Faced with the reduction of their country to a virtual colony and the elimination of its industrial, scientific and cultural achievements of the last 80 years, a patriotic struggle to defend Russia from imperialism is essential. But it can only be led by the working class.

By Geoffrey Owen

Zyuganov's address to the CPRF Congress

In his political report for the Central Committee to the congress of the Communist Party of the Russian Federation on 19 April, party chair Gennady Zyuganov correctly pointed out that Russia remains 'the main stumbling block in the path of the creators of the new world order' — the United States and its allies. That is why the class struggle in Russia today is the most momentous in its historical consequences since the second world war. As when Hitler came to power in Germany, no person in the world is going to be able to escape from the consequences of the outcome of the class struggle in Russia.

For that reason, *Socialist Action* believes that socialists everywhere in the world must do everything in their power to aid those who are fighting against capitalism in Russia. That requires breaking through the wall of disinformation in western Europe regarding the left in Russia. The fundamental fact in this regard is that out of the dissolution of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, whose bureaucracy discredited socialism and led the USSR to the point of collapse, has emerged a centrist left Communist movement, axised around the Communist Party of the Russian Federation, which is leading the fight against capitalism in Russia today. A vigorous debate between the anti-capitalist communist left, social democratic right and patriotic/nationalist centre is taking place within that movement.

Zyuganov's report, extracts of which we publish below, accurately conveys both the strengths and weaknesses of the present leadership of that movement. These are encapsulated in his formula 'irreconcilable, but responsible, opposition'. This has involved the contradictory combination of, on the one hand, voting for the Yeltsin regime's budget and, on the other hand, simultaneous advocacy and leadership of huge extra-parliamentary mobilisations up to and including the creation of soviet-type structures and the call for a national political general strike.

I. Key Questions of Party Strategy

Russia's Communists are greatly in debt to the people. We failed to help them to defend their home against ruin, their family against humiliation. The priority task — to eliminate the anti-people regime and change the ruinous socioeconomic course — has not yet been resolved.

The Main Question of Our Strategy

The CPRF, while remaining a class party, a party of the working people — workers, peasants, and intelligentsia — has consciously defined its main aim at the present stage: to unite and rally sound social and political forces to resolve the whole people's tasks, the common democratic tasks of national and state salvation.

We are the heirs to that part of the CPSU that never counterposed the class principle to the principle of the whole people. This is our fundamental stance, enshrined in the party Program. It is in line with this stance that we have in recent times defined our tactics and built our relationships with both allies and opponents...

With the most active participation of the CPRF, the People's Patriotic Union of Russia was created, uniting more than 30 organisations on a federation-wide scale. This is a lot, but even more must be done. Even today many citizens of Russia are capable of uniting around the idea of national salvation. Our task is to turn that potential into real action and strive to eliminate the obstacles that exist on this path... It goes without saying that all the forces belonging to the people's patriotic bloc preserve their political and ideological autonomy...

Is it possible today to be a true patriot and at the same time a supporter of rampant capitalism in Russia? Is it possible to be a true democrat and not be in opposition to such a regime?

We believe it is not possible...

The contemporary patriotic idea is a profoundly socialist idea. And we must convey that thought to everyone.

Let us ponder once again what the attempt to restore capitalism in Russia has already led to and where it will lead in the future...

The attempt at restoration has led

to the destruction of production, basically the de-industrialisation of the country, the loss of more than half the economic potential, and the profound qualitative degeneration of the entire production structure... A distinctly colonial type of economy is developing.

The attempt at restoration has led to an unprecedented split in society... Society has been divided into a handful of rich and the vast mass of the destitute. The miner and the peasant, the teacher and the doctor, the scientist and the officer are humiliated...

The attempt at restoration has resulted in monstrous genocide of the people... The average life expectancy has fallen from 70 years to 64. And, for men, to 58 — that is to say, few survive to pension age. There are almost no villages left in Russia where there are more newborn children than funerals. Overall, the number of deaths is 60 per cent higher than the number of births.

The attempt at restoration has brought forth an unprecedented crime wave in all spheres of life, has given rise to the total criminalisation of the economy, administration, daily life...

The attempt at restoration has destroyed the union state and the national unity of the Russian people and led to unprecedented Russophobia. It has done serious damage to Russia's economic and political integrity. Many regions, particularly in the far east and the far north, are cut off from the country and their very survival is teetering on the brink. The confederalisation of the state has begun, and, with the effective secession of Chechnya, the breakup of Russia.

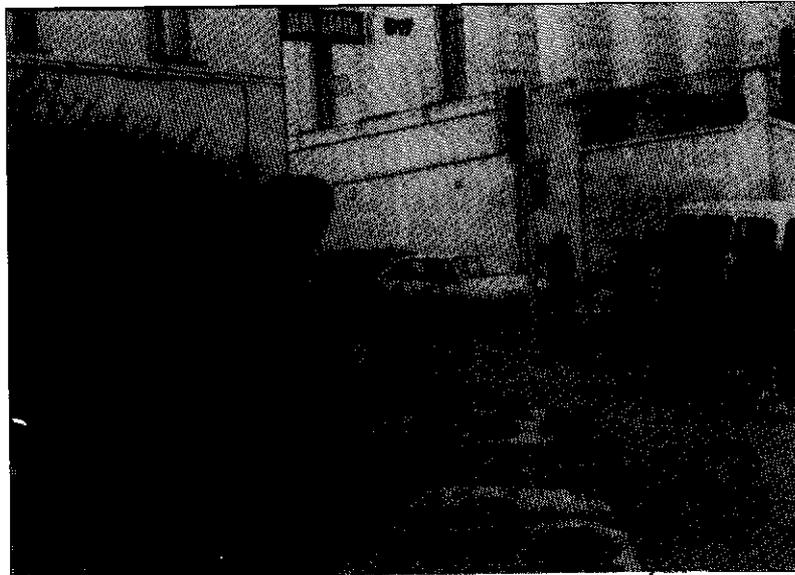
The overall result is obvious — the undermining of the country's political, economic, and spiritual independence and its national-state security. In short, capitalism, not for the first time, has revealed its incompatibility with the peculiarities of the life of our people and state.

The attempt at its restoration is resulting in practice in the progressive colonisation of Russia. Or rather, it is a qualitatively new form of waging war against our country.

The dirty money, lies, and provocations with which the fifth column arms itself have proved no less devastating to Russia than the incursions of Batu, Napoleon, and Hitler put together. In essence, the Third Patriotic [War] is already raging in the wide territories of our country...

We will never become part of the

'The attempt at capitalist restoration has resulted in monstrous genocide of the people'



'golden billion', those who live by exploiting other peoples, by plundering others' riches. Any form of capitalism — whether early, mature, or dying — is organically contraindicated for us. Because our conscience will not allow us to grow fat by exploiting the weak...

Encircled by New Threats

However weak and drained Russia may be today, even after the destruction of the Soviet Union it remains the main stumbling block in the path of the creators of the 'new world order'.

That is why yet another 'cordon sanitaire' is being erected around Russia. In the south they are trying to cut us off from our historical allies in the Balkans. In Central Europe, the question of NATO expansion has been decided. In the northwest, the Baltic region is being drawn into this cordon. That is the main external threat today.

The internal threat is the regime's irresponsible and incompetent policy, which is leading to a spontaneous social explosion. This is not only a threat to the ruling regime, as it may seem at first glance. In view of the destitution of the population, the vastness of our territory, and the presence of nuclear powder kegs, this will be the 'ninth wave' which threatens the total destruction of society's main vital structures, already weakened as they are. The total 'Balkanisation' of Russia and the sending of NATO 'peacekeepers' into its territory — that is the most probable outcome of such an explosion...

The latest plans of the so-called

'young reformers', headed by Chubais and Nemtsov, who have taken over the government are aimed specifically at exacerbating social tension.

Housing and municipal 'reform' will confront millions of families with the prospect of being left without a roof over their heads. Those who built the houses are deliberately being turned into vagrants.

Pension 'reform' will heap a new burden on the already strained family budgets of the working people.

The dismemberment of the natural monopolies will finally deprive the state of the opportunity to control such strategically important nationwide structures as transport, communications, electricity, and gas supplies.

The so-called 'reorganisation of loss-making enterprises', which became loss-makers through the fault of the 'reformers', will dump millions of new unemployed on the streets.

The free buying and selling of land will auction off the last asset of the whole people, turn the peasant into a hired hand in their native fields, and generate a mass of conflicts in the countryside.

The 'new stage of reforms' means, therefore, nothing less than an offensive against the vestiges of the working people's socioeconomic rights — a cynical social provocation by the authorities...

The only way to change the situation is a change of course in state policy. The restoration of the people's power and the rebirth of the ruined state. That is the basis for a true national consensus. And it can be done by embarking on the path of social justice, the path of socialism.

II. The Party in Responsible Opposition

Our party in its present form is only a few years old. But it already has an eventful history. And this can be divided into periods. The period of temporary retreat had ended by the time of the previous, third, congress. The period now under review can be called a period of building up strength and achieving a certain equilibrium between the opposition and the authorities. Now we are on the threshold of a new period and we believe it will be marked by a switch to the offensive.

Our Tactics Today

The period between congresses was, for the CPRF, one continuous election campaign...The number of voters supporting the party is steadily growing. In December 1995 2.5 times more voters voted for our party list than in December 1993. In the second round of the presidential elections twice as many votes were collected than voted for the CPRF in 1995.

The peoples' constantly increasing support, which brought us, together with our allies, more than 45 per cent of the seats in the State Duma, the majority in a whole string of representative organs in the regions, and more than 30 governorships — such is our political potential today.

But this significantly increased potential is itself the seat of a serious contradiction which requires creative resolution. The question is, since we have strong parliamentary positions at federal level and real power in a number of regions, do we also have a responsibility for what is happening in the country?

According to the classical canons, it seems we do not. But that is not right, because the situation in Russia is far from typical. Furthermore, the country does not have the time to calmly await the next 'rotation' of power.

In recent years, through a desperate struggle, we have succeeded in winning a small morsel of power. At the same time we will never be reconciled to the present course. A situation has arisen which can no longer be appropriately described by terms like 'systemic', 'constructive', or 'parliamentary' opposition. This is a new phenomenon, and we call it

responsible and intransigent opposition.

The tactics of this opposition are above all the tactics of squeezing the entire present mercenary clique out of Russia's pores. It is the tactic of rigorous exposure of the ruling regime's policy. It is the tactic of awakening and organising the masses and controlling the growing protests. It is the tactic of acquiring administrative experience, without which there can be no question of coming to power.

Take, for instance, our attitude to the budget for this year. It would have been possible not to adopt it at all, since it is not going to be fulfilled by the government anyway. But the question is, is it permissible to abandon the country's last resources to final plundering? Have we a right to leave the activities of the executive free from all control?

The Communists and their allies in the State Duma set the government 11 well-known conditions for approving the federal budget and secured a change in the budget concept in the direction of protecting social production and meeting the working people's needs...

In voting for the budget and setting certain conditions, the opposition reserved the right and the opportunity to demand from the government an account of its fulfilment of its commitments. And the time for such an account has now come.

Up until today, a great many other questions have had to be resolved in a similar way.

But the temporary compromises we have accepted do not take away from the fact that the party is not only a responsible, but also an intransigent opposition. I emphasise yet again, we will never be reconciled to the authorities' general course and we will proceed on this basis in all our work both within parliament and outside its walls.

The Times Are Changing — And Tactics Too

Demands on the leadership to operate more boldly, resolutely, and energetically are increasing within the party. The Central Committee agrees with this approach; both the objective and the subjective prerequisites for this are coming to fruition.

In the past two months the situation in Russia has changed so significantly that there is every reason to speak of a new tactical stage in

our activity. What is this associated with?

The president's message [to the Federal Assembly], which was heard in March, and in its wake the reshaping of the government, left no room for illusions as to the possibility of achieving anything like a coalition in the government...

The newly formed government has already begun and will pursue — and there can be no doubt of this — a policy that is murderous for Russia. This is stage two of shock therapy, except that there is almost nobody and nothing left to cut. It only remains to destroy that 'almost', and with it Russia itself.

The logic of the actions of a patriotic opposition leaves no room for choice in the situation that has developed. Consent to what is happening or non-resistance to it would mean betrayal of our own voters, our own history, Russia as a whole.

It is the responsible nature of our opposition that forces us to be intransigent here.

However, that does not mean that it is necessary to act simplistically and hastily. We cannot allow ourselves the luxury of taking unconsidered steps.

The fact is that a vote of no confidence in the government which we would fight for — taken in itself, in isolation from the struggle for the removal of the present regime — would most likely result not in the government's resignation but in yet another even worse 'mutation' of the government, and the dissolution of the Duma.

That is not a tragedy in itself. Early elections could even be useful, but on one condition. Namely, the new Duma must not end up in the same constitutional impasse that we now face. When the representative and legislative organ is virtually powerless to exert real influence on the formation of the government and the shaping of socioeconomic strategy. How is this to be avoided?

It is necessary to strive with all our might to secure the adoption of amendments to the constitution. Because the present constitution drives any Duma, no matter what majority the opposition may have in it, into a vicious circle of 'war' with a given cabinet. Postponing matters until the next presidential election and the victory of an opposition candidate would take too long. It is necessary to fight resolutely for a change in the constitution...

The strategy of constitutional changes must be that the govern-

'The tactics of this opposition are above all the tactics of squeezing the entire present mercenary clique out of Russia's pores'

ment would be formed by the Federal Assembly and would be accountable to it...

The People Take the Floor

Obviously the struggle to change the constitution, by virtue of the complexity of the procedure, cannot be easy. In assessing the prospects for its success it is necessary to proceed on the basis that no parliamentary votes can solve the problem by themselves — they will run up against a brick wall of presidential vetoes, legal chicanery, and procrastination.

The process can only be accelerated by a mass people's movement from below. And therefore, in the struggle to change the constitution, we must bring in and unite all possible sociopolitical forces on the basis of a single criterion — patriotism and the defence of national interests.

Not only political parties and movements, but also trade unions and youth, women's, and veterans' organisations should become our comrades in this nationwide cause. It is the logic of this joint struggle that should lead us to the formation of a patriotic government coalition.

Obviously the party's first task is the organisation of the growing protests and the fusion of the masses' economic struggle with the political struggle.

The 27 March Russia-wide protest action has already shown that the masses' demands go considerably further than the purely economic slogans to which the FNPR [Federation of Independent Trade Unions of Russia] leadership wanted to confine them. Resolutions of a political nature were adopted everywhere, primarily calling for the resignation of the president and government.

There will soon be actions connected with the 1 and 9 May celebrations. The party calls on working people to attend rallies and demonstrations under the slogans:

'Yeltsin — resign!', 'No confidence in the government!', 'We demand an immediate change of course!', 'We are with you, fraternal Belarus!', 'Hands off the State Duma!', 'National television for Russia!'

It is necessary to go into the thick of the struggle, making the forms of the struggle increasingly organised and conscious. The CPRF Central Committee deems it necessary im-

mediately to begin a mass collection of signatures to demand the president's resignation and a change to the constitution. This must be done at any picket, rally, hunger strike, or strike, at any protest action. The wider and more organised this movement, the more easily and organically it will develop into a Russia-wide strike, which we call on working people to engage in if the powers that be remain deaf to the people's demands...

It is necessary to step up the propaganda of our concrete proposals for the country's recovery from crisis. Not so that the government of radical liberals takes them up — it would be ridiculous to expect that — but with the aim of demonstrating to all the people that there is a real alternative...

The main question of today is whether 'market forces', or in reality a few banking groups, will determine the movement of our economy, exploiting state resources for their own selfish interests, or whether, on the contrary, the state will determine the spheres and areas of use of market competition in the interests of society.

We advocate the latter. The strategic heights of the economy and the main financial flows should be brought back under state control. Property in the course of whose privatisation criminal actions were committed should be returned by way of a corresponding legal mechanism.

Without state control society will not be able to ensure the necessary transparency of economic activity and confront the crime wave that has swept over it.

We attach particular significance to strengthening centralised state management and reducing tariffs in such key systems as the fuel and energy complex, railroad transport, and communications, which form the backbone of Russia's single economic and political area and are the guarantors of its preservation.

At the same time, on the basis of past experience, we rule out bureaucratic overcentralisation. We advocate giving the economic system a flexibility based on the interaction of various systems, with ownership by the whole people taking priority.

The management of the economy should take place primarily on the basis of the interests of the internal market and domestic production. It is proposed to devote particular attention to those areas of production and the social sphere where the

country's future is shaped: machine building, hi-tech spheres, education, and science.

In order to implement this program it is necessary to mobilise significant internal resources. Such resources exist. Let us enumerate their main sources:

● restoring production. In the first stage — in sectors with rapid circulation of capital. The sale of their output will provide resources for capital investments in the modernisation and development of hi-tech production sectors. The tax base will be widened;

● stopping the leakage of capital abroad and creating economic conditions that favour its return;

● attracting the population's savings by means of strengthening savers' confidence in the state savings system. Confidence will increase thanks to measures to compensate for savers' losses as a result of price liberalisation;

● returning strategically important income-generating enterprises to state ownership;

● squeezing the dollar out of the economy and replacing it with the ruble. At present Russia is losing on the order of 10 trillion rubles of income per year through the dollarisation of the economy;

● striking resolutely at criminal structures and corruption, which will relieve the Russian producer of a double and triple squeeze;

● stepping up taxation of nonproductive property while at the same time alleviating the tax burden on commodity producers;

● restoring the state monopoly of foreign trade in strategically important categories of goods;

● fully restoring the state alcohol and tobacco monopoly.

The revival of production will be the basis of a strong social policy aimed primarily at preserving jobs and eliminating wage and pension arrears.

In the agriculture sphere the party proceeds on the basis of the impermissibility of the free buying, selling, and mortgaging of agricultural land, coupled with the preservation of mixed forms of land ownership and use...

Toward Russia's Unity

A strong single union state cannot be revived without a strong and unified Russian Federation. The Russian Federation cannot be strong

'The party's first task is the organisation of the growing protests and the fusion of the masses' economic struggle with the political struggle'

outside of a new Union.

How should the problems be resolved? Our general answer has long been known. Only nonviolently, only on a voluntary basis, only on the basis of the real common interests of all the peoples inhabiting the great Eurasian area.

That is why we have supported and will support any steps to establish union relations with Belarus...

the people's patriotic forces have gained control of the executive power in a whole string of regions... The new governors will need the masses' help in the battle against bureaucracy. The specific forms are well known and have been tried out in practice in a number of places, not without success. They include committees of social salvation, councils of labour collectives, and public monitoring.

The process of Russia's internal consolidation will become irreversible only provided that it is reliably protected against outside interference. This is not easy to ensure since all the Soviet Union's international positions were surrendered practically without a fight and the country's political independence and defence capability have declined sharply...

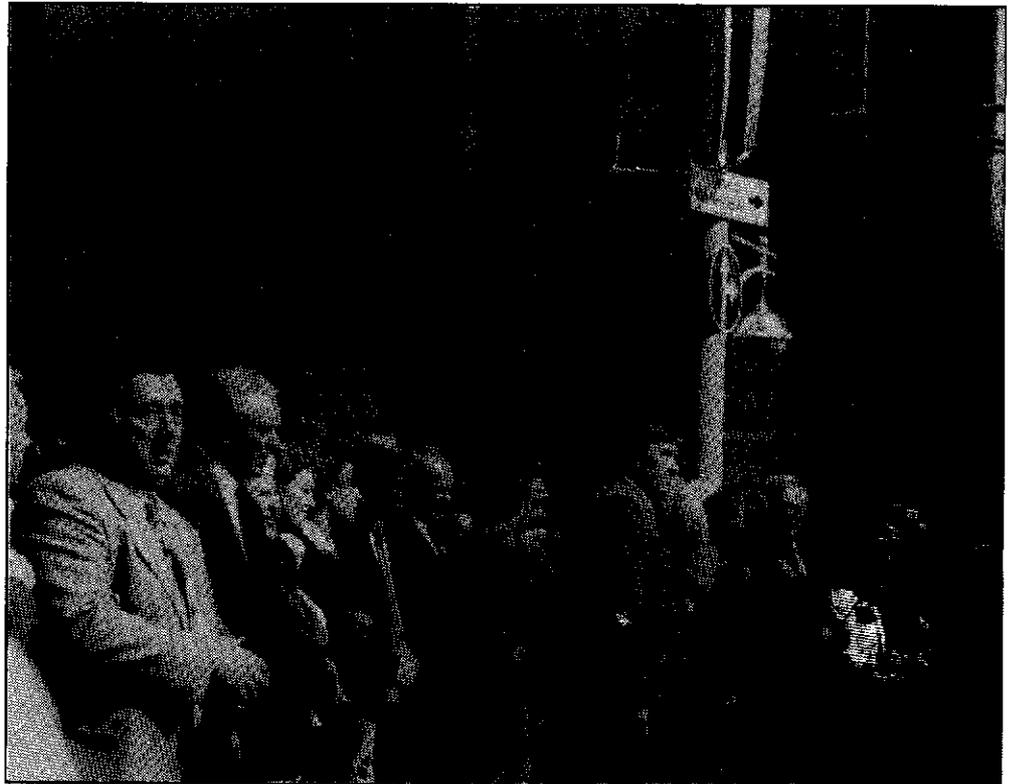
The aims of NATO expansion are obvious: to reinforce the positions of their supporters in Moscow with tank guns in Eastern Europe. And in the event of the advent of people's power, to encircle Russia with a 'cordon sanitaire'. Not to allow its traditional influence on the course of world affairs to be restored.

The patriotic forces' strategy must be constructed in the light of this...in order to secure its foreign policy interests Russia needs a powerful economic and defence potential.

But the destructive processes have impacted most severely on the state of the Armed Forces. Evidently our rulers have completely forgotten that a state which refuses to feed its own army will end up feeding somebody else's.

We have always demanded and will continue to demand of the government that the army gets everything necessary to ensure the reliable defence of the country. But here we must tell servicemen the unpalatable truth. No financial and material injections will count for anything unless the army re-acquires its moral backbone.

People in uniform have a duty to seriously ponder the lessons of the two state coups of 1991 and 1993.



At that time the army passively watched the destruction of the state, to which they had sworn loyalty and service.

Is this not the root of the present authorities' contemptuous attitude to the Armed Forces' needs? The root of the endless 'set-ups' like the criminal Chechen adventure?...

III. The Party in the Struggle for the Masses

We are opposed here by a gigantic machine for stupefying minds and zombifying souls. The radio and electronic media have been transformed into a factor of filth, violence, and depravity...

Preparations are underway for a new wave of anti-patriotic hysteria designed to peak in the fall and called upon to distract attention from the looming disaster. They want to again portray our party as some kind of monster intent on destroying democracy and freedom of speech...

We must respond in a fitting way to the new campaign of lies and slander...

I wish to stress again and again: the CPRF is calling the people not back to socialism but forward to socialism. Reverting to a previous model would mean dooming ourselves to repeating the past...

The current catastrophic processes in no way just fell from the sky but are largely the continuation of

'The CPRF is calling the people not back to socialism but forward to socialism. Reverting to a previous model would mean dooming ourselves to repeating the past'

the worst tendencies of the not so distant past.

The trend toward the domination of production by heavy industry and the bias toward a raw material type of economy started not five-10 years ago but at least in the seventies...

If there is no advantage in honest labour today, the roots of the loss of incentives for productive labour should be sought in the alienation of working people from the means of production and the imperfection of the forms for every citizen to exercise their right to common ownership.

When we are astounded at the passivity and equanimity with which the people reacted to predatory privatisation we have to remember that 'big-scale privatisation' was psychologically and morally primed by 'small-scale privatisation' — that is, the overt pilfering which flourished in our country for many years.

When we are outraged by the current decline in morals and the ideological impoverishment of society we should acknowledge that this calamity did not start yesterday either. The formalism of 'ideological education work' and disparity between word and deed sowed the seeds of skepticism and mistrust, which have now produced their poisonous blooms.

Finally, when we link all our troubles with the activity of the 'party of power', we must not disregard the fact that this party consists to a considerable extent of former nomenclatura members and is a direct suc-



cessor to it. Are the rottenness of the party-state apparatus and its corruption and merging with the criminal world an exclusively present-day phenomenon?

It was precisely that bureaucratized section of the CPSU that spawned the treachery and spawned Gorbachev and Yeltsin, who are the real custodians and augments of the dirty legacy. It is precisely this still-flourishing 'party of power' that is seeking to deviously offload its sins onto genuine communists.

So we resolutely reject that kind of legacy and bear responsibility for it only to the extent that we representatives of the other, patriotic wing of the party did not manage to purge the party of crooks and parvenus in time.

The Kind of Legacy to Which We Remain Loyal

We are taking a different legacy with us into the future: the ideal of social justice, the ideal of state patriotism, the ideal of Soviet people's power, which alone can ensure the realisation of human rights in the full sense....

We are also carrying with us the legacy of the soviets. Soviets as an organ of statehood are the product of the people's creativity, were cre-

ated by the people, and matched perfectly age-old national notions about the organisation of power.

What advantages do soviets have over a parliament and municipalities? First, soviets are closer in name to people's representation than parliaments. To the accompaniment of talk about the need for members of parliament to be professional, parliament is turning into a corporation of lawyers, economists, and journalists.

Second, soviets create a more effective barrier to the penetration of organs of power by demagogues and adventurists. This barrier is provided by the actual principle of election. A labour collective nominates its own representative to a soviet. So people know the candidates well.

Third, the soviet principle makes it possible to organise real control of the activity of the people's elected representative.

Fourth, soviets eliminate the fatal separation of legislative and executive powers. They protect society against a struggle among the branches of power. They shape unity of action among power structures...

On Allies

We will allow a strategic alliance based on a common ideological foundation only with those political forces which are struggling for ulti-

mate objectives shared with the CPRF — that is, for Russia's rebirth on the basis of socialism. Such an alliance could include all communist movements, the Agrarian Party, and the Agro-Industrial Union... Close cooperation with the communist parties of the CIS countries — a guarantee of the revival of a union of fraternal peoples — is particularly important.

A strong tactical alliance capable of developing in the long term into a strategic alliance is also possible with left-socialist and left-patriotic organisations.

It is also important to strive for tactical agreements with certain social democratic organisations or individual representatives of such organisations.

Right-wing bourgeois parties will not become allies of the CPRF in any circumstances. But some of them could play the role of associates [poputchiki] in solving national security problems, establishing democratic institutions, boosting the economy and culture, and so forth...

[With regard to] Zhirinovsky, Yavlinsky, Lebed, and their ilk... Our task is to persistently disclose the profoundly anti-people essence concealed behind the surface gloss.

IV. Our Prospects

Enormous gratitude is due to the thousands of ordinary party activists who, despite their leaders' treachery, the mass defections by careerists and turncoats, the prohibition and terror, did everything possible and impossible at a difficult time to restore and strengthen the party ranks...

It is proposed that a number of amendments be made to the party Program... It is proposed that the very first paragraph, which talks about a return to capitalism, be supplemented with the words: 'This is the path of political reaction and social regression, the path of national disaster leading to the demise of Russian civilization'.

The second paragraph notes that Russia is being turned into a target for the next redivision of the world. Later on in the preamble there is a fundamental addition concerning the need to merge the socio-class and national liberation movement into a single mass resistance movement...

We are confident — Russia will be great and socialist!

(translated from Sovetskaya Rossiya, 22 April, 1997)

Left Unity also opposed support for SAAR, but they could not even persuade 50 delegates to support them on this.

The turn around in the anti-racist debate and the strength of the black-Jewish alliance was further underlined by the fringe meetings. The Union of Jewish Students (UJS) had a record attendance of over 600 people to their meeting where Lee Jasper, representing the National Black Caucus, was a speaker. The Student Assembly Against Racism fringe meeting the following lunch-time was the next biggest with more than 200 attending.

The second key issue at conference was education funding where the impact of the attacks on students' living standards and the threat to impose tuition fees continues to present the challenge of developing a strategy to resist this attack

While the Blairite Labour Students leadership of NUS succeeded in winning a policy against free education they were under considerable pressure to make a strong stand against tuition fees — which is likely to place them in conflict with the new Labour government. Labour Students will, in any case, meet serious problems when a Labour government begins to enact its manifesto pledge that 'the costs of student maintenance should be repaid by graduates on an income-related basis, from the career success to which higher education has contributed'.

As at previous conferences, the right's success was aided by the tactics imposed by *Workers' Liberty* on the Campaign for Free Education. Their substitution of ultra-left rhetoric for serious proposals on how to pay for free education has weakened the CFE. Left wing opposition to this fact among the CFE's own ranks was reflected in the visible decline in the CFE at the conference. The CFE fringe meeting — which had around 200 people last year with Ken Livingstone — had about 35 people present and was one of the smallest at conference.

This decline of the CFE does not reflect a fall in opposition to tuition fees and loans. This was clear in the executive elections. Declining support for the CFE reflected discontent with the campaign's tactics, particularly its failure to adopt arguments which could demonstrate how education could be funded without attacking the working class or students themselves. The CFE had the



potential to become a broad, mass campaign. Its failure to do so is a result of the fact that the campaign was controlled by *Workers' Liberty* who refused on principle to take up a serious economic argument on how to pay for free education or to involve students who had different views on such matters to their own. This failure to present a serious and coherent funding strategy allowed Labour Students to get away with arguing that grants and fees were pitted against child benefit and other forms of welfare spending.

Secondly, the CFE failed to take up the issue of fees centrally or rapidly enough and as a result initiatives, such as the Huddersfield No to Fees conference and various press conferences with Campaign Group MPs were organised outside of the CFE by independent left forces. Other colleges such as Kent waged their own campaigns against fees clauses being included in prospectuses.

Thirdly, through *Workers' Liberty's* leadership the CFE failed to grasp the significance of Dearing, again necessitating other initiatives such as *Dearing Watch* and by individual colleges outside of the CFE. Had the CFE led the fight on these key issues and made the link with colleges under attack it would have been strengthened. Instead, incorporating all views and building the most representative and powerful campaign was seen by *Workers' Lib-*

erty as a threat to their political dominance of the CFE. Officers and members of the CFE Steering Committee who expressed opposition to the tactics used by the campaign were not informed of meetings and decisions were taken outside of the elected steering committee.

Many key left independents, who were central to the CFE a year ago have since left. This was evident at conference: the *Workers' Liberty* leadership of the CFE presented what had been a significant defeat as a victory. Many were put off by the purely negative rhetoric against Labour Students during the debate, which was not balanced with any positive statement about how to pay for free education, other than 'make the rich pay' declarations. A group of students organised as an independents caucus in the CFE distributed their own alternative leaflet advancing serious economic arguments on how to pay for free education as the central theme, alongside the fight against fees.

A third example of the beginnings of a change in the politics in NUS was provided by the outcome of the executive elections. The elections represented a shift to the left.

The 'block of 12' part-time places on the NUS executive committee indicated firstly, significant support for left wing candidates, and secondly that new political currents were emerging outside of the exist-

'Perhaps the most significant decision at this year's NUS conference was to create a Black Student officer on the NUS executive'

ing blocks.

Labour Students were only able to get two of their three candidates elected. This is significant because it is a taste of the kind of opposition Labour Student will encounter when the Labour government attacks students.

Left Unity candidates also declined from 3 to 2 on the block of 12, with those elected scraping on at the bottom of the poll. They prioritised an unknown, white, Left Unity candidate over a better known black woman Left Unity candidate. Carolyn Culver, a left independent CFE candidate who stood on a platform which made the economic case for fully state-funded education and which supported the Student Assembly Against Racism, came high in the poll, gaining significantly more votes than the Left Unity candidates.

In addition a number of 'centre' independent candidates were elected, plus a member of the Socialist Worker Student Society.

The breakthrough at conference to place racism centrally on the student movement's agenda would not have been possible without the involvement of the wider anti-racist movement outside NUS, which shone the light of reality onto NUS' distorted agenda. The campaign which SAAR and the National Assembly Against Racism (NAAR) had waged had begun to organise students against racism, in particular through the two Student Assembly Against Racism conferences in 1995 and 1996.

Following conference the need to bring together a new left political current to consolidate these progressive changes in NUS is even clearer. The debates on racism and on student funding and the executive elections all show the potential for a class struggle left in NUS which can give leadership to the vast numbers of students with progressive views who don't fit into *Workers' Liberty's* pro-imperialist and sectarian politics, nor the right-wing politics of Labour Students. Developing such a current is vital because students have to play a part in the most important struggles in society, not abstain from them. Over the last decade NUS has been a training ground for Blairite cadre rather than providing new activists for the political vanguard of the left. Changing this situation would not just help students — it would be a contribution to every progressive struggle in society.

The left NUS needs

Paul Cornell, who until recently was national chair of Left Unity and David Meech, former press and publicity officer of the Campaign for Free Education, spoke to Socialist Action about recent developments in NUS left politics and what sort of left current is needed.

What are your main concerns about the left in NUS at present?

Paul: The main current has been Left Unity and the problem is its sectarian politics and practice. The Campaign for Free Education has been narrowed down in a really ridiculous way because anyone with a slightly different view to *Workers' Liberty*, who control it, is seen as a problem. Similarly, the liberation campaigns, which are very important in NUS, are approached cynically. Left Unity is extraordinarily tokenistic. They proposed no positive agenda or serious campaigning against homophobia or racism or sexism and just see these campaigns as potential recruiting ground.

David: There is no democracy. As far as we are aware there was no meeting or democratic process to select the candidates who stood for Left Unity for NUS executive. The last AGM was three years ago.

How is it that a current like this was able to present itself as a left?

Paul: With the shift in the Labour Students leadership of NUS to the right, Left Unity was able to get away with just being an opposition to the right wing's policies on funding, in particular. On that one issue, and not even on the tactics of how to fight the campaign, they were able to present themselves as the left opposition.

What is the future for the left in NUS then?

Paul: On the positive side, the new unity between black and Jewish students is the key development. The work between the Student Assembly Against Racism and the Union of Jewish Students was important for beginning to set a more progressive terrain of debate. There are a lot of left-orientated black students who also are keen to push this forward, which they'll have to get a constitutional amendment passed on the black students officer. The national black students alliance is beginning to kick off within NUS and that could be important for the whole left.

David: You only have to look at the Student Assembly Against Racism fringe meeting when the Union of Jewish Students intervened. People from a range of political backgrounds were creating a completely new discussion, compared to the CFE fringe meetings which were more or less non-existent.

Paul: By contrast, only 2 Left Unity candidates got elected and they were at the bottom of the block of 12 seats on the national executive, whereas Carolyn Culver an independent left candidate finished about sixth. In the anti-racist debate, where LU opposed the demand to stopping the BNP's election broadcast and jeopardised the call for a black students officer by compositing in lots of ultra-left and sectarian rhetoric, they alienated an awful lot of students, particularly black students. Left Unity don't appreciate how abhorrent it would be for black, Jewish and many other people to have the BNP's opinions on national television.

Any new left will need to put the issues of self-organisation, in NUS the liberation campaigns, at its centre. LU has a very narrow understanding of what is working class or what is left wing. How do you relate to black youth, the black working class which is becoming a large part of further and higher education with LU's politics. How do you relate to international students or students who care about anti-imperialist issues if you never take those issues up because you're worried it might be unpopular. You don't. It's a recipe for division. We need a left that can be hegemonic, that has an economic alternative to the arguments of Blair's supporters in Labour Students but also has a policy for every section of students.

David: Because of Left Unity a number of people have been alienated from the left. It will be important to ensure that a left current is an alliance of people with different concerns as well as having a clear policy on key issues.

Paul: The left thinks of itself as putting the positive agenda. Just denouncing people as sell-outs is not enough to win the argument and win the leadership of NUS. In the last year people from a more positive political perspective have put forward serious arguments about how to pay for free education, about what NUS has to do to fight racism, and at this year's conference it was those people who got the applause and the support.

Labour moves towards tuition fees

As the *Times Higher Education Supplement* commented on 11 April, 'Fear of [the middle class vote]... has driven the parties to push higher education off the election agenda... Higher education is one of the biggest middle class benefits. The conspiracy of silence implies that higher education will be in the firing line after the election.'¹

The parameters of this attack will be set by the Dearing Committee of Inquiry into Higher Education, set to report 'on or around July 17'.²

All the indications are that Dearing will present three main options aimed at solving the crisis in higher education funding:

- Completely replacing student grants with loans (probably at the National Union of Students (NUS)/Committee of Vice Chancellors and Principals (CVCP) proposed level of £4,475/year), saving the government £1bn annually;

- Introducing tuition fees — the Committee of Vice-Chancellors and Principals (CVCP) argued in their Dearing submission that students should be charged 44 per cent of tuition costs (£2,400 per year). The Dearing Committee has also taken a keen interest in the Australian fees system — the Higher Education Contribution Scheme (HECS) — which offers a 25 per cent discount to students who can afford to pay their fees up-front and charges higher fees to students on courses which are expensive to run (e.g. medicine) or which are deemed to confer greater earning potential (e.g. law).

- Two-plus-two system — so called because students would be required to gain a 2 year 'associate degree' at a locally based college before going on to university. While this system might appear attractive to part-time and mature students, its real lure for the government is

that it costs £2,000 less per year to educate further education college students based at home, compared with students studying away at universities.³ The 2-plus-2 system would lend itself well to the creation of a British 'super-league', as advocated by the vice-chancellors of some self-styled 'elite' universities. This would mean a smaller, more elite, university



Baroness Blackstone — new Minister for Further and Higher Education and a supporter of tuition fees

sector which would monopolise research funding and levy entrance fees for students wishing to avoid a 2 year 'apprenticeship' in an expanded, but far less well resourced, locally based college system.

Labour's response to Dearing will be effectively determined by its economic policy, most significantly its intention to keep within Tory public spending plans.

On the basis of these spending plans, the Department for Education and Employment warned that there could be 'no assumption that higher education's share of the total education budget from public funds will increase or can even in the medium term be sustained at its present level'.⁴

Yet Labour, in contrast to the Tories, is committed to the further expansion of higher education.⁵ Having ruled out increased government spending to pay for this, however, Labour will be looking to students to

foot the bill.

Thus, Labour's manifesto pledged to abolish student grants.⁶ Furthermore, the probability that Labour will consider tuition fees certainly increased with the appointment of Baroness Blackstone as minister for further and higher education. Blackstone is a long-time advocate of tuition fees and even back in 1972 was

foundational Union of Students. However, the dominance of the right wing of Labour Students in NUS stands to be shaken by the inevitable widespread opposition to an imposition of maintenance loans and fees by a Labour government.

The need for a coherent and serious alternative economic strategy to fund education, as outlined in the *Socialist Economic Bulletin* and *Dearing Watch* was again illustrated at this year's NUS conference. Attempting to fight for free education on the basis of mere rhetoric, a tactic perfected by the Campaign for Free Education, led by supporters of *Workers Liberty's* politics, only makes life easier for the right wing.

In contrast, consistently illustrating that there *are* realistic alternatives to the Labour government's economic strategy, which would provide ample resources to improve student living standards and increase access to higher education, provides a basis for winning the support of the majority of students. Not only that, but it is the only method by which students will be able to convince the rest of the population that it's in the interests of everyone to fight for free education.

By Paul Lewis

Footnotes

¹ *Times Higher Education Supplement*, Editorial, 11 April 1997

² *THES*, 'Dearing Lists the Options', 21 March 1997,

³ *THES*, 'Parties air differences in policies', 14 February 1997

⁴ *Guardian*, 'Bombshell for universities', 6 February 1997

⁵ Labour Party general election manifesto, April 1997, p.9

⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷ *THES*, 'Radicals rule the roost. OK', 9 May 1997

⁸ CVCP, 'The CVCP's evidence to the National Committee of Inquiry into Higher Education', November 1996

German PDS debates strategy

Since 1989 social democracy in western Europe has moved sharply to the right, championing the monetarist framework of the Treaty of Maastricht. At the same time mass political currents to the left of social democracy have emerged and consolidated themselves in the form of the Party of Democratic Socialism (PDS) in Germany, the United Left in Spain, Communist Refoundation in Italy and other similar currents elsewhere. These parties have mass support — Communist Refoundation, for example, increased its vote in the May local elections to nearly 12 per cent — and parliamentary representation. But they now face the question of what tactics should be pursued towards the larger social democratic parties to their right — whether to vote in parliament for them to form the government, under what, if any, conditions to join such a government, and so on. In Italy, for example, the government depends on the votes of Communist Refoundation for its parliamentary majority. In Germany, the PDS faces the same issue on a regional level and may in the future do so on a national level. Peter Rosen reports on their debate.

The German Party of Democratic Socialism (PDS) grew out of the collapse of the old ruling Communist party of East Germany, the Socialist Unity of Germany (SED). At its first conference in 1989 it defined itself as an 'opposition party', that is a party whose role was to challenge and change the existing capitalist order of things, rather than to alter it within the accepted bourgeois consensus, as is the case with German Socialist Party (SPD).

The current leadership is formed from a mixture of people who had some leadership function in the SED, some who were within the SED but critical and others, from both east and west, who have moved into the party since '91.

The party has a federal structure based on local branches along with working groups (AGs). The AGs are free associations of members who want to work around subjects such as racism, women's liberation or the trade unions. Both branches and AGs may send delegates to conference. In addition, organised political platforms are allowed within the party and send delegates to conference. A proposal by the leadership to remove this right was rejected at the PDS conference in Schwerin in January this year.

In the elections to the Bundestag, Germany's parliament, in 1994, the PDS received 4.4 per cent of the vote overall — 20 per cent in east Germany. In opinion polls in November 1996 PDS support was 6 per

cent, 22 to 25 per cent in the east and 1.5 per cent in the west.

While the average age of PDS members is much higher than is the norm for radical parties of the left, this is not true of the party's voters. Thus for the combined federal/national/Euro elections in June 1994, the party received 4.9 per cent of the votes in the 18-24 age group, 5 per cent in the 25-34 group, 6.4 per cent of 35-44 group, 5 per cent of the 45-59 group and 4.2 per cent of voters 60 and older.

In regional elections, the PDS peak vote often occurs in the 18-24 age group, and never above the 35-44 age group.

These results show that the PDS, a party ostracised and denounced by the German establishment, is supported in the east both by substantial numbers who were young teenagers at the time of unification and also of those who grew up and started their working lives in the GDR. While the PDS has mass support in the east, its support in the west is relatively weak.

That so many people in the east support the ruling communist party tells us a great deal about the impact of 'unification'.

Unemployment across the whole of Germany stands at a record high. At the end of January 1997, the official rate for the whole of Germany was 12 per cent and rising, but in the east the figure was 20 per cent. By October 1996, the PDS estimated that at least 26 per cent of the working population in the east were with-

out regular employment. The proportion of industrial jobs in the east is only half that of the west, as is the per capita domestic product. Although 20 per cent of the population lives in the east, only 3 per cent of the country's exports are produced there.

The PDS has no short term perspective of becoming a mass party in the west. The German bourgeoisie is doing all it can to neutralise it, by simultaneously trying to marginalise and witchhunt it and win it to become part of the 'establishment'.

Germany is currently governed by a right wing coalition of the Christian Democratic Union (CDU), its Bavarian sister party the Christian Social Union (CSU) and the Free Democrats (FDP). Despite the highest unemployment since the end of the second war, the German Social Democracy (SPD)'s vote is stagnant or declining at around 30 per cent.

The governmental parties have been waging a vicious policy of 'Ausgrenzung' against the PDS — to drive it out of the orbit of bourgeois acceptability. This has three related purposes. Firstly, to attempt to dislodge the PDS as a major player in the eastern political landscape. Secondly, to rule out the PDS *with its current politics* as a factor in the coalition calculations of the SPD and the Greens. Thirdly, to tame the PDS. It is totally unacceptable to the German bourgeoisie that an anti-capitalist party should exist as a factor in mass politics.

It is in this context that one must view the debate on governmental 'participation', 'toleration' or 'opposition' within the PDS since 1995. There is no prospect of the PDS finding coalition partners at a national level in the next year or two, even if it wanted to. The PDS, however, has many hundreds of councillors and elected mayors and more than 20 members of parliament. Moreover, the PDS 'tolerates' the regional governments of Mecklenburg-Vorpommern and Sachsen-Anhalt. 'Toleration' has meant not only voting for an SPD government against the directly capitalist parties, but also voting for the budget. While, therefore, coalition or toleration is not an im-

'The PDS has mass support in the east of Germany, but is relatively weak in the west'

mediate issue at a national level, the debate has already opened on what it should do when and if that issue is posed.

The question was aired extensively in the August 1996 issue of *Disput*, the PDS' monthly journal. The debate was in the context of the current attacks by Chancellor Kohl on the welfare state, the conditions of the working class in Germany, and the increasingly overt use of German troops outside German borders. The central issue was whether the net effect of governmental participation would be to weaken or strengthen the position of the working class in Germany. The question of whether the German, or indeed any consolidated capitalist state, would allow itself to be reformed to the point where it did not function in the interests of capital was not directly approached.

An article by Uwe-Jens Heuer, Ekkehard Lieberam and Gregor Schirmer argued:

'Firstly, the question of governmental participation is not to be answered for all time with "Yes" or "No". The answer is dependent on the concrete political and social gains for the citizens and consequently above all on the political balance of forces, but also from the level of democratic and extra-parliamentary movements, from the economic situation and the condition of state finances, from the clarity of the reform program of the left parties, but also from the relations between these parties.

'Secondly, left governments have only ever brought social and political improvements for the citizens, where they were brought into being and overseen by powerful extra-parliamentary movements. This contributed to the building of the social (welfare) state and — with limitations — to the extension of democracy. Examples for this are the people's front government in France and the (British) Labour government of 1945. The reforms of Willy Brandt would also not have been possible without the movement of 68.

'Thirdly, it can not be overlooked, that the governmental participation of a social democratic, left socialist or communist party, (above all under conditions of an unfavourable political balance of forces and a crisis situation) is, as a rule, the last step to solid integration of the relevant party in the existing power structure (the most recent example: the PDS in Italy).'

An article by six leading support-



ers of the Communist Platform (KPF) argued:

'Naturally... the PDS should not hold back if the chance arises to remove the Kohl government.

'The way things are at the moment, however, the question requires filling out more fundamentally. Are appreciable parts of the SPD and the Greens ready to get rid of the Kohl government with the support of the PDS, without as a precondition dictating, in reality, a new program and statute for the PDS? ...Under the given conditions, we see the task of our party in the moulding of the optimum interplay between extra-parliamentary and parliamentary opposition. Precisely from those people who contemplate participation in coalitions, to which no one has yet invited [the PDS], it would be expected that the preconditions for which the PDS should stand, would be defined: Should, for instance, PDS ministers help in the dismantling of welfare rights? Should they accept co-responsibility for the expulsion of asylum seekers? Should they help out with the discrimination against East Germans, pension cuts (for those accused of crimes in the old GDR), and the 'justice' of the victors? No one can behave as if the welfare or otherwise of the party and its voters depended on us forcing ourselves into responsibilities, that with the given balance of forces, would only force us to wheel and deal to the point where no one trusted us.'

In the event, these questions were not unambiguously clarified by the January conference. However, both the leadership and currents to its left appear to have concluded that the

PDS has moved closer to becoming an accepted part of the political landscape in Germany. The word on everyone's lips was 'arrived'. In an interview two days before the conference, PDS Chair, Gregor Gysi, said: 'We need to make a culture leap. We must change from being a foreign body within this society to being a part of it. This has nothing to do with accommodation. The PDS is the only party which has developed an understanding of the feelings of the East Germans. But, if we want to change this republic, we must become a party of this republic.'

The main motion, proposed by the leadership, stated 'The question, whether a parliamentary fraction of the PDS operates in an oppositional role, in a situation of toleration, or as part of a coalition, will be determined by the PDS — in so far as it is up to the PDS — according to how in the circumstances at the time, the greatest degree of social change in the direction of the goals of the PDS can be achieved. The question of a governmental participation presents itself, therefore, to the PDS as part of the overall political framework and relationship of forces when these make possible the creation or defence of the preconditions for a social, ecological and democratic change in the [German] republic'.

The leadership of Nord-Rhein Westfalen proposed the following amendment which was supported by the AG Young Comrades, the Marxist Forum, the Communist Platform, Forum West and others: 'The question of governmental participation presents itself... only when this makes possible concrete advances to a social, ecological and democratic

'An amendment stating that governmental participation was only acceptable if it made possible concrete social, ecological and democratic advances was narrowly defeated by the PDS congress'

change in the [German] republic'.

This amendment, which united forces ranging from those who wanted more precise conditions for participation in a coalition through to those who reject participation in principle was defeated by 211 to 183 votes with 36 abstentions.

The leadership of the PDS has set its sights on getting over the five per cent threshold for parliamentary representation in the elections scheduled for 1998. It says that it must 'accept responsibility' if it is to be taken seriously by the electorate.

However, the reality is that at present governmental responsibility can only be on terms dictated by pro-capitalist parties, whether of the right (CDU/CSU/FDP) or of the left (SPD, Greens). Within the PDS currents like the Communist Platform, the Marxist Forum, the AG Youth, as well as more regionally based groups like Forum West are trying to get to grips with these issues.

These currents rightly assert that the PDS needs to work together with other 'progressive' movements and parties around their particular goals without either side expecting the other to abandon its program.

But different issues are mixed up here. Clearly the PDS should vote for the SPD and Greens to form local and regional administrations and, after the general election, the national government against the direct parties of the bourgeoisie. It can do



Anti-fascist demonstration, Munich, 1 March

so without taking any political responsibility for their policies.

In Italy, Communist Refoundation have voted for the Olive Tree Alliance to form the government without signing its programme, taking ministerial positions or renouncing their right to vote against legislation to which they object. In fact the Olive Tree Alliance government is not led by the Italian social de-

mocracy — the PDS — even though that is the largest party in the coalition, because the PDS have made a directly bourgeois politician, Romano Prodi, the Prime Minister — which in our view means that the government does not merit left support and still less so does its budget.

Nonetheless the Communist Refoundation's tactics do show that it would be possible in Germany, for example, for the PDS to support social democracy forming the local or national government without voting for or taking responsibility for its policies or budget. Furthermore, by allowing the population to test social democracy's program which has the majority support of the working class, the conditions are created to win support for a superior program to its left.

To enter a *coalition* with the SPD is a different issue. That would mean taking political responsibility for the government's policies — which could only be done if an acceptable program was negotiated. In the real world, the SPD is not going to agree to a program to defend the interests of the working class.

The debates in the PDS and Communist Refoundation show that with mass political parties to the left of social democracy consolidated in much of Europe, their tactics towards the larger social democratic parties to their right are going to have decisive weight in their further progress.

Communist Refoundation vote rises by 50 per cent

Italy's two rounds of local elections, concluded on 11 May, witnessed a significant increase in support for Communist Refoundation. The elections, which took place against a backdrop of an official unemployment level of 12.5 per cent, tax increases and spending cuts to try to prepare Italy for membership of European Monetary Union, saw a 50 per cent increase in Communist Refoundation's vote, from just over 8 per cent to 12 per cent of the vote. The elections took place as Italian voters had just started to pay the 'Euro-tax' imposed to

try to reduce the budget deficit. Voters responded by ensuring that the party which did best was the one most opposed to EMU.

The two rounds of local elections involved 9.4 million voters, almost a fifth of the electorate. Communist Refoundation now holds the balance of power in Italy's lower house of parliament. The strength of Communist Refoundation's support was underlined in the second round of voting, where the victory of a number of candidates of the ruling Olive Tree alliance was only secured by winning the support of CR notably in Turin.

Communist Refoundation

new strength increases the difficulty for Romano Prodi's government to make the necessary attacks on welfare spending to meet the terms for EMU membership set by the Maastricht Treaty. In response to the prediction in the International Monetary Fund's Economic Outlook in April that Italy, with a predicted budget deficit of 3.3 per cent for 1997 and 4.1 per cent for 1998, Prodi claimed that the government is 'deeply committed to following its own action of structural reform which will allow Italy to arrive at the single currency date with all its papers in order'. However, meet-

ing this aim would require massive cuts to welfare spending and/or tax increases. The government has already earmarked pensions for attack. However, getting such policies through the Italian parliament will depend on the support of Communist Refoundation, which is pledged to defend pensions and the welfare system. After the first round of the elections Communist Refoundation leader Fausto Bertinotti stated that only proposals on welfare reform which did not 'entail any public spending cuts' would be supported.

By Louise Lang

Romania and Bulgaria set for economic convulsion

Since the break up of the eastern European centrally planned economies in 1989, the countries of the region have embarked upon a number of major changes that will result in the full incorporation of central and eastern Europe into capitalist Europe — the so-called 'return to Europe'. These changes have aimed at breaking down the pillars of the former system. Firstly, to destroy the political influence of the Communist Parties on political and social life. Secondly, to end central economic planning and state ownership. Thirdly, to break the eastwards orientation of the region towards the former Soviet Union, both in trade and military terms.

The first category of political change has been fully achieved. The second and third categories, of economic and regional orientation change, have not however, been uniformly developed throughout central and eastern Europe.

What became clear by the early 1990s was that the region was undergoing a kind of two-speed transformation, where central Europe — Poland, Hungary, the Czech Republic and Slovakia — were more 'advanced' in most areas of economic reform than the countries further east — Romania and Bulgaria, particularly in relation to the privatisation process.

Whereas the central European countries mentioned above have, according to the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD), 'reached the stage in reform where some action has been taken to reduce the abuse of market power and promote a competitive environment... and that substantial progress has been made in establishing bank solvency', this has not been uniformly developed throughout eastern Europe.

Romania and Bulgaria have been slower in establishing the institutional framework for capitalism. Romania has been the most behind on the introduction of competition policy as well as

being the most reluctant privatiser.

This can be clearly shown through gross domestic product figures (EBRD, 1995 estimates). Private sector share of GDP in percentages are as follows: Czech Republic 70 per cent; Hungary 60 per cent; Poland 60 per cent; Slovakia 60 per cent; Bulgaria 45 per cent; Romania 40 per cent. As a comparison, figures for the Russian Federation are 55 per cent and Belarus 15 per cent.

The figures for privatisation of large-scale state-owned enterprises are equally revealing.

In the Czech Republic and Hungary over 50 per cent of large state-owned enterprises have been privatised, in Poland and Slovakia over 25 per cent, and until recently in Bulgaria and Romania there had been minimal privatisation of large-scale State Owned Enterprises.

The slower development of privatisation in Romania and Bulgaria has been the direct result of the political situation in those countries since 1989. In

Romania the political dominance of Ion Iliescu, and his Socialist Democratic Party of Romania, prevented both a rapid transition to capitalism and the witch-hunting of people associated with the former regime. In Bulgaria, the dominance for most of the post-1989 period of the Bulgarian Socialist Party (emerging mostly from the former Communist Party), similarly prevented rapid structural change.

The situation in both these countries will change as these parties have recently been ousted by liberal bourgeois coalitions supported by western financial institutions who did their utmost to economically and politically destabilise the ruling parties. In Romania, the Democratic Convention under Victor Ciorbea has plunged into an IMF-guided neo-liberal reform programme based on price liberalisation, privatisation, liquidisation and restructuring which has already brought the government into conflict with the unions. On 15

May thousands marched in Bucharest, demanded cuts in food and energy prices and abandonment of plans to liquidate bankrupt companies. In Bulgaria, the new government of the United Democratic Forces has made agreements with the IMF and the World Bank for a similar programme of rapid economic transition.

Such changes will have a dramatic impact on the economies of those countries and will end the possibility of retaining any economic sovereignty. As the west seeks rapid integration of the whole region into its economic and security frameworks, through the expansion of the EU and NATO, it is not surprising that the half-way house status of Bulgaria and Romania was not to be tolerated. The implications of such integration for the social and economic conditions for the Romanian and Bulgarian people will no doubt rapidly become clear.

By Kate Hudson

Solidarity needed to save Mumia Abu-Jamal

The black political activist and writer Mumia Abu-Jamal, on death row in the US since 1982, has virtually exhausted the appeals process. Without significant pressure it is likely that Mumia will imminently face execution.

Mumia Abu-Jamal, born in 1954 in Philadelphia, was, at the time of his arrest on 9 December 1981, on charges of the murder of a police officer, a leading broadcast journalist.

His arrest came after a number of years of activism for black political rights. At the age of fourteen, Jamal was beaten and arrested for protesting at a presidential rally for George Wallace. In 1968, he became a founding member of the Philadelphia chapter of the Black Panther Party.

Jamal's hard-hitting criticism of the Philadelphia Police Department incensed the establishment, and eventually cost him his broadcast job.

In the early morning hours of December 9, 1981, Jamal was shot and beaten by police and charged with the murder of officer Daniel Faulkner. Put on trial before Philadelphia's notorious 'hanging judge', Albert Sabo, he was convicted and sentenced to death on July 3, 1982.

Jamal's appeal to the Pennsylvania Supreme Court was denied in March 1989, and the U.S. Supreme Court refused review of his case. In June 1995, Pennsylvania governor Tom Ridge signed Jamal's death warrant. Jamal filed a petition for post conviction relief in the Philadelphia Court of Common Pleas, alleging 22 separate violations of rights and procedures that occurred during his first trial, and seeking a reversal of his murder conviction. Large rallies were held around the world in Jamal's support and the death warrant was vacated a few days before his scheduled ex-

ecution (August 17, 1995).

All signs are that the Pennsylvania state supreme court is getting ready to turn Mumia's appeal for a new trial down. Then the only recourse is to file for a stay in the Federal Courts and then file for a Federal Writ of Habeas Corpus. If this is turned down, Mumia could be executed immediately.

Protests to:

● Martin F. Horn, Dept. of Corrections, 2520 Lehigh Road, P. O. Box 598, Camp Hill, PA 17002-0598

● Acting Superintendent Varner, SCI Greene, 1133 East Roy Furber Hwy., Waynesburg, PA 15370-8020

● Judge Donata Amodeo, 5th Floor US Dist Court, Pottsville, PA 17870

By Rashid Astraf

NATO expands towards Russia's borders

The first East European states will be admitted to NATO in July at a summit in Madrid and become full members by 1999. Having delayed for fear of losing Boris Yeltsin last year's presidential elections, NATO is now poised for rapid expansion towards Russia's western borders.

The states most likely to be admitted in July are Poland, Hungary and the Czech Republic. All three occupy the strategically crucial central European corridor between Russia and Germany. Other candidates are Romania, which has the backing of France, and Slovenia, sponsored by Italy.

A big obstacle to NATO enlargement was cleared away by a charter between NATO and Russia — the 'Founding Act on Mutual Relations, Cooperation and Security', agreed by NATO Secretary General Javier Solana and Russian foreign minister Yevgeny Primakov on 14 May.

The ground work for this was laid at a summit meeting between the United States and Russian presidents in Helsinki on 21 March. This summit secured Yeltsin's *de facto* acceptance of NATO's eastward expansion.

Expansion into East Europe does not stop at the formal enlargement of NATO. The US is also moving into the former Soviet Republics, Ukraine and the Baltic states.

Closer ties with Ukraine are due to be announced at the Madrid summit. In April General George Joulwan, NATO Supreme Allied Commander in Europe, held talks in Kiev aimed at a formal agreement with Ukraine and the possible establishment of a NATO-Ukraine council. Ukraine is the third largest recipient of American aid, after Israel and Egypt.

US Secretary of State, Madeleine Albright, visited the Baltic states at the end of March, as part of America's efforts at drawing up an interim security agreement with Latvia, Estonia and Lithuania.

The Madrid summit will also announce the setting up of an Atlantic Partnership Council to take forward NATO's 'Partnership for Peace' initiative, whereby the US has extended

its military relations across East Europe. There are 27 members to date, many of whom are now participating in joint military activities with NATO, including in Bosnia and Albania.

The Founding Act not only secures Russia's acquiescence in NATO's eastward expansion, but also establishes that Russia will not even be able to veto the incorporation of former Soviet states into NATO. The crucial clause of the Founding Act states: 'Provisions of this document do not provide NATO or Russia, at any stage, with a right of veto over the actions of the other nor do they infringe upon or restrict the rights of NATO or Russia to independent decision making and action.'

At the same time, the Act reaffirms the central features of NATO expansion: the right to station nuclear weapons and foreign troops on the territory of new members in East Europe. The text of the Founding Act reasserts NATO's nuclear first-use policy. While a preamble says that there are no plans to deploy nuclear weapons on the territory of new members *at present*, the key clause states: 'the members of NATO reiterate that they have no...need to change any aspects of NATO's nuclear posture.'

The text also clarifies NATO's right to move foreign troops into new members' territory as it chooses. It asserts: 'reinforcement may take place when necessary.'

The Act also ignores Russia's demands for a legally binding treaty defining its relations with NATO, and for a veto on matters affecting Russian interests. NATO insisted on a vague charter allowing it to retain a free hand, or as the *New York Times* put it: 'to assert the most important character of the North Atlantic Alliance — to carry out military plan-

ning and make decisions without Moscow's blessing.'

In addition to these fundamental aspects of relations between NATO and Russia, at the Helsinki summit Yeltsin accepted a series of steps which will allow the US to engage in a new phase of nuclear rearmament. He agreed three things. First, to push for the ratification of the Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty, Start II — which the Russian parliament refuses to pass. Start II would cut Russia's long-range nuclear warheads to 3000 by 2003. Second, Yeltsin agreed a proposal for a Start III treaty which would further slash Russia's nuclear arsenals to about 2000 within 10 years — 20 per cent of their cold war levels.

Third, Yeltsin withdrew opposition to the development by the US of a medium-range battlefield anti-missile shield. The significance of these systems is that they would allow the US to use its nuclear weapons, while protecting its own forces from any nuclear response. In other words, anti-ballistic missiles (ABMs) constitute a crucial step away from the phase of deterrence and towards nuclear war-fighting strategies.

Since Ronald Reagan's 'Star Wars' (the Strategic Defence Initiative), the US has been campaigning to gain acceptance for ABMs. The proposal for 'theatre' ABM systems is a step in that direction — with the advantage that it would not involve the astronomical costs of the full Star Wars programme.

The US is working on a joint project for theatre-wide anti-missile defence with Germany and is pressing Britain to join. Britain recently also floated a proposal for an ABM system.

The *Guardian* was correct to point out that: 'the real US objective is to move to a far more ambitious Start III regime, along with a formal settlement of the vexed issue of theatre missile defence — small and regional versions of the anti-missiles defence systems originally proposed in Ronald Reagan's stra-

'The US is also moving into Ukraine and the Baltic states'

tegic defence initiative.' (22 March)

This agreement on nuclear weapons would dramatically shift the military balance in favour of the United States and, ultimately, remove Russia's capacity to defend itself against NATO attack.

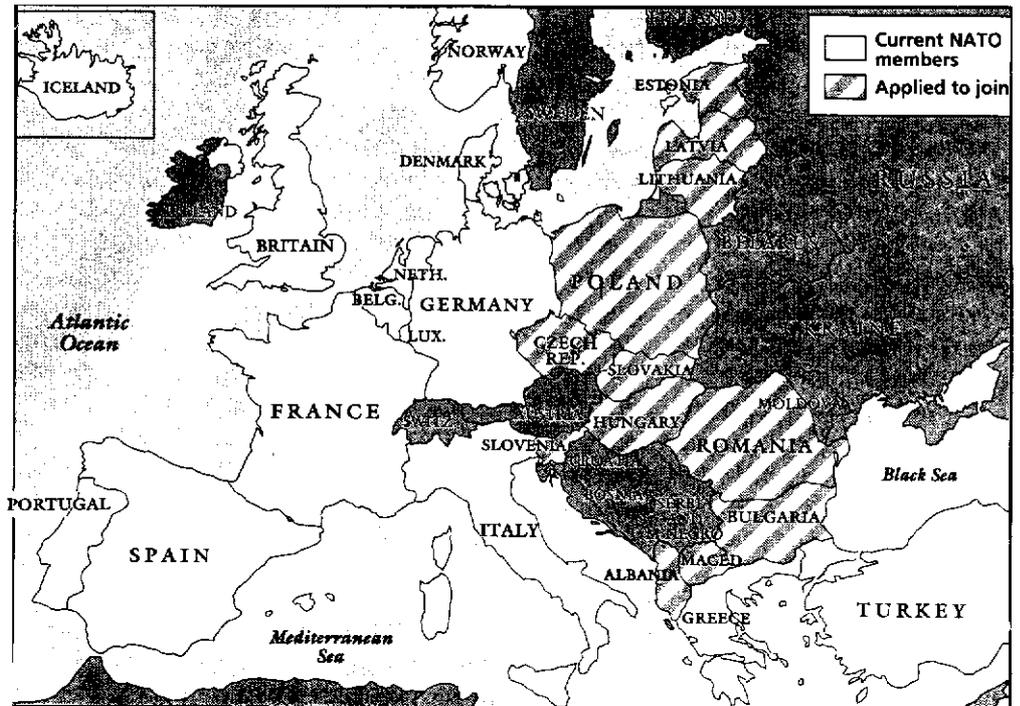
Communist Party leader Gennady Zyuganov said the agreements reached were in effect a 'Treaty of Versailles' for Russia and that Yeltsin was 'guilty of completely betraying the national interests of the country'. Zyuganov correctly observed that NATO's commitment not to station nuclear weapons on the territory of its new members should be treated as seriously as the promise to Gorbachev in 1989 that East Germany would not be brought into NATO after German unification.

In reality, Yeltsin has acquiesced in an advance by NATO which would greatly reduce the time taken for NATO nuclear missiles to reach Russian cities. It is because they understand that fact that the vast majority of Russia's people oppose NATO moving east.

NATO expansion is also going to unleash some serious political problems. First, it has the effect of totally unifying the Russian military against the West. As the military is required to envisage scenarios threatening Russia's integrity, the obvious menace of the most powerful war machine in the world advancing towards Russia's borders while the government starves the army of funds, can only intensify hostility to Yeltsin's government. On 22 May, President Yeltsin sacked both his defence minister and the head of the general staff — amid signs of serious disaffection in the armed forces.

Second, Belarus has responded to the NATO plan to move up to its western border by campaigning for reunification with Russia. This has been accompanied by the crushing of all the capitalist political forces in Belarus. The US has responded by trying to overturn the regime of President Alexander Lukashenko — but he appears to enjoy wide popular support, particularly around his proposal to restore the union with Russia. On 2 April, Belarus, which shares a long border with Poland, signed a treaty with Russia for closer military and economic cooperation.

Third, while East European states see joining NATO as a first step towards getting into the European Union — which many wrongly suppose will bring them West European living standards — they will find



that the big increase in military spending envisaged exacerbates rather than improves their economic problems. This will feed the popular unease already developing at the idea of making their countries the likely battlefields in any new war.

In Slovakia, for example, the *Financial Times* reported that 'Opinion polls suggest most Slovaks do not want nuclear weapons or foreign troops on their soil.' (4 April) A Czech opinion poll showed only 42 per cent of respondents favour membership of NATO (*Guardian* 23 April).

A US Congressional Budget Office (CBO) study in March 1996 estimated that Poland, Hungary and the Czech Republic would have to increase their defence budgets by a massive 60 per cent to meet the costs of membership. The CBO reported to the US Congress earlier this year that the total cost of NATO expansion would be up to \$35 billion over the next 12 years — with the US paying a mere \$2 billion of this.

These sorts of costs will have a devastating effect on East European economies. In the case of the Czech Republic, for example, the 1997 budget earmarked 32 billion koruna for defence. The government said it will increase this gradually in line with an anticipated growth in the economy. But official figures show a sharp contraction in economic activity in the opening months of this year. On 16 April, the Czech government announced steep budget cuts.

At the beginning of April, the Polish parliament approved a new

draft constitution, which includes a cap on national debt of 60 per cent of GDP and forbids central bank financing of the budget deficit. President Aleksander Kwasniewski said the new constitution 'confirms the values and principles...which lie at the root of the North Atlantic Alliance and the European Union'. Critics warn that clauses allowing for Polish entry into NATO and the EU could be misused to derogate sovereignty and also point out that it fails to enshrine trade union rights.

Poland is introducing pension reform to bring public spending down. Defence minister Stanislaw Dobrzanski recently announced cuts in the armed forces — from 230,000 at present down to 180,000 by 2004 — to help pay for new equipment that will be needed to make Czech Republic forces NATO-compatible.

The Hungarian government too is adopting harsh spending cuts. During February, farmers demonstrated against tax and social security contribution increases, culminating in a protest in Budapest on 11 March.

This next phase of NATO expansion into eastern Europe will not proceed without strains, however — which are poised to grow as the real effects of NATO expansion become clearer. These must be explained to as wide an audience as possible, to begin to develop the movement against NATO expansion that is urgently needed.

'Belarus has responded to NATO's move east by campaigning for reunification with Russia'

By Meg Bradley

The Berlin of George Grosz

The George Grosz exhibition at the London Royal Academy of Art leaves a strong image of his German 'types', explains *Sophie Bolt*. Cigars clenched between bared teeth, his industrialists are pushed right up against the front of his drawings and paintings, often counting money, or eating. His military types are square jawed, thick necked with huge gashes of mouths.

George Grosz joined the German Communist Party after the 1914-18 war. In 1924 he explained 'I was trying by means of my work to convince the world that it is ugly, sick and hypocritical'. This

exhibition, covering his work from 1912-30, is certainly representative of such a world.

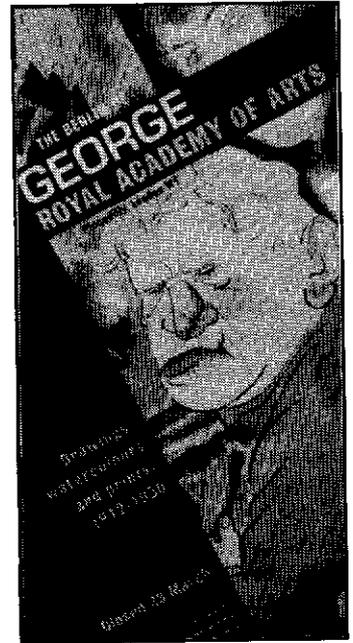
Most of his drawings and paintings are of street life — war veterans selling matches, elegant women in furs and jewels, gross capitalists. Prostitutes proliferate, invariably solemn and naked, surrounded by drunken industrialists and preening businessmen.

Grosz also experimented in photo-montage and in the duplication and transformation of images. A dark street scene takes on a hallucinatory feel as a man's head forms part of a horse, bodies seem to

appear out of dark corners.

Grosz's growing disenchantment with the Communist movement is reflected in some of his later work. One of his most enduringly provocative drawings is *Christ with a Gasmask* (1927) which shows a skeletal Jesus on the crucifix, wearing army boots and gasmask. In 1930 Grosz left Germany for the USA and did not return until shortly before he died in 1959.

While Grosz's work is harsh, unsettling and even cruel, he was only painting what he saw. Walking back from the gallery through Regents Street and Soho, it is very easy to see London through his eyes.



The reality of sexual abuse

The extent of the hidden misery of child sexual abuse in our society is such that periodically it breaks through all efforts to suppress knowledge of its existence. *Yvonne Hill* argues that the screening of *No Child of Mine* was such an occasion.

A powerful and moving drama, based on a real life story, *No Child of Mine* portrayed the harrowing experience of Kerry. Aged ten, she is prostituted by her father to finance his gambling debts and in subsequent years she is sexually abused by her mother, step-father, a careworker and drawn into child prostitution. It also documents the failure of statutory agencies.

The film was greeted with a chorus of denial and disapproval. Its makers were accused by the *Guardian* of 'eroding the programme's credibility' by choosing such a 'sensational' case. Teresa Gorman described it as 'pornographic' and 'depraved'. However, children's organisations that viewed the film endorsed it as a 'realistic and responsible portrayal'.

It explored the complex impact of sexual abuse on the child's life. Kerry's trust suffers a shocking betrayal when gifts and games with a group of adults lead to her sexual subjugation by her step-father. She is physically abused and

threatened with violence by adults should she speak of their sexual exploits. Her reality is at odds with that of her contemporaries. Her desperate attempts to seek help from her parents are futile. Unable to talk about her experience she suffers a terrible alienation.

The sexualisation of victims of child sexual abuse is implicit in the unfolding of Kerry's story. Vulnerable, she is successfully solicited by a pimp — himself a victim of sexual abuse.

Her rape by a careworker reinforces her agony and powerlessness.

In creating a smokescreen of sensationalism critics viewed the film from an adult perspective which allowed them to deny that the powerlessness of children often leads to their repeat victimisation.

Research and production of the programme, its makers explained, took two years and included extensive corroboration but a second element of criticism came from the Department of Health

which claimed that there was 'no evidence' that the film was based on a true story.

The film concluded with the shocking fact that just four safe houses for victims of child sexual abuse exist in the whole of Britain and also that none of the abusers portrayed in the film were prosecuted.

A report by the Children's Society concerned about the growth of child prostitution in British cities, showed that a significant number of child prostitutes have been in institutionalised care and that many have been abused by family members or other adults. Childline reported that 8,000 children were given extensive telephone counselling in 1996 and the DSS that 9,200 children were registered at risk of sexual abuse in 1995. Some recent court cases have highlighted the existence of child sexual abuse in care institutions. Reported cases give just some indication of the scale of the problem.

What *No Child of Mine* reflected was the formidable struggle of victims of child sexual abuse to survive. The Department of Health claim of fabrication both echoed the threats of abusers — don't tell because no-one will believe you — and, by denying the

existence of the crime enabled it to shed responsibility.

No Child of Mine did indicate the need for new policies: for a network of safe houses, for a review of the work of the CPS in this area and for a national counselling organisation for adult survivors. Its contribution will be welcomed by all those working to defend the rights of children.

What most debates ignore is that it is the structure of power within the family in bourgeois society which creates the circumstances for the widespread practice of child sexual abuse.

Instead bourgeois and social democratic politicians promote 'family life' knowing that the family is a primary source of violence against women and children and that prostitution, including child prostitution, is its counterpart. Measures which advance the social and economic independence of women and that develop the socialisation of childcare — such as the provision of high quality childcare available to all — by providing an alternative to the family will begin to tackle the institution which permits such extensive criminal activity against children.

The trumpet of sedition

This volume promises to be one of the more controversial in Pluto Press' *Socialist History of Britain* series. The subject matter, classical political theory from Thomas More to John Locke, is both important and fascinating. But, says **John Church**, for a reader coming newly to the subject, parts of the book will be confusing.

Thus supposedly answering the question of whether the English Revolution of 1640-1660 was a bourgeois revolution or not, we are told:

'The Revolution played its role in the development of English capitalism not by

defeating a (non-existent) feudal aristocracy but by bringing to a head the tensions between a landed class increasingly dependent on capitalist forms of appropriation and a monarchy still clinging to remnants of personal, patrimonial rule left

over from its feudal past. Some other feudal remnants were also swept away. But, in the end, at least as important to the progress of English capitalism was the suppression by the propertied classes of the threat below, the revolutionary ferment unleashed by the Civil War itself, which seemed to endanger everything the ruling class stood to gain from their triumph over the king.'

The suggestion is firstly, that the Revolution involved

no conflict with substantial feudal forces. Secondly, that the 'threat from below' was greater than these 'non-existent' forces.

It is suggested that the actual course of the revolution was essentially a result of 'provocations' by the Stuarts who worked for a strengthening of absolutism. To finally elaborate this position it is necessary to quote from another work of Ellen Meiksins Wood, the analysis of which underlies the positions of *The Trumpet of Sedition*. In her work *The Pristine Culture of Capitalism* we read:

'Was there, then, a 'revolutionary change from one, pre-capitalist, economic formation, to another, capitalist one in England' some time between the Middle Ages and, say, 1688? Of course there was no single, cataclysmic moment when the 'modern world' was born. But there certainly was a transition from feudalism to capitalism. England, indeed, is the only case in history where such a transformation took place. It is the only case in which feudal property relations were transformed into a different, capitalist, system of social property relations, with its own distinctive laws of motion, its own rules of maintenance and reproduction.

In some Western European cases, feudalism gave way not to capitalism but to absolutism, with its own non-capitalist modes of appropriation and politically constituted property.'

The real processes have been much more accurately analysed. In *Capital Marx* explains:

'The prelude to the revolution that laid the foundations of the capitalist mode of production was played out in the last third of the fifteenth century and the first few decades of the sixteenth. A mass of 'free' and unattached proletarians was hurled onto the labour market by the dissolution of the bands of feudal retainers who, as Sir James Stueart correctly remarked 'everywhere uselessly filled house and castle'. Although the royal

The fight for peace

The authors of *The Fight for Peace*, who are not noted for their nationalist or republican sympathies, have nonetheless written a devastating critique of the response of the British state to the Irish peace process.

From the Anglo Irish Agreement to the Canary Wharf bomb that signalled the end of the cease-fire they outline the process with flat objectivity, explains **Katie O'Connor**.

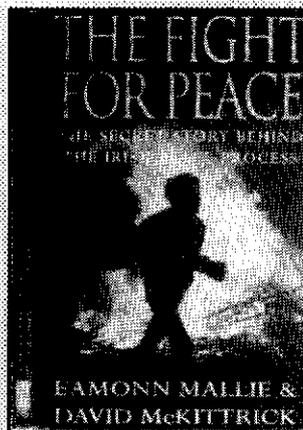
The book ditches the received wisdom that John Major couldn't 'go the extra mile for peace' because of the lack of an outright majority in the House of Commons and his reliance on the Unionist votes in the dog days of the Tory government. While Major's political considerations were no doubt a factor, the book reveals that from the very start, even when the Tory majority was more substantial, significant sections of the British establishment had no real commitment to peace in Ireland. Obstruction from British civil servants prepared the ground for British betrayal.

Reynolds, Taoiseach of the 26 Counties, assigned a very senior civil servant who is named and has been interviewed for the book. The British, by contrast, assigned a still nameless spook to talk to the IRA and remain furtive about their objectives in setting up such meetings.

In contrast with practically everywhere else in the world, the IRA's cessation statement was received by Britain with suspicion and panic rather than acknowledgement of the development it clearly was. The book also details how issues of, firstly, the word 'permanent' and, secondly, the decommissioning of arms were used to block the admittance of Sinn Fein into the peace talks and to deliberately stall the process.

The Rev Ian Paisley described the ceasefire as 'the worst crisis in Ulster's history since the setting up of the state'.

The most depressing aspect of the whole book is how it so effectively exposes the standards of dubiety and venality which are endemic in the British state, particularly in relation to Ireland. What is also clear is that an incoming Labour administration at the Northern Ireland Office will have to deal with senior civil servants who are



deeply implicated in the smashing of the peace process and who will continue to work against all-party talks. There will be resistance to even the most modest proposals that could lead to a progressive settlement.

Mallie and McKitterick's book therefore serves the important purpose of underlining the pressure which socialists must place on the Labour leadership to ensure that their 'bipartisan' acquiescence in the obstruction of the peace process is broken from now they are in office.

The fight for peace
The secret story behind
the Irish peace process
Eamonn Mallie and David
McKitterick
£8.99 Heinemann

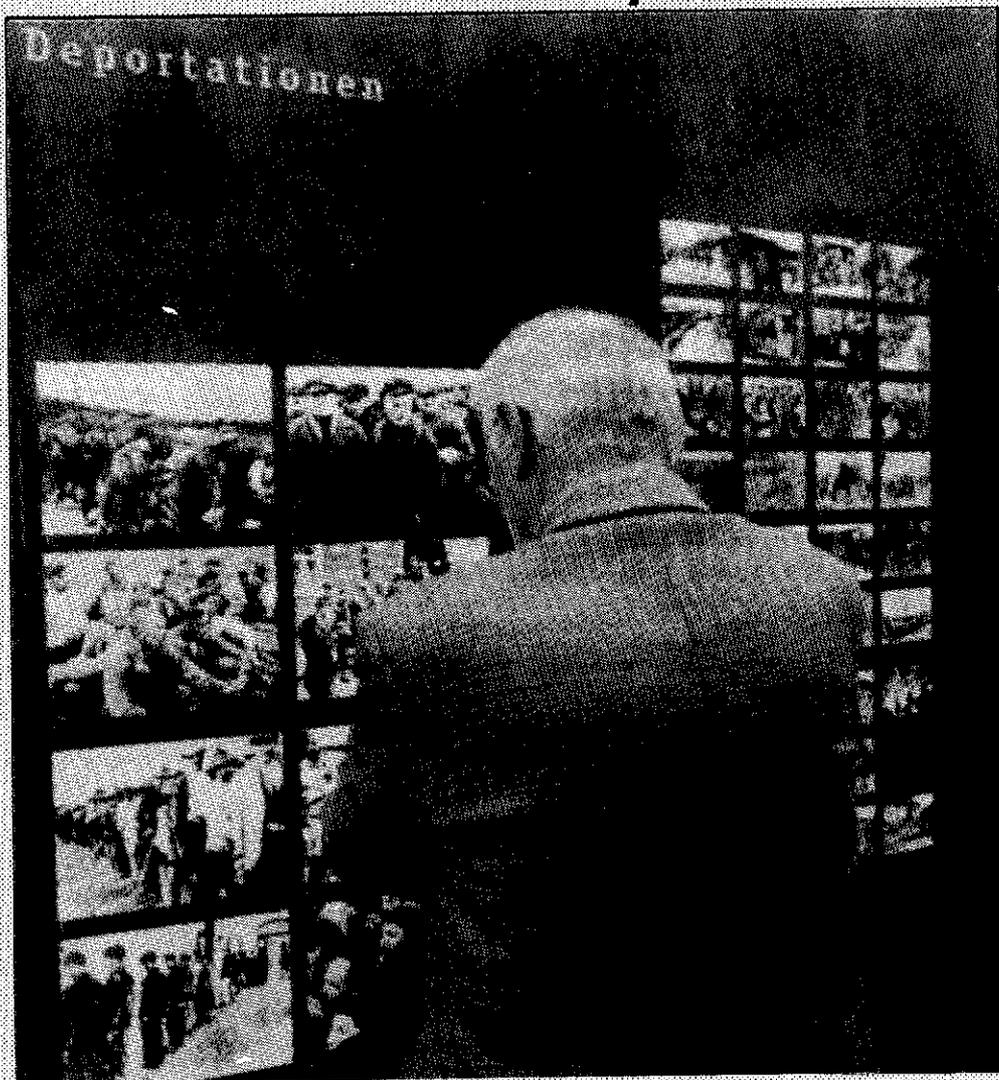
power, itself a product of bourgeois development, forcibly hastened the dissolution of these bands of retainers in its striving for absolute sovereignty, it was by no means the sole cause of it. It was rather that the great feudal lords, in their defiant opposition to the King and Parliament, created an incomparably larger proletariat by forcibly driving the peasantry from the land, to which the latter had the same feudal title as the lords themselves, and by the usurpation of the common lands. The rapid expansion of wool manufacture in Flanders and the corresponding rise in the price of wool in England provided the direct impulse for these evictions. The old nobility had been devoured by the great feudal wars. The new nobility was the child of its time, for which money was the power of all powers. Transformation of arable land into sheep-walks was therefore its slogan.' (*Capital*, Vol 1)

For Marx absolutism was a political form, not a mode of production. The bourgeoisie utilised absolutism, under the Tudors, in so far as it acted as a centralising force for the economy. The process expanded the area of capitalist relations. At a point in this expansion the form of absolutism itself hindered the expansion, a direct transfer of power to the capitalist class was necessary. As for the 'threat from below', well the analysis of the authors themselves is sufficient to show that much of the content of the programme of the Levellers, and even the Diggers, could be assimilated by later bourgeois theorists, such as Locke, in searching for social stability.

It is hard not to draw the conclusion that the authors have allowed current academic interests to interfere with their judgements. Above all they seem to have forgotten that the capitalist class at the time was a rising, progressive class from whom theorists need to learn.

A Trumpet of Sedition: Political Theory and the Rise of Capitalism, 1509-1688
Ellen Meiksins Wood and Neal Wood
£9.99 Pluto Press

Wehrmacht exposed



The exhibition being toured around cities in Germany and Austria by the Hamburg Institute for Social Research on *War of Extermination and Crimes of the Wehrmacht, 1941-1944* has provoked violent opposition by right wing and fascist currents.

The exhibition shows in gruesome detail how the regular German army, the Wehrmacht, was involved in the extermination policy of the third Reich and that this involvement was at all levels, from ordinary soldiers to the high command.

The director of the exhibition acknowledges that while there was a subjective difference between the Wehrmacht and the SS — in that soldiers were conscripted into the Wehrmacht whereas the SS were volunteers — the tasks of the organisations were much the same. Before the attack on the Soviet Union, it was explained that 'the war in the East will be a war of extermination, to be carried through without mercy'. On 19 May 1941, the high command of the army issued a general order: 'Bolshevism is the deadly enemy of the national socialist German people. It is up to Germany to combat this destructive world view and its proponents... This fight demands ruthless and energetic engagement against Bolshevist agitators, mercenaries, saboteurs, Jews, and the unstinting removal of all resistance, both active and passive'.

When the exhibition opened in Munich on 24 February it met a torrent of abuse from the Christian Social Union (CSU) as well as various fascist groups. The head of the Munich CSU denounced it as a 'slander of countless men who fought honourably'. Fascists were given permission by the CSU administration to hold a demonstration in front of the town hall where the exhibition was sited. In the event more than 10,000 anti-fascist demonstrators forced police to escort the 5,000 fascists back to the safety of their buses.

In a country which requires 'non-German' children, born and raised in Germany, to apply every year for a visa to remain in the country, the explicitly racist ideology of the third Reich remains, for many on the right, too close to home to afford honest examination.

Peter Rosen

Gerry Adams replies to Tony Blair

The largest swing to any political party in the general election was to Sinn Fein — a 60 per cent increase in their vote over 1992, nationalist voters made clear that they held John Major, not Sinn Fein, responsible for the collapse of the peace process. As well as gaining two seats — Mid-Ulster and Belfast West — the party's 16.1 per cent of the vote made them the third largest in Northern Ireland, overtaking Ian Paisley's Democratic Unionist Party. In the local elections which followed, the Unionists lost control of Belfast City Council and Sinn Fein's vote advanced further.

But, in his first major policy statement on the north, Tony Blair made clear that as far as he is concerned Labour's conference policy for 'Irish unity by consent' is now a dead letter. Blair did not make clear under what conditions Sinn Fein would be admitted to all-party talks.

For the information of our readers we reproduce here the bulk of Gerry Adams' reply to Tony Blair.

'It is a matter of regret that the speech delivered by Mr Blair in Belfast last Friday was so barren of new thinking...Protestations from British sources that the main part of the speech was the invitation to talks with Sinn Fein and that the rest was merely to reassure the unionists, ring hollow.

Not so long ago the British Labour Party had a united Ireland by consent policy which reflected the honourable democratic sentiment within the British labour movement that the partition of Ireland was wrong and should be ended.

It is therefore understandable that nationalists should feel disturbed to hear Tony Blair declare himself a unionist with such gusto.

I can accept Mr Blair's assertion: 'I believe in the United Kingdom', because that is the British government's position and he is the prime minister. But to declare: 'I value the Union' begs the question why or which part of the Union is to be valued? It is also at odds with the claim by some here in Ireland, a claim never made by the British government, that it is neutral. When one considers the centuries of conflict and the human misery resulting from the Union forced upon Ireland by England what is there to value in that Union? It is based on coercion not consent. It exists not by the popular will of the people of Ireland, but by a minority who are backed by British guns.

There is also no point in pretending that a partitionist solution is possible. It is now widely accepted that an internal settlement is not a solution. Mr Blair is right to say, 'violence has no place in a democratic society'. If this were a democratic society there would be no violence here. But the problem is that the Six-County state is not a democratic society. It never has been and cannot be. It is the antithesis of democracy. Its existence is based upon and is the



cause of violence. It is governed under a permanent state of emergency on a life-support unit of British militarism. It is maintained to deny to the Irish people the same rights that the people of Britain enjoy, the universal right to be free from foreign interference. Is this to be valued?... Apparently it is alright for the British to occupy and lay claim to a part of Ireland by force, but the Irish have to yield our claim to nationhood. There is no chance of that. Neither is anyone impressed by the oft-repeated cliché of the train leaving the station with or without Sinn Fein. One thing which everyone should have learned by now is that exclusiveness does not work. A peace process cannot be built upon threats or ultimatums.

Those who drafted Mr Blair's speech are from the old administration. They know precisely what they are doing. If progress is to be made then the new government must give a new political direction to its officials. Otherwise little progress will be made. The speed and decisiveness with which the new 'rules' for setting interest rates or the social chapter was dealt with must be replicated in regard to Labour's Irish policy also.

Sinn Fein will not be deflected by Mr Blair's comments. On the contrary we see it as our duty to change British government policy, especially on the question of the Union.

This is also the responsibility of the broad democratic and nationalist opinion on this island to assert Irish national interests in negotiations and to seek international support for that position. That is certainly what Sinn Fein will be doing and Irish nationalists have a right to expect the Irish government to enter negotiations on that basis. In fact there is a constitutional and democratic imperative upon Dublin to do just that.

Sinn Fein has accepted Mr Blair's invitation to talks. Despite his government's reprehensible refusal to acknowledge the democratic rights of our electorate and without prejudice to this, our party believes in honest dialogue and we will play a positive part in the shared task of establishing a lasting peace.

However, we should not blind ourselves to the problems involved. Progress is only possible if the opportunity which has been created is grasped.

Sinn Fein believes in resolving political problems through the use

of peaceful and democratic methods. Our commitment is to peace talks, inclusive, without pre-conditions and without delays. It is a commitment to a negotiated peace settlement, achieved through agreement and based on equality. At the moment there are not the peace talks capable of achieving such a settlement.

Securing meaningful and inclusive peace talks and through them a lasting peace settlement is my personal and political priority.

Sinn Fein will, of course, bring our democratic Irish republican analysis to any negotiations process. It is our view that the British presence and the partition of Ireland are at the heart of the instability, political divisions and violence which have wrecked this country in every generation since the Six County state was established. We believe that a unitary, independent sovereign Irish state holds the best prospect for a just and lasting peace in Ireland. We will represent and promote this Irish republican perspective in the context of democratic negotiations. Others will bring their perspectives. We uphold their right to do so and we accept this also and reaffirm our commitment to the agreed outcome of a process of democratic negotiations.

Sinn Fein is often challenged on our refusal to accept the unionist veto. Yet Mr Blair reinforces unionist intransigence when he says, in relation to cross border institutions, 'if such arrangements were really threatening to unionists, we would not negotiate them'.

It may not be Mr Blair's intention, but if this logic is followed through there will be no progress whatsoever on any issue of substance.

Sinn Fein wants to make peace with our unionist neighbours. We want to be creative in finding ways to do this. But peace demands justice. Justice demands equality. Consent is a two-way street.

The consent of the Irish people to the partition of Ireland was never sought. It has never been freely given. There is no democratic basis for partition. That is the basis on which the consent issue has to be addressed.

The context in which 'unionist consent' is framed today aims to cloud the fact that what is really being talked about is not the issue of consent but rather a dated and spurious justification for partition and the unionist veto.

It is obvious that political stabil-

ity, political cohesion and lasting peace in Ireland requires agreement between the people of this island. But those who elevate consent into a veto ignore the reality that the principle of consent has never been extended to nationalists.

The consent and agreement of the unionist section of our people is necessary to the building of an agreed and stable Ireland. Sinn Fein has argued this consistently. Our proposal that the British join the persuaders is, in fact, the logical extension of this position. It is our firmly-held belief that the consent of the unionist community is only realisable in the context of a clear policy change on the part of the British government. Liberated from the negative influence of the veto, the potential for unionists and nationalists negotiating an agreed future would be opened up.

There is an onus on those who claim that consent can be obtained while the veto remains to explain how this might be achieved.

The British government's failure to commit themselves to a positive policy of working towards Irish reunification inevitably increases suspicions among Irish nationalists about Britain's real intentions. That failure does not dispel the fundamental illusion held by unionists that they somehow possess a unilateral right to Union. It also ignores the wish of the majority of the British people themselves that their government should withdraw from Ireland and Irish affairs.

Sinn Fein has the democratic right to be involved in negotiations now and to represent our electorate on the basis of our strongly reestablished electoral mandate. We reject any pre-conditions to our involvement in dialogue and negotiations. Sinn Fein is not the IRA.

But we accept that inclusive democratic negotiations will best be conducted in a wholly peaceful environment.

All my efforts over the period since the breakdown of the peace process have been specifically aimed at securing that objective. In the context of a pro-unionist conservative government this was not possible. The difficulties arose from that government's position towards Ireland and its support for the Union. It is this which has consistently underpinned London's Irish policy, not the government's majority or lack of majority which merely influences how it implements that policy. This is not to underplay John

Major's dependency on the UUP and Tony Blair's landslide victory did raise many people's hope, that freed from the stranglehold of the Unionist Party, the new British Labour government could grasp the opportunity to play a leadership role by tackling the crux issues in a democratic way.

In my view what is required at this time to create a new peace process is the reasonable assurances recommended by Senator Mitchell in the report of the International Body that a 'meaningful and inclusive process of negotiations is genuinely on offer'. These reasonable and practical criteria are, in my view, the litmus test for progress and essential if there is to be any prospect of success.

According to the British legislation setting up the talks if there was an unequivocal restoration of the IRA cessation of August 1994, Sinn Fein would be invited to participate in the negotiations.

The stated position of the IRA is that they are willing to enhance a genuine peace process. The gap between the two positions must be bridged.

The elements of a meaningful process have long been identified. Many have been satisfactorily agreed. A number of critical outstanding concerns remain.

To be effective in achieving a lasting peace a negotiation process must address all the issues which have led to conflict and division. These need to be resolved if a meaningful and inclusive process of negotiations is genuinely being offered.

These are:

- 1) Confidence building;
- 2) The removal of pre-conditions;
- 3) A timeframe for the negotiations;
- 4) Sinn Fein's entry into negotiations.

Absolute clarity is essential on all these matters.

1) Confidence building

If trust and confidence is to be built then the British government should outline a programme of specific confidence-building measures.

The issues which need to be addressed as part of a programme of confidence-building measures are:

● Those issues which fall into the equality and democratic rights agenda and which address political, economic, social and cultural discrimination. These issues do not require any negotiation. They can and should be addressed immediately.

● The principles of equality of treatment, equality of opportunity and parity of esteem would have to apply across the political, cultural, economic, social, legal and security spectrum.

● Both governments would also need to urgently address a demilitarisation agenda dealing with issues such as: political prisoners; emergency legislation; and policing.

● At this time the plight of republican prisoners in Britain continues to cause concern. This should be speedily dealt with.

2) The removal of pre-conditions

The two governments should outline how the obstacle of decommissioning is to be removed so that this issue can be properly addressed along with all other issues without blocking the negotiations.

The removal of the gun from the political equation in Ireland is a clear objective of a lasting peace settlement. Sinn Fein is totally committed to resolving all issues through negotiations, including the issue of disarmament, decommissioning and demilitarisation. Sinn Fein is willing to address all aspects of the Report of the International Body and to sign up to the six Mitchell Principles in the context of our participation in inclusive negotiations.

Our party is prepared to consider any proposals which address the need to take all the guns out of Irish politics and we will be putting forward, for consideration, our proposals on this issue.

However, it is clear at this time, 12 months after the commencement of the talks at Stormont, that the issue of decommissioning is being used as a block on the overall negotiations process, thus preventing movement towards an agreement which would resolve all of the vexed issues. If real progress is to be made and the substantive issues addressed then this situation must be corrected.

3) A timeframe for the conduct of negotiations

The two governments should propose a timeframe and calendar, in our view in the region of six months, for the conduct of the negotiations. It should be made clear that both governments will review the negotiations process at that point and if there is not sufficient progress the two governments will proceed with the substantive issues.

The Stormont talks have, after 12 months, not yet begun to address the

substantive issues. The loss of confidence as a result is obvious. Confidence and momentum is needed.

There also needs to be some structural device to ensure that unionist politicians, as the incumbents and beneficiaries of the status quo, cannot exploit that advantage by using an open-ended negotiating process as a tactical instrument to ward off or delay rather than seek agreement on political change.

The two governments have already taken such a leading role in relation to a number of issues including both the chairing of the talks and the ground rules for the talks. The alternative is endless stalling and obstruction.

4) Sinn Fein's entry into negotiations

The British government should state clearly that Sinn Fein will join the negotiations immediately following an unequivocal restoration of the IRA cessation of August 1994.

Just as we have sought clarification from the British government we also acknowledge that there are real issues of concern on the part of the British government. We have attempted to deal with these issues of concern in a positive and flexible manner and to create some space for others to move accordingly.

I have outlined Sinn Fein's belief that a restoration by the IRA of its cessation of August 1994 will be genuinely unequivocal containing a clear and unambiguous commitment to enhance a genuine peace process.

Sinn Fein believes that an unequivocal restoration of the IRA cessation would represent the most important confidence-building initiative on the IRA's part.

Political will

I firmly believe that if clear assurances are given by the British government that a negotiations process which is both viable and credible will be put in place then the peace process can be restored and that the opportunity to finally resolve the conflict can then be brought to a successful conclusion. The re-establishment of contact between Sinn Fein and British government representatives, offers us the most direct means of resolving these issues. What is required is political will on all sides.

Republicans have the political will. I hope and I pray that the new British government also has the necessary political will.

(An Phoblacht 22 May)

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