

# Socialist Appeal

The Marxist voice of the labour movement

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## Privatisation

# KILLS

★ **Labour's Second Term**  
**Editorial Statement**

★ **AEEU Conference**  
**Left support grows**

★ **CWU Conference**  
**Prepare for action!**



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Spanish  
Revolution 1931-7

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# "Stealing Our Clothes"

"What is good for Business, is good for America", is certainly the view of the Bush administration. Blair, who has continually grovelled before the United States, now repeats the mantra: "What is good for Business is also good for Britain."

The first act of the Blair government following the election (along with paying themselves an enormous pay rise) was to side with big business in attempting to block the EU directive on workers' rights to consultation. Repeating the Tory argument against the dangers of "over-regulation" and "red tape", Industry Minister Peter Hain battled to ensure the directive would not apply fully in Britain for seven years. He claimed that the staged introduction would reinforce "traditional UK strengths" of "flexibility, partnership and cooperation, rather than bureaucracy and legal rights." In other words the right of multinationals to hire and fire at will in this country.

While in Europe the directive applies to companies with 20 or more workers, in Britain it will, after seven years, apply to companies employing over 50 workers. Hain said thousands of companies "had been spared". The CBI supported the government's stance arguing that the directive would "undermine the ability of managers to manage." In other words, the bosses should be free to sack workers at the drop of a hat, without any interference. While we have no illusions about 'consultation', it shows how far the Blair government is in the pocket of business.

Chancellor Brown wants to import a US-style "entrepreneur culture to Britain". He has announced that Capital Gains Tax is being reduced from a maximum of 40% to just 10%. "Accountants are asking", states the *Financial Times*, "why he had not done away with the tax altogether." Perhaps the same could be said of Corporation Tax, which is also at 10%, the lowest in the advanced capitalist world. In reality, as in the US, big business pays little tax. Through its army of accountants it avoids paying tax. Taxation falls mainly on the middle class and working class, especially on the poorest sections, through indirect taxes. The bosses get all the representation with little of the taxation.

Big business is becoming increasingly involved with running our public services. The government has just appointed Sir Howard Davies, past director-general of the CBI and presently chairman of the Financial Services Authority, to conduct a review of schools and further education to

promote business, enterprise and the economy amongst students.

Lord Young, ex-Tory Industry Secretary, and chair of the Manpower Services Commission in the early eighties, introduced these ideas into schools. He said the new initiative was excellent. "The Chancellor is stealing our clothes, but doing it rather better." This ringing endorsement demonstrates just how far the Blairites have gone.

They are now planning an all-out assault on the public sector in the name of "reform". Labour's election victory, despite getting fewer votes than Kinnock in 1992, is being portrayed by the Blairites as a mandate for privatisation, dressed up in the guise of the 'public private partnership'. Stephen Byers, the new Transport Secretary, warned UNISON delegates that the government had a mandate to bring the private sector into public services and were determined to carry it through, despite the evidence of wholesale public opposition. We will not allow "political dogma to triumph over the interests of the public", said Byers. Yet their adherence to the market means they are doing precisely that.

The 'virtues' of private finance are also being peddled by Charles Clarke, appointed by Blair as Labour 'chairman' without reference to any elected body. Addressing the AEEU conference, in a tone reminiscent of a marketing consultant, he said: "Government must put consumers at the heart of delivery of these services."

However, this line is being vigorously opposed by union leaders in the public sector, even at this early stage of Labour's second term, illustrating the pressure being exerted on them by the rank and file. UNISON general secretary Dave Prentis told his conference that the government "may say they want modernisation but the truth is, it is the very people in government who cannot let go of their Thatcherite obsession with privatisation who are the relics. They are the wreckers, the true forces of conservatism." He called on the government to "stop the creeping privatisation and scrap the private finance initiative."

"In every PFI hospital so far, beds and jobs have been cut to generate income and profit. The idea that PFI hospitals have been built on time and to budget beggars belief. The costs of the Royal Worcester Hospital rose by 118% between 1996 and 2000", said Prentis. The Carlisle PFI Hospital has experienced "ceilings falling down and inherited a sewerage

system unable to cope." In contrast at Dryburn PFI Hospital in North Durham privateers were making 18% annual rate of profit - "money taken out of the NHS" he said.

Privatisation is a disaster. It must be stopped now before our schools and hospitals are ruined like the railway. It is not possible to run effective public services and maximise profits at the same time. A MORI poll for UNISON found that 78% thought the government not privateers should run public services.

Unfortunately, the Blair government is mesmerised by the market and big business. They have ditched the party's socialist objectives and have adopted Tory policies instead. The Blairites are plotting to break the union links and turn the party into a version of the US Democrats. How far they are prepared to go was revealed by John Monks. "There are some in Labour Party headquarters during the election campaign who said they relished an early confrontation with a major public sector trade union", said Monks. "I could not believe it."

While Monks finds it unbelievable, it is common knowledge that the Blairites hate the Labour Party as it stands and also the trade unions. They plan to wage war on the public sector. But this will open up big struggles that will raise the whole question of Blair's domination of the Labour Party. The unions founded and built the party. They will be forced to take the struggle into the party. To imagine that you can defeat Blairism outside of the party as some still dream is to fly in the face of reality. The election should once and for all have made clear that working people see no alternative outside of Labour. Trade union activists must take up the struggle not only against Blair's pro-capitalist policies, but fight for an alternative, a socialist programme. The unions have the power to defeat Blairism and transform the Labour Party into a party that will represent the interests of the working class. In doing so, words have to be turned into deeds. Today's fighting talk will need to be turned into determined action if the Blairites press ahead with their privatisation madness.

- No privatisation of public services
- Renationalise the railways and privatised utilities
- Don't contract out contract in - trade unionists join us in the fight to reclaim the labour movement.



# AEEU: Right wing stall as left support grows

**Delegates arriving in Blackpool for the 2001 Policy and Rules conference of the AEEU were met with a leaflet from the right wing AEEU United group reliably informing them that the left was a tiny minority harking back to the past. So tiny and irrelevant in fact that the leaflet referred to the "Hard Left" no fewer than 8 times.**

**by Phil Mitchinson**

After a week at conference however, Sir Ken Jackson repeatedly attacked the third leaflet produced by the left Gazette group in his closing speech. Rumours of the demise of the left in the AEEU were somewhat premature it seems. On the surface the conference was a resounding success for the right wing, but Jackson's attacks betray their true feelings. In reality the right wing are on the run. Their time is almost up.

Jackson's time should certainly be running out. Due to retire at 65 a rule change was passed allowing him to stay on until he's 67 at the end of 2004. Despite the further delay in elections, the growing support for the left in the union could see both the executive and a new General Secretary shift left in the near future, when elections are finally allowed to take place.

Meanwhile, if the leadership's obsession with partnership deals leads to the signing of no strike deals, the AEEU will become a pariah in the movement. More importantly workers jobs and conditions will suffer. Exactly how many jobs has this partnership approach saved anyway? Ask the workers at Vauxhall or Corus. The only partnership on offer from the bosses is that between a horse and its rider, and we aren't the ones with the whip in our hands.

That other partnership, the one between the public and private sectors better known to us as privatisation, was also a key item debated at the conference, inside the hall and outside. In his opening speech Jackson appeared to back Blair's plans for so-called reform of public services when he said "to get the investment we need we have to look to the private sector as well." Meanwhile even the leaderships of other unions like Morris in the T&G, and Prentis in UNISON were warning the Labour government that they would fight back. How far they are actually prepared to go remains to be seen.

John Monks from the TUC on the other hand told conference that "No-one will deliver better public services by seeking bruising confrontation." Someone should tell him that he is supposed to be the leader of the trade union movement not an arbitrator between workers and the government. Even Jackson, recognising no doubt the overwhelming opinion of his members, claimed "This is not about privatisation.

Privatisation of public services is not an agenda this union will support." But that's not enough, the union should be exposing the real meaning of partnership, both in work and in terms of public services. Increasingly AEEU members can see that, and that will be reflected in a victory for the left when elections for the leadership of the union eventually take place.

There were a number of good motions defeated or remitted at the conference on rationalising the railways, abolishing student fees, ending the discrimination against young workers in relation to the minimum wage amongst others. As one left delegate put it "we won the argument hands down, but lost the vote hands up."

Motions calling for the campaign for a 35 hour week to be stepped up and for a campaign on equal pay were passed. There were also important industrial questions debated, such as combating stress and bullying in the workplace, and the dangers of repetitive strain injuries and upper limb disorder. One delegate pointed out that six million working days a year are being lost due to stress related illness.

In the days since conference a new report has claimed that many of these are fraudulent. The bosses claim such 'days off' are costing them £4 billion per year. The reality is that the pressure they are making us work under is seriously damaging our health. They are losing money because they fail to invest, trying to make a quick buck instead, not because we are lazy. There were also political motions calling for the link with the Labour Party to be strengthened. The proposed merger with MSF would make the new union the largest affiliate to the party and the second largest in the TUC. That influence must be used to represent AEEU members interests not to promote the right wing agenda of the current leadership.

Tony Blair, too busy no doubt deciding what to do with his £47,000 pay rise to attend in person, sent a video to the conference expressing his particular support for the General Secretary. Meanwhile Transport Minister John Spellar used the conference as a platform for a despicable attack on Tony Benn, blaming him for the loss of the Chesterfield seat in the General Election. "He nearly wrecked the national party and he did wreck his local party" he claimed as he warned of a new attack on the left. He had little to say, however, about transport.

The AEEU is a powerful union and can play a major role in the union movement and the Labour Party. Therefore the campaign to change the leadership and direction of the union is an important part of the struggle to transform the entire movement. ●





# Striking to guard our safety

**The publication of the Cullen report into the Paddington rail disaster should make abundantly clear what the labour movement knew all along, that Railtrack and the privatised train operating companies are putting profit before safety with disastrous consequences. This alone should be reason enough for the Labour government to renationalise the railways.**

by Paul Matthews

The consequence of the recent tragedies on our railways, and all our experiences with the deterioration of services since privatisation, is that 76% of the population want renationalisation, including an astonishing 71% of Tory voters. Yet what conclusion do the fatcats who weep crocodile tears over the deaths on the railways draw? That the safety of all who work and travel on the railways should be further jeopardised in the desperate scramble for profits, with their proposal to abolish the post of guard, reducing the role of onboard crew to kitkat sellers.

The report published by the Health and Safety Executive condemned "serious and persistent management" lapses as being responsible for the appalling disaster at Paddington. ASLEF General Secretary Mick Rix concluded that "Railtrack's greed and negligence are directly to blame for the loss of 31 lives."

The private bosses have blood on their hands. The HSE is waiting for the Crown Prosecution Service to consider charges, yet given the bias of the law on corporate manslaughter in favour of the bosses, they

are likely to get away with murder. Worse, it has just been revealed that Gerald Corbett, boss of Railtrack at the time of the disaster, and therefore one of those directly responsible, was given a million pound payoff. If he had a shred of decency he would hand that over to the grieving relatives of the dead and the survivors of the crash that he, the management and privatisation caused. Only the labour movement can prevent further tragedies, by fighting on safety, and for ownership and control of the railways.

It is truly astonishing that despite all its condemnation of the privatised management, the report does not demand the obvious solution of nationalisation. It doesn't even demand the bare minimum of calling for guards on all trains. Mick Rix pointed out that "Train companies owe it to the dead and bereaved to abandon plans to extend driver only operation and begin the process of putting a second, safety-trained staff member on every train on the network."

Railway workers are not prepared to be placed in yet more danger. 5000 RMT members, guards from all over the network, voted by more than four to one for strike action to



**FIGHTING FOR  
TRAINCREW AND  
PASSENGER  
SAFETY  
VOTE  
YES**

retain guards in the interests of safety. This should serve notice to Blair of what will happen if the government goes ahead with plans to privatise the London Underground, or foist privatisation on our other public services.

Two one day strikes are now planned, as we go to press, for Monday June 25 and Wednesday July 4 (see below). These strikes will affect all lines except Great Eastern and the Isle of Wight, where guards have already been scrapped. The collapse of Railtrack's share price saw them booted out of the FTSE 100. Now they plead with the government for billions of pounds more from the public purse. No doubt their incompetence will result in yet more disastrous corner cutting, like the recent debacle of trains not able to run because there was too much sunshine - the rails had been set at the wrong tension, and warped in Britain's tropical heat. The billions they are asking for would be enough to buy back the rail network that the privateers have driven to destruction. But not a penny should go to these parasites. The railways should be taken back into public ownership immediately, and their incompetent management replaced by representatives of railworkers, passengers and the government.

Every branch of the labour movement should pledge their support to the guards strike, and demand that safety come before profit. That can only be guaranteed if we all own and run the railways. ●

## Don't downgrade guards

The Rail, Maritime and Transport Union (RMT) has called two 24-hour strikes for Monday 25th June and Wednesday 4 July, which will affect the majority of train operating companies. The RMT's 5,200 guard members voted by 4 to 1 in favour of strike action.

Since the introduction of One-Person Operation in the mid 80s, the operating companies have been trying to downgrade the role of the guard. A guard's main role is the safety of passengers and in cases of derailment to protect the rear of the train from other trains. The new rules introduced 18 months ago, in effect reduce the guard's role to a glorified revenue collec-

tor. Leaving the train driver to protect both ends of the train, which is impossible.

Rightly, the RMT wants guarantees that safety responsibilities will be put before commercial duties. A poll showing that 91 per cent of passengers backed the call for fully trained guards on all trains shows strong support for the safety campaign.

Bob Crow, RMT's Assistant General Secretary said: "Once the travelling public understands that this is about their safety, then one or two days of inconvenience will pale into insignificance... It's about having a human being on the train who can help if something goes wrong." ●

## Stop Press

As we go to press, talks are taking place to avert the guards strike action. It seems agreement has been reached with several companies, but railworkers will be on their guard against any attempt to divide them with different offers across different companies. Every train on every line must have a fully qualified, responsible guard on board. The threat of more driver-only operations will also be highlighted in a new report showing an alarming increase in the number of signals passed at danger, up from 37 last month to over 50. Drivers are under enough pressure already without the added strain of operating without guards. Unless the guards dispute is successful ASLEF will have to join the struggle in the interests of safety too.



# Postal workers under attack: Prepare for action now!

**Royal Mail deliberately provoked the last unofficial action, involving some 50,000 postal workers, as a dry run for future attacks on workers in the industry.**

**by Rob Sewell**

The bosses at Royal Mail, or Consignia to call them by their new corporate name, have an agenda of privatisation of the industry, despite all their denials and subterfuge. Along side this, is a programme for the complete reorganisation of the industry, based upon new worse terms and conditions, and the introduction of new 'flexible' working patterns. Such a 'counter-revolutionary' policy will mean big battles with the workforce in the coming period.

The introduction of so-called 'commercial freedom' into the postal service, foolishly promoted by the union leadership, is but a stepping stone towards the break up of the postal service and its wholesale privatisation. That is the real objective of Royal Mail bosses, as well as the Blair government, who regard the Post Office as an outpost for unacceptable out-of-date working practices. Part and parcel of this will be the attempt to break the power of the union. It is a similar idea to Thatcher's towards the mining industry, and the miners' union in the early 1980s. The management are lining up to provoke a national dispute on one issue or another, and then go for selective dismissal. It will be a decisive moment for the workforce and the union itself.

The revelation by John Monks about a layer of the Blair leadership wanting to take on a public sector union is very revealing. The public sector is to be "reformed" by breaking the resistance of the unions, and forcing the workers to comply.\*

The provocation of strikes by management is also an attempt to swing public opinion in favour of privatisation.

They hope that the disruption and inconvenience caused by industrial action will provide the pretext for swift action to restore 'order', using the mechanism of the market.

Over the past decade, Post Office management have attempted to change working practices and bring

in more 'flexible' working arrangements and shift patterns. At each stage this has met opposition from rank and file postal workers.

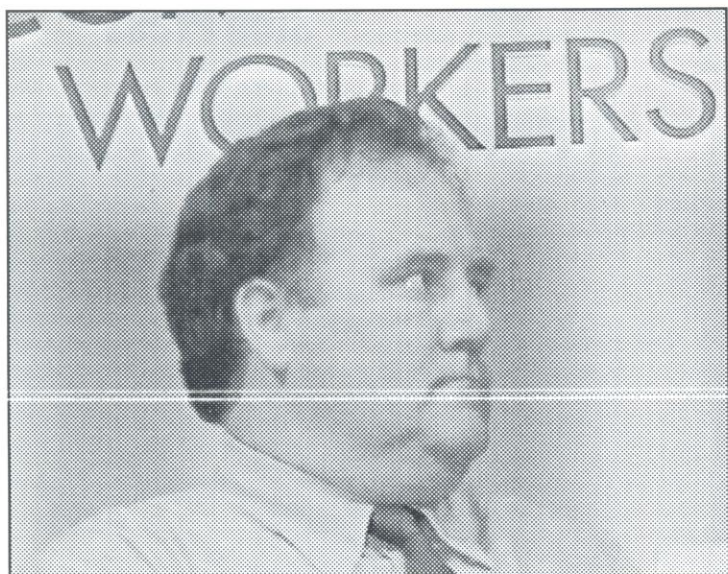
However, the bosses always come back for more, and these attacks will continue. That is why there are two or three unofficial walkouts in the Post Office every week, and union activists are threatened with dismissal. But postal workers have been forced to stand their ground.

Nevertheless, postal workers are being increasingly pushed into a corner. The 'Way Forward' agreement, which was initially rejected by the members, has changed a range of pay and condition terms for the bulk of workers. No doubt, it was John Keggie's role in the selling of this deal that cost him the recent general secretary election. The reorganisation of the Post Office, known as 'Shaping for Competitive Success', says it all. New market methods have to be introduced to 'shape up' the workforce. Combine that with the role of the regulator and the reduction of the PO Monopoly and you have a recipe for conflict.

Every section of the Post Office - Royal Mail, Parcels, Counters, Customer Management - are all being told that the future is difficult and we have to face up to 'market' pressures and competition. All this is a preparation for privatisation. The Crown Office network is being privatised further, and other elements of the Post Office clerical work have either been privatised or threatened with privatisation. The catering section, Quadrant, has been partially privatised through a joint venture with Granada.

Post Office management are trying to introduce in some offices, like Watford, 4am starts with every letter to be delivered before 9.30am. This is to squeeze every ounce of sweated labour out of the workforce. Workers are being continually faced with worsening conditions. No wonder that morale is at an all-time low. It is management by dictat. They now want to tear up the agreement on 5-day working, making full time posts into part-time, and imposing new earlier delivery times. There is not a single 5-day week in London. Management is changing conditions surrounding the 35-hour week. Delivery changes are being imposed by 'executive action', that is, imposed by the will of management without any consultation or negotiation. Royal Mail is continually withdrawing agreements and pushing workers to the limit. They are constantly moving the goal posts. Managers are just charging ahead, ignoring or tearing up what was agreed yesterday.

They are pulling every trick in the book.





New recruits are introduced with early starts and six-day working. This has provoked problems throughout the whole of the country. The Bonus Scheme that was introduced has delivered nothing for the workers. However, it was linked to major changes in working practises. The bosses want 'continuous change' to reach the 3% savings they are determined to make. This has provoked rising frustration amongst rank and file postal workers.

"If something is worth fighting for", said East London postal worker, Lee Waker, "and then people will fight. We can be proud of what we have achieved so far. The workforce has been willing to struggle, but the leadership of the union has kept the membership in the dark, stumbled along, and with nothing coordinated."

The unexpected election of Billy Hayes as the new general secretary of the CWU represents a shift to the left. The leadership of the union must recognise that manoeuvres will not stop the privatisation plans. The threats from government to take on the public sector must be used to galvanise other public sector unions into an alliance. The rank and file must be alerted to the

threats posed against their terms, conditions and jobs. A campaign must be organised on the basis of:

- **A five day 32 hour week with no loss of pay.**
- **No watering down of terms and conditions.**
- **No bonus scheme. A living wage for all postal workers.**
- **No privatisation. Keep the Post Office in the public sector, under workers' control and management.**
- **Take the Fight into the Labour Party**

## Capital Idea

### MUMIA: THE FIGHT GOES ON

Recent new affidavits filed by the legal representatives of Mumia Abu-Jamal, who is facing the death penalty in America, have cast even more doubts on the basis of his conviction. In truth the eagerness of the Philadelphia state prosecutors to send Mumia to the execution chamber has already been exposed as rooted in racism and the desire to "punish" Mumia for his opposition to the system rather than any actual evidence. Mumia's death sentence arises from the shooting of a police officer back in 1981. Mumia was in the wrong place at the wrong time and, after being shot at and beaten up by the cops, was hurriedly tried and convicted in a frame up trial, using bribed witnesses, which sent him straight to death row. Since then activists around the world, including the NUJ here in Britain, have been fighting to save Mumia and set him free. Now it seems new sworn evidence, supported by lie-detector tests, has been produced showing that the cop was killed by someone else for not going along with mob payouts to corrupt policemen. However the State in their desire to execute Mumia come what may have sought to ignore and/or rubbish this new material. The whole legal system in the USA is rotten to the core and totally under the control of big business. The poor go to jail or death row, the rich usually just get a slap on the wrist if that. The only way to free Mumia is for the Labour and trade union movement, both in the US and internationally, to keep up and increase the pressure both to get Mumia out and to clear away the system that seeks to legally kill him.

## Support Wm Cook Strikers

We are publishing below an appeal for support from workers on strike for nine weeks (as we go to press). Messages of support and donations should be sent to Wm Cook Strike Fund c/o Eddie Grimes, 116 Richmond Park Crescent, Handsworth, Sheffield, S13 8HG.

### "Dear Brothers

We are writing to ask our fellow trade union members to help support us in our fight against Wm Cook (Parkway Foundry). Any support you can offer us, especially financially, will be gratefully received and will help us to carry on fighting this dispute. Listed below is a run down of the dispute so far.

March 16, 01: New contracts received, terms and conditions rejected.

April 12, 01: One day strike. Official ballot AEEU.

April 13, 01: Returned to work, locked out and every day since. Jobs advertised and 'Scab' labour hired.

April 13, 01: Sign a contract rescinding union activity - we refused.

April 26, 01: Internal appeal, decision to dismiss workforce upheld.

May 10, 01: External appeal, decision to dismiss workforce upheld. Each worker was given a finishing date depending

on service starting date. Members have been getting dismissed from April 20th onwards.

June 7, 01: Interim relief refused at industrial tribunal.

June 8, 01: All union members involved in dispute have now been dismissed.

It is now the eighth week of our dispute. We have followed all rules and regulations in this dispute, whereas the management has broken the employment laws. The laws state that there can be no dismissals in the first eight weeks of a dispute, and that there can be no new employment on jobs in dispute!

This dispute and ballot were legal and sanctioned by the AEEU. Labour MPs have been approached with no success and AEEU leader Sir Ken Jackson has made no statement on our behalf. We hope to be hearing from you shortly because 'workers united will never be defeated.'

Yours faithfully

Eddie Grimes

On behalf of the Wm Cook Strikers."



# Oldham mobilises against the fascists

**The events in Oldham have hit the national headlines. This has brought the BNP and the danger from far-right groups back into the spotlight.**

**Bryan Beckingham, Secretary of Oldham National Union of Teachers, describes the background to these developments.**

Many alliances have been established to combat the fascist presence in Oldham. The National Union of Teachers has a proud record of being one of the organisations active against racism in Oldham over many years.

A few years ago when one school was covered in racist graffiti we organised a protest meeting, which attracted wide support involving trade unions, Labour Parties and ethnic minorities.

Oldham has many problems between the ethnic groups. It has the highest incidence of reported racist attacks in greater Manchester. It has a police leadership, which consistently blames the problems on Asians, stating that a majority of reported attacks is Asian on white.

For many years the Asian population has suffered abuse and attacks and the police have ignored their complaints. The Asian population as a whole suffer from institutional racism and discrimination in jobs, housing, education, policing, and the criminal justice system.

Racist attacks have been ignored or shrugged off by the police. Only recently under pressure have the police been making some "politically correct" moves. However, as the events on March 31st and subsequently, have shown us, they still remain institutionally racist.

There are some groups of Asian youth who are racist and attack whites because they are white, and also Bangladeshi and Pakistani youths fight each other. Some of this is related to territorial gangs and some is drug related crime.

The police and council had called for a ban from the Home Secretary Jack Straw and that was in place for a 6-month period. Along with others we issued a call for a counter march and rally for March 31st against any proposed NF presence, as they had proclaimed they were turning up.

Oldham United against Racism (including representatives of the Bangladeshi, Pakistani, Afro Caribbean community as well as anti-racist groups and trade union activists) organised a counter event. 20,000 leaflets were provided by the T&GWU and mass meetings were held in the main eth-

nic minority communities.

Behind the scenes the powers that be used every possible pressure to get the anti-racist movement to call the protest off. The council (now under Liberal control) tried all sorts of pressure on us. They sent notices out to schools saying that on police advice they urged teachers and other staff not to support the rally. The police refused permission for the march to go through the centre of Oldham. The police, aided by the council leadership, made scare stories about trouble from outsiders! Special meetings were called with the leadership of the anti-racists and the NUT to try to pressurise them to call the event off because the NF had not asked permission to march so there was no need to cause this fuss! These arguments are one of the reasons why we do have a problem of racism in Oldham. The argument that if you ignore racists and fascists they will go away has never worked.

On March 31st over 1,000 rallied against the fascists. The Council met the day before and issued a strong anti-racist statement saying they opposed the NF or BNP having a march in Oldham.

On the day of the mass rally every ethnic group was represented. Labour MP, Phil Woolas, and Glyn Ford MEP, were among the speakers. For the NUT, President Jason Travis, made an excellent fighting speech.

The police provided "support". Massive support in fact! About 40 transit vans full of police. Most of the Greater Manchester mounted police were present as was the inevitable helicopter! There must have been about 400 police present. They bullied people by such a massive presence and in various ways their actions were openly racist.

On the day we had a great peaceful rally against racism. We had said all along we were placing great emphasis on the peaceful nature of our event. The NF did not turn up on that day. The anti-racist alliances have been strengthened by our activity and this is necessary for the future to build upon.

Since that first event the NF have tried to come into the town every weekend. The BNP have stepped up their activity and

stood candidates in all three Oldham seats.

The attack on Walter Chamberlain, an elderly white man, was given massive coverage in the media. The man himself and his family said it was not racist, but criminal. In the area the attack occurred (waste ground, not residential), this is more likely. The police always say to white victims "this was a racist attack wasn't it?" They tend to do the reverse, if it is Asians

The number of attacks on Asian people equally vicious and horrendous is given little publicity and is going on all the time and, in fact, in the recent period has massively intensified.

Almost every weekend since Easter has seen massive police presence and the NF attempting to march. The BNP have had activities in parts of the town, leafleting and abusing people. They are attempting to be very "respectable" and "nationalist", not racist or fascist, leaving the hooligans and the NF to the violence. This is of course purely a tactic and a façade.

As the election result showed this was successful. Many of the voters who supported the BNP are not fascist or even racist but want answers to the problems they face.

In the week of May 21st at Breeze Hill school, (a school with 75% Asian pupils) white youth from a local estate whipped up by the BNP/NF attacked Asian pupils (the thugs included youth previously expelled from the school for racist activity).

The Head teacher had asked the police for help for three days and apparently had no response. They came on the fourth day and arrested some of the Asian pupils who were fighting back. Once again the police arrested the victims not the perpetrators of the attacks.

In the week of the 26th May to 2nd June the town erupted. The media painted the picture of Asians attacking the police. However evidence clearly showed that fascist and racists attacking Asian people provoked the events. The fascists were canvassing Asian areas and attacking, verbally and physically, Asian people. When the police arrived they arrested Asian youth and the thugs were allowed to run off. The Asian youth decided they had had enough and fought back and the police ended up attacking them!

The petrol bombing of the deputy mayor (Riaz Ahmed) forced the media and the police into at last seeing the main issue of right wing parties causing much of the violence. Members of OUAR spent the week explaining the issues at press conferences and at interviews and the message began to get across.

In Oldham the people of all communities are frightened. The town centre has been deserted on Saturdays when the NF has threatened to come to town. Police escort these thugs from one pub to another. Why



have they been allowed into the town?

The election result has sent shock waves round the country. I have been warning for years that the level of deprivation and racism in Oldham is a major problem. The issue will not go away

The NF threatened another march and demo on 10th of June and the ANL mobilised. The rally of the ANL was excellent with about 500 present and a strong trade union presence. The NUT, FBU, UNISON, NUJ, CWU had a good turnout. I opened the rally from the Oldham NUT, and others followed from FBU, UNISON, as well as Labour Councillor Mohammed Azam and others.

These results are a warning to the trade unions and Labour movement. The Labour Government in power for the last 4 years has failed to solve the problems people face. The Council has much to answer for over the years in allowing the segregation of the town in housing and education. The attitude and action of the police needs to be the subject of a public inquiry and the local press the Evening Chronicle needs challenging in its reporting. Michael Meacher has called for an inquiry. This is correct we want a full, open and public inquiry. We also want the Labour MPs to lead from the front and take the issues up.

The fascists grew in a previous period of Labour government in the 70's during the Wilson government. The political conclusion has to be drawn that because Labour is not solving the problems and poverty that leads people to vote for some "alternative".

The trade unions must now take a lead and Oldham NUT calls for the TUC regionally to organise a trade union march against racism and fascism in Oldham, in cooperation with the OUAR and ANL as early as possible in the Autumn.

In the town the Labour Party and its elected leaders must take a lead in a campaign of political education and action. A mass drive has to be made by all sections of the trade unions and Labour movement to explain the real nature of fascism, the BNP and NF. We must have no more ignoring the problems. Resources need putting into all areas in housing, education and employment. The Labour Government needs to deliver especially on its promises of increasing massively the resources for Health and education in all our towns and cities but particularly into Oldham. The BNP can be sent packing, but not easily, and only when we take the issues up and tackle the social issues that cause racism. ●

## Socialist policies needed to fight racism

**The recent disturbances in Oldham are the culmination of a long period of tension in the town. The riot of the evening of Saturday May 26th, when 500 Asian youths battled with police, was sparked off by an earlier incident where white youths attacked Asian businesses and homes in the mainly Pakistani Glodwick area. The police, who many felt had not done enough to protect the Asian community in the area, bore the full brunt of the anger.**

by Alan Creear

Tensions have been building since the publication of media claims of 'no-go areas for whites' (a position denied by most people in Oldham) alongside the lurid reporting of an attack on a 76 year old war veteran, Walter Chamberlain, although his family said that they did not believe there was a racial motive behind this incident. It has also been noted that a series of attacks on Asian taxi drivers had not received any-thing like the same media attention.

The deliberate decision of the BNP to stand candidates in the 2 Oldham constituencies at the general election-and to accordingly push all their national resources into this area during the campaign, with armies of thugs travelling up from all over the country-also clearly inflamed the situation. The National Front had also been threatening to march in the

town and NF activists were sighted drinking in local pubs on the day of the May 26th riot, fuelling speculation of their involvement. The previous day's edition of the Manchester Evening News had reported in detail on the harassment of Asian pupils at the nearby Breeze Hill School.

Undoubtedly social conditions are at the root of the problems here. The area has a concentration of some of the worst housing in the North West. Asians make up just 11% of the population of Oldham yet unemployment levels amongst Pakistanis run at 16%. The unemployment level for Bangladeshis is even higher at 25%. They are largely concentrated in the Westwood area of town where the second night of rioting occurred and where there had been earlier incidents of trouble involving racist elements who had

attached themselves to football supporters going to a game at the local league ground. Youth unemployment in the Asian community is currently running at between 30 and 40%-one Asian youth summed the situation up well when he told the Guardian paper that "when you go for a job and you say you are from Glodwick, they say 'On Your Bike!' "

Now we have seen the worryingly high vote that the BNP got at the election in Oldham. The fact that a layer of white residents have been temporarily taken in by the rubbish spouted by the BNP and their friends is a warning. That they have been allowed to get this foothold is mainly down to the perceived failures of New Labour at both a national and local level, as seen by the heavy loss of council seats for Labour in the area last year. Urgent action needs to be taken by the Labour movement to reassure all sections of the community and show where their interests really lie. It is insufficient and counterproductive merely to divert the current inadequate resources to supposed 'white' areas as the government now proposes. A class approach based on socialist policies for jobs and housing could unite the area, undermine the fascists and set about solving the real and deep seated problems which have beset places such as Oldham. ●



# Rail privatisation - a warning

**Ladbroke Grove, Hatfield - there's been a lot of disasters on the railways of late. In fact the real disaster has been rail privatisation itself.**

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**by Mick Brooks**

The railway system under public ownership had been run down and was losing money for donkey's years. All of a sudden the Tories doubled the money they were pumping in - to fatten the system up for privatisation. They had decided to give all the money we taxpayers had poured in to the railway system over the years to their big business friends. The Tories spoke about 'risk transfer' to the private sector, but it seems that risk has really been transferred to the passengers (sorry - 'customers'). There was a lot of rhetoric from the Tories about the 'dynamism and efficiency' private capitalism would bring, but the way the whole thing was done was entirely political. Major proposed to make sure this was one omelette that couldn't be made back into an egg.

The railways were not privatised as a going concern. Instead the system was split up between over a hundred different companies. The Health and Safety Executive warned about the fragmentation of decision-making before the sell-off. "Unless considerable care is taken to set up systems to ensure that new operators are properly equipped and organised, there can be no confidence that risk will be effectively controlled right from the start and that important matters do not fall between the safety arrangements of the various parties". In the rush no such systems were set up.

Railtrack was in charge of maintenance of the permanent way, while train operating companies ran the services, usually as regional monopolies. Then there were the rolling stock leasing companies. Porterbrook ROSCO was privatised for £527 million in January 1996 and sold on for £825 million seven months later. The managing director made £36 million and three other managers trousered £70 million. Eversholt ROSCO was privatised for £580 million and resold for over £726 million a year later. This was outright theft. The Tories in their last

years in office were nicking everything that was not nailed down to the floor.

Who were the train operating companies? Richard Branson, the maverick capitalist, is currently making a hash of the West Coast

line. Connex is actually owned by a French water utility. Lack of even the most rudimentary knowledge about railways is not seen as any kind of disqualification to running one. In fact a slew of shadowy consortia have emerged in the wake of the worldwide trend to privatisation who tender for all kinds of work. Their only known skill is how to boss workers about. An obvious question is how these firms are to make 'cost savings' while paying out massive dividends to shareholders. The case of rail privatisation shows that there are no cost savings, or none that passengers can see anyhow. Since privatisation the Swiss can boast their trains are not the dearest. British railways are now the most expensive in the world.

The first thing these privateering 'custodians' of the public interest do is sack anyone with any skill or experience. Skilled and experienced workers are expensive workers! Under privatisation the number of railway workers fell from 159,000 to 92,000 in the five years to 1997. Staff involved in track maintenance went from 31,000 to between 15,000 and 19,000 over the same period. The Tories had deliberately privatised the system so that nobody was in charge and nobody was there to take the blame. In other words they had privatised it in such a way that accidents were bound to happen. Railtrack was contracting maintenance work out to firms like Balfour Beatty. They in turn, like every firm about heists that go wrong you have ever seen, were hiring workers in pubs. On one occasion they put a colour blind, inexperienced worker in charge of a team fixing rails. Perhaps it is necessary to explain to these cowboys - with railway signals it is important to be able to tell the difference between red and green.

A recently published book (Ian Jack - The crash that stopped Britain) shows how this chaos led directly to the Hatfield tragedy. "When a contracting firm repairs a track, it 'takes possession' of it. Trains are stopped for the duration of these 'track possessions', and this may in itself cost Railtrack if it cannot meet its obligations to the train operating companies, and their trains are cancelled or delayed...A delay to a train in the London morning rush hour, for example, can cost Railtrack £200 a minute at Waterloo. One delayed train can cause other delayed trains for hundreds of miles down the track, with Railtrack compensating their operators for each.

The train now approaching platform -

CRASH!  
BANG! WALLOP!







A bill of £250,000 is quite easy to run up. Railtrack, therefore, can penalise the contractor, gathering in money with one hand as it pays out with the other." He sums up, "Whatever emotion this system appeals to - greed, fear, blame, retribution - it is unlikely to inspire either trust or careful workmanship." This was illustrated by Professor Baldry in giving evidence before the Ladbroke Grove enquiry. "We were given on several occasions evidence that if, for example, track workers from Scotland had been

ers of £134 million - our money, every penny of it. On present projections Railtrack will have debts of £8 billion by 2003 and £14.5 billion by 2006. Effectively, it is already insolvent, actually worthless. Share tipsters ABN Amro reckon if we don't stump up share valuation could fall to £266 million. Railtrack was floated on privatisation as worth £1.9 billion.

John Prescott says we can't renationalise the railways because of the compensation the government would

lion, and share prices are falling like a stone. It's time to switch off their life support machine. Just before the election Railtrack announced: a) that it has made a loss of £530 million and b) that it proposes to pay out a dividend to sharehold-

sating their killers! The 77% of the population who want trains back in public ownership don't want yet more of our money thrown at these greedy incompetents. They want to see the people responsible in prison for corporate manslaughter.

Instead the government proposes to 'inject' £26 billion more of our money into the system over the next ten years. They hope that sum will be matched by £34 billion from the private sector companies. Some hope! Railtrack have put new investment plans on hold since Hatfield. Renovation of the railways under private ownership is cloud cuckoo land. Rail ticket sales collapsed in the wake of the Hatfield disaster. The train operating companies' response is to open up a squabble with Railtrack for compensation. Railtrack's money is ultimately our money. The Post Office has had to cancel its contract for first class letter carriage because of the post-Hatfield shambles. Who can blame them?

Railtrack says it needs another £2 billion upfront to keep going. If it gets the money, it will have taken £6 billion of our money in one year. Remember the company is currently valued at £1.78 billion and has swallowed £5 billion of our money already since 1997. We cannot afford NOT to renationalise them. The rail service will wither away under con-

**John Prescott says we can't renationalise the railways because of the compensation the government would have to pay. Readers may think the compensation is for the victims and bereaved of the successive crashes. But actually John is talking about compensating their killers! The 77% of the population who want trains back in public ownership don't want yet more of our money thrown at these greedy incompetents**

sent down to York to work on a bit of track that was unfamiliar to them, they find themselves working with other employees of a different contractor. Their instinct is to ask local people about the nature of the track. The local people may have been told by their employer, 'Don't talk to these persons because they are employed by the opposition!'

This is the kind of atmosphere that led to the 'gauge corner' cracking at Hatfield not being reported and dealt with for two years. Four people died as a direct result.

Jack's account gives the reader some idea of the crazy money-go-round of our railway 'system'. The fact that government subsidies have soared since privatisation gives the lie to the theory that privatisation produces cost savings. Railtrack has held out the begging bowl for more than £5 billion since Labour was elected. Their total share valuation at present is around £1.78 bil-

lion, and share prices are falling like a stone. It's time to switch off their life support machine. Just before the election Railtrack announced: a) that it has made a loss of £530 million and b) that it proposes to pay out a dividend to sharehold-

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## News in brief

**1,500 Merseyside firefighters** are being balloted for strike action following continued industrial relations problems. The decision by Merseyside's Fire Service chief Malcolm Saunders, to allow non-uniformed staff to apply for officer jobs was the last straw. Firefighters were tired of heavy-handed management tactics. Mr. Skarratts said, "FBU members are now at the end of their tether with Merseyside Fire Authority and chief Fire Officer Malcolm Saunders." Any strike action could begin in the first few weeks of July.

The new Education Secretary Estelle Morris has informed **Teachers** that from September onwards they will have to do extra teaching, marking, reading and grading in their own time either at night or during the weekend. It has been calculated that primary schools are working an average 53 hours and in secondary schools it is 51 hours. That is without any more training being added in teacher's own time by the Education Secretary.



# Labour's second term: Break with big business!

**With the election results counted, analysed and digested, it is now possible to deliver a final verdict on the British general election of June 2001.**

**editorial board statement**

**"Today they are ringing their bells.  
Tomorrow they will be wringing their hands."  
Horace Walpole**

**L**abour has won the elections with a majority of 167 seats at Westminster - only slightly down on last time when they won a landslide majority of 179 seats. This was an historic victory, the first time Labour has won a second consecutive term, and with a majority greater than that of Attlee in 1945.

The election result was a body-blow to the Conservative Party. They even failed to win back traditional Tory seats like middle class Torbay (popularly known as Tory-bay in the past) which was won by the Liberals at the last election with a majority of only twelve votes.

The defeat suffered by the Tories is even worse than that which Labour suffered in 1983. Tory leader William Hague took the hint and immediately

announced his resignation, opening up a crisis inside the Conservative Party, which is badly split over Europe and other questions.

The Tories failed to win a single seat in Wales, and just one in Scotland. The SNP is the second party in Scotland, but it failed to make much headway. Nor did Plaid Cymru, the Welsh nationalist party gain much ground in Wales and lost Ynys Mon (Anglesey) to Labour.

On the face of it, it is an outstanding triumph for Tony Blair. But these results do not adequately express the contradictory nature of the mood in British society. The general election turnout was low - only 58 per cent bothered to vote - twelve per cent less than in 1997 and the lowest figure for 80 years. Labour was elected by only one in four of potential voters - the lowest figure for any government.

The heaviest abstention was in traditional Labour strongholds in the North. In Liverpool Riverside, only 34.1 per cent turned up to vote - 18 per cent lower than the already low figure of 1997. The reason for this alleged "voter apathy" is not hard to find. After four years of Blairite policies, there is no enthusiasm for New Labour, but even less for the Tories. The mood of the masses is sceptical. The working class is disappointed and frustrated with New Labour. Despite Labour's landslide victory, the underlying mood is extremely volatile. This was shown by the result in Wyre Forest where a local doctor, fighting against the closure of a hospital, won a seat from Labour with a massive majority.

There were massive abstentions among the youth. Only one third of young voters between the ages of 18-24 said on the eve of the election that they intended to vote. The Labour

leaders are now trying to claim that the reason for this is that people were convinced that Labour was going to win anyway, so there was no need to vote. It is true that 53 per cent when questioned by the opinion polls gave this answer. But a far larger number - 71 per cent - said that they would not vote because "it made no difference who they voted for". And the evidence points to the fact that these were concentrated in traditional Labour seats.

In Labour's working class heartland, there is a mood of frustration and disenchantment. This has serious implications for the next Blair government. It will not be the same as the last one.

## Pro-Business policy

**I**n May 1997, Labour won a landslide majority after 18 long years of right wing Tory government. Tony Blair, the new leader of the Labour Party, promised a new and "radical" policy to build a "Better Britain". But once installed in Number Ten Downing Street he followed a policy tailored exclusively to the interests of Big Business

In the past two decades a large part of Britain's manufacturing base has been destroyed. The level of investment in industry has lagged behind that of Germany, France and other countries. Even formerly backward Italy has overtaken Britain, and Spain is not far behind. The former workshop of the world has been largely turned into a parasitic rentier economy based on banking and services, like France before the Second World War. This has had serious social consequences.

Britain also now has some of the longest hours, lowest pay and worst working conditions of any major industrialised country. At present, British workers work 25 per cent longer hours than workers in Europe or the USA. Polly Townsend, writing in *The Guardian* (23/3/2001) points out: "The OECD - conservative economists - finds Britain has the least market regulation, the lowest corporation tax (lower than any time in history) and the lowest employment costs - not just lower than the rest of Europe, but when everything is added on (including US employers' health insurance) lower than the US too. Social insurance and labour taxes average 24 per cent in Europe and only 13 per cent in Britain."

The Blair government has done little to remedy this. The introduction of the minimum wage was a step forward, but it was set at such a low rate as to water it down completely and discriminates against young workers. Even a large part





of the notorious Tory anti-trade union legislation - which restricts trade union rights to a far greater extent than in any other industrialised nation - have not been rescinded.

While Blair struts around the world stage, parts of Britain are falling to almost Third-World levels. Public housing, education and transport are in a lamentable state. The much-vaunted National Health Service is now in ruins. Once Britain led the world in health. Now, according to the World Health Organisation, 25,000 Britons who died of cancer every year would have lived if the NHS was at the best European levels. Expenditure on health in Britain is only one third of US levels, and one half that of France.

After decades of neglect, the infrastructure is crumbling. The Observer (27 May) pointed out that investment in the public sector under New Labour has been even lower than under Thatcher: "Investment in hospitals, schools and transport infrastructure sunk to the lowest sustained level since the Second World War during Labour's four years in power [...] Overall real investment declined by 4.4 per cent a year, a larger decline than was registered during Margaret Thatcher's premiership."

Yet the answer of Blair and the Labour Right is to privatise and invite Big Business to invest in public services. But people can see that the so-called Private Finance Initiative is nothing but a fraud. There are fewer hospital beds and worse terms of employment than before.

These policies have been disastrous for Labour. They led to a series of devastating defeats in Wales and Scotland and in the European elections. Above all, they led to an unprecedented routing of the official Labour candidate in the election for the mayor of London. For lack of an alternative, and to keep the Tories out, the working class voted for Labour on 7 June. But they did so with neither enthusiasm nor conviction. Labour won on 7 June not because of, but in spite of, Tony Blair.

## Why Labour won

**D**espite everything, Labour won this election by a sizeable margin. This is a decisive answer to those on the fringes of the labour movement who have left the Labour Party and are desperately striving to build phantom "revolutionary" armies in the clouds.

These groups imagined they would be able to capitalise on the disillusionment of the workers with New Labour. In Scotland the SSP said they would get 100,000 votes. In the event they got 70,000, which is a respectable result, but not as much as they had anticipated. However, in England and Wales the Socialist Alliance, SLP, etc., flopped completely. In the working class London constituency of East Ham, where in 1997 Arthur Scargill's Socialist Labour Party saved its deposit and got one of its best results nationally, coming third, they lost heavily, falling into fourth place. In Hartlepool, where right winger Peter Mandelson, discredited by scandal, seemed an easy target, Arthur Scargill stood in person, and got less

than a thousand votes. Elsewhere, they got only a few hundred votes in each constituency.

The conclusion is inescapable, and should be pondered over by all those who wish to build a left alternative to Blair: Outside the Labour Party and the unions there is no possibility! Although many working class people are disappointed with Blair and his policies, they see no alternative to the Labour Party at the present time. Those who did not vote for Labour did not look for an alternative outside the party. They merely stayed at home. Those who saw the need to prevent the return to Tory rule - despite all their misgivings - rallied once more to Labour. Blair and the Labour right wing will try to present this as a victory for the pro-capitalist policies of the leadership. It is nothing of the kind. Beneath the surface, there is a simmering discontent, anger and frustration which will inevitably surface in the next period and will have far-reaching effects inside the Labour Party.

The Labour victory was based to a great extent on the world boom which has kept the British economy afloat over the past four years. Despite the increased polarisation of wealth and the increase in stress at work, real wages have continued to rise while inflation remains low. However, this 'boom' has not improved the lot of many workers in the industrial areas, especially in the North of England, where there is a considerable degree of dissatisfaction, and all the indicators are now pointing in the direction of a recession in the forthcoming period.

There are already storm clouds gathering on the horizon. The outlook is very bleak as the world economy begins to slow down. The tame economists try to argue that Britain will not be affected by the slowdown in the United States. This argument is completely phoney. There are already clear signs of the beginning of a downturn. In January we saw the steepest fall in industrial output for three years. Simon Robinson, an economist at Garrard, commented:

"With demand slowing, things are likely to get worse before they get any better. This will soon translate into further job losses." (Financial Times, 13/3/2001)

This explains the haste with which Blair called the election. The Labour leaders know which way things are going. Had they waited another twelve months, the result might have been very different.

## Blairites out of touch

The Times and Financial Times - two traditionally Tory papers, advocated a vote for Labour. So did The Sun, Murdoch's reactionary right wing gutter press rag. This is







a pat on the back for Blair from Big Business, which is evidently well pleased with his performance - up till now. During the campaign, Blair was confronted on television by an angry woman distraught by the NHS's treatment of her husband. Yet, under the pressure of Big Business, Blair is determined to push through backdoor privatisation, as he stated in a BBC interview:

"Anybody who comes to me after the general election from the traditional old left and says 'no, you cannot involve the private sector in these things,' I want to say 'no, I made it clear during the election that we wanted a different partnership between the public and private sector'."

The Blairite leaders of the Labour Party are completely out of touch with reality. Dominated by sycophants and "spin doctors", they live on another planet. Removed from the pressures of the rank and file, they are even more open to the pressures of Big Business and the press. The new cabinet will undoubtedly indicate a further slide to the right. Figures like John Prescott, too associated with "Old Labour" for Blair's liking, will be increasingly sidelined. But by this procedure, there will be the beginnings of divisions inside the PLP and even inside the Cabinet in the next period between the new generation of middle class parvenus loyal only to Blair and the older layer of right wingers who do not want to see the Labour Party destroyed.

Blair now imagines he can do anything he wants. He thinks he can lord it over the Labour party and the unions. During the election campaign he made it clear that he would regard an election victory as a mandate to press ahead with the "public-private initiative". The attempt to introduce the methods of the private sector into the public sector is a finished recipe for conflict. The workers in the public sector are in no mood to accept further impositions. The stage is therefore set for a collision of major proportions. Speaking on BBC television on election night, Andrew Marr predicted that there would be "big battles with the Left and the trade unions". That is undoubtedly correct.

### Crisis in the Tory Party

**T**he Tory Party is now deeply divided and in crisis. Unable to present a credible alternative to the policies of the Blairites, they tried to play first the race card ("asylum seekers"), then the question of the Euro.

But all these manoeuvres have failed. The problem of the Tories is simply stated: Blair has stolen their clothes. Since he was elected he has consistently done everything Big Business has asked of him. They therefore have no need of the Tories at the present time.

The cosy relation between Blair and Big Business has led some to conclude that Labour is now a bourgeois party. That is a complete misreading of the actual state of affairs. The ruling class does not trust the Labour Party because of its links to the trade unions and the working class. Of course, they will back Blair because he is their man. But they understand very well that the Labour Party is not Tony Blair.

At present the Tories are in a mess. Therefore, the ruling class is prepared to back Blair. But they do not see Labour as their party. Their policy is "use and discredit". They will press it into doing the dirty work until it is thoroughly discredited and then swing back to the Tories. The ploy was clear from the front page of The Sun: "Don't let us down, Tony!" This slogan is double-edged. It is, on the one hand, a peremptory order from the capitalist class, and at the same time a sly preparation of the terrain for a future onslaught by The Sun on the Labour government when it suits the ruling class.

### Changing mood

After two decades of mild reaction, the situation in Britain is changing. The polls show that the mass of people now reject privatisation which is generally seen as a licence to plunder the public sector. Only six per cent of voters (13 per cent of Tory voters) support the running of public services by private companies. 76 per cent of all voters want renationalisation of the railways, including an incredible 71 per cent of Tory voters. This shows that there is a sea-change in public opinion in Britain. The red light is flashing for the Blairites.

Yet the self-styled realists of the Labour leadership, who claim to be listening to the views of the electorate, remain deaf to all this. They are determined to maintain their right-wing pro-business line to the bitter end. The Blair government insists in pushing through creeping privatisation of the schools and hospitals, as well as the London Underground and Air Traffic Control.

The working class in general learns from experience. The election of the first Blair government was a necessary part of the learning process whereby the masses put their leaders to the test. The real attitude of the workers to Blair was shown in a whole series of partial elections in Wales, Scotland, London etc., where they registered an unprecedented protest. All this constitutes an absolutely unavoidable stage in the development of consciousness. The know-nothing sects interpreted this as proof that the working class was moving away from Labour. The present election shows just how little they have understood. The workers, having taken stock of the position, voted Labour to keep out the open representatives of Big Business. But after the election, their attitude to the government will not be the same as before.

The mass of working people will no longer be so patient and tolerant as they were under the first Blair



administration. They will insist that Labour acts in their interests. The Blairites will find themselves ground between two mill stones.

## Labour and the unions

The union leaders have tried to avoid strike action, pointing to the danger of legal action under the anti trade union laws which, disgracefully, remain on the statute books. But this will not hold back the workers indefinitely. The unofficial (and illegal) strikes in the Post Office are a warning of things to come. If the union leaders continue to drag their feet, they will face outright rebellion in one union conference after another. There will be a wave of unofficial actions which the leaders will have to make official in the end.

It is a mistake only to see the surface of events and not to see the processes that are unfolding underneath. There is a mood of boiling anger and indignation in the class which sooner or later must come to the surface. At a certain stage, the union leaders will be pushed into semi-opposition, or even open opposition to Blair. The recent events in Greece, where the right wing union leaders were forced to organise two general strikes against the government of Simitis, the Greek Tony Blair, is an indication of where Britain is heading.

For years the employers have been piling on the pressure, increasing the workload and whittling away workers' gains in hours, pay and conditions. Now the limits of this are being reached. The discontent on the shop floor is shown by the spate of strikes in the Post Office in the run-up to the general election. There is the beginning of a ferment in the unions. That is shown by the unexpected victory of the Left candidate in the election for general secretary in the CWU. In another surprise victory for the left, Mark Serwotka won in the leadership elections in the civil servants' union, the PCS. This is a clear indication of the transformation of the trade unions, which will continue at an even faster pace in the next period. The unions have been restrained during the run-up to the election, but that will change afterwards.

Many of the unions are privately alarmed at Blair's proposals to hand the public sector over to the private sector, which do not differ markedly from measures by the Conservative government. Disgust at these right wing policies has led some to question the union link with Labour. This was shown by the recent decision of the Fire Brigades Union to change the union's rules to allow donations to candidates other than Labour who support "the principles and policies of the union". Indignation against the right wing Labour leaders is understandable. But the question is: what is

to be done about it?

Certain groups are encouraging unions to disaffiliate from the Labour party. This is completely wrong. By refusing to carry the fight into the Labour Party, they are merely doing what Tony Blair wants. After all, his main concern, in line with the demands of his Big Business backers, has been to break Labour's links with the unions. That is

local branches but also the affiliated unions sprang to life. True, the movement subsided again when Livingstone left the Party. But it showed the shape of things to come. In the next period, there will be many other incidents like that which will shake up every Party branch and union all over Britain.

Those people who continually ask themselves how it is possible that the British

**It is a mistake only to see the surface of events and not to see the processes that are unfolding underneath. There is a mood of boiling anger and indignation in the class which sooner or later must come to the surface.**

not our policy. Socialist Appeal says: unions should not contract out, but contract in. They should flood the Labour Party with their members, demanding that Labour carry out policies in the interests of the workers, not the bosses.

## Time to fight back!

Despite all Blair's efforts the organic link between the Labour Party and the unions has not been broken. The unions and the rank and file will demand policies in the interests of working people. On the basis of events, at a certain stage, a mass Left will emerge within the Labour and trade union movement. That is the way to defeat Blair and transform the Labour and trade union movement!

The process that will open up was already anticipated in the Livingstone affair in London. In protest at the high-handed conduct of the Labour leadership in refusing to accept the democratic decision of the London Labour Party, there was a revolt of the rank and file. The whole Party was in a state of ferment. Overnight, not just the

workers continue to vote for Blair reveal a complete lack of understanding of how the class moves. It is sufficient to pose the question concretely to get the right answer. Where is the alternative to Blair? The Tories? Certainly not. The Labour Left? But they are invisible! The sects who fiddle and fuss on the fringes of the Labour movement? That is just a joke. In the general election the working class once again voted Labour, not because they like Blair or his policy, but simply because there is no alternative to the Labour Party. Not to see this is to understand nothing about the real situation in Britain.

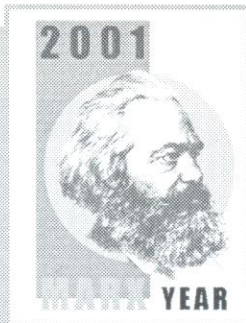
The victory of the Labour Party on 7 June is not the end of the story, but only the closing of one chapter and the opening of a new chapter, a period of storm and stress with sudden and sharp changes in the situation. On the basis of a real socialist policy and correct methods, we can build the necessary alternative. ●

## ...more news

**The election results for the constituency section of Labour's National Executive Committee have revealed some increased successes for the Left.**

**Although Tony Robinson came top of the poll with 29,771 votes, mainly because of the "Baldrick" factor, Leftwingers Ann Black (24,947 votes) and Christine Shawcroft (24,284) came second and third respectively in the poll. Also elected back on after a year off was Mark Seddon with 22,559 votes. Equally pleasing was the fact that former bureaucrat Joyce Gould failed, despite all the best efforts of the Blairite machine, to get elected only polling 17,751 votes. The turnout was again down which was not unsurprising given that the voting papers were hidden inside the incredibly dull election special magazine sent out by Millbank to a less than enthusiastic party membership. ●**





# Where Does Come from?

**We are constantly told that workers get paid in full for the work they perform. We are also informed that profit comes from the enterprising skill of the capitalist who invests his money wisely and produces the commodities that people want. In his last article *Mick Brooks* explained that the secret of capitalist exploitation was contained in the fact that the worker doesn't sell his labour to the boss but his labour power, his capacity to work. In this following article Mick reveals the real source of profit, which arises from the unpaid labour of the working class.**

Imagine a farmer who keeps a horse to plough a field and sow oats. The farmer feeds the horse some of the oats and sells the rest. It would be pointless for the farmer to keep a horse if it only ploughed up enough soil to feed itself. Horses have traditionally been used in agriculture because they can provide farmers with a surplus above their own subsistence. That is also why capitalists employ workers. It's easy to see what's happening in the case of the horse; you can actually divide a crop up into oats for subsistence and oats for sale. It's more difficult with the worker. The worker comes in to produce commodities which very often are consumed neither by labourers or capitalists. The commodities are sold on the open market. The worker is paid off with a wage, which she is free to spend as she thinks fit. That's the theory. Really you have to pay the rent, and you have to eat. By the time you've paid out on essentials all you have left is pocket money. Meanwhile the boss trousers the surplus left over in money form.

The worker adds value in the process of production. That is a well recognised fact. The Inland Revenue can compute value added in order to calculate how much VAT they should be getting. This product of the worker's labour undergoes a two way split. If we look at every day, every hour, every minute of time or every piece of work done value added can be divided in two. Marx called these necessary and surplus labour. Necessary labour is what goes to maintain the workers' labour power - it is paid labour and goes towards the workers' wage. Surplus labour is labour which goes to keep not just your immediate boss, but the whole class of hangers on, in idleness. This is unpaid labour.

Hostile commentators often attribute to Marx the notion that workers could only get an absolute subsistence minimum wage. This, of course, is the prelude to 'proving' that Marx was wrong, or at least completely out of date. Actually Marx and Engels were scornful of contemporary theories of the 'iron law of wages' as put forward by Lassalle, an opponent of theirs in the German labour movement. Quite logically Lassalle contested that, since wages were fixed, trade union activity and strikes were a waste of time. Marx, as head of the International Working Men's Association, vigorously argued the opposite. The International actually spent most of its time and effort raising funds for workers on strike and issuing leaflets in different languages and appeals against the danger of international scabbing. Marx was also one of the nineteenth century economists most aware of rising

standards of living for the workers. Moreover he saw these early faltering steps of the labour movement in gaining an improved standard of living through struggle as the necessary first stage in the process of self-emancipation of the working class. "The comprehensiveness of what are called 'needs', and the method of their satisfaction, are likewise historical products, depending upon the stage of civilisation a country has reached; and depending, moreover, to a very considerable extent upon what conditions, and therefore with what habits and claims, the class of free workers has come into existence. Thus the value of labour power includes... a historical and a moral factor."

The division of the working time into paid and unpaid labour is not a feature of capitalism alone. All ruling classes in history have maintained themselves by exploiting the oppressed class. "Surplus labour was not a new discovery made by capital. Wherever a part of society has a monopoly of the means of production the worker, whether free or bond, must supplement the labour time necessary for his own maintenance by surplus labour time in which he produces the means of subsistence for the owner of the means of production, whether this owner be an Athenian devotee of the Good and the Beautiful, an Etruscan theocrat, a Roman citizen, a Norman baron, an American slave owner, a Wallachian boyar, a modern landlord or a capitalist."

The difference is that, under capitalism, exploitation is not obvious. Under feudalism the peasants often worked three days on their own strips of land and three days on the lord's land. The product of the first three days' work would be consumed in the peasant household while the product of the next three days labour was harvested and taken to the castle for the lord and his retainers. Whatever the contemporary religious or traditional justification of this practice, it would not have been necessary for medieval revolutionaries to have written erudite tomes explaining that this was exploitation. Likewise with the slave. Actually it would seem here that all the slave's labour was unpaid. In fact if the slave was producing a commercial crop such as cotton or tobacco, the slave owner would have to put aside a part of his revenue to buy food for the slaves. The same division of the product of work into paid and unpaid portion takes place in all forms of class society.

The reality of exploitation under capitalism is complicated by several other factors. First the medieval peasant is likely to harvest a crop with his own hands. It is obvi-



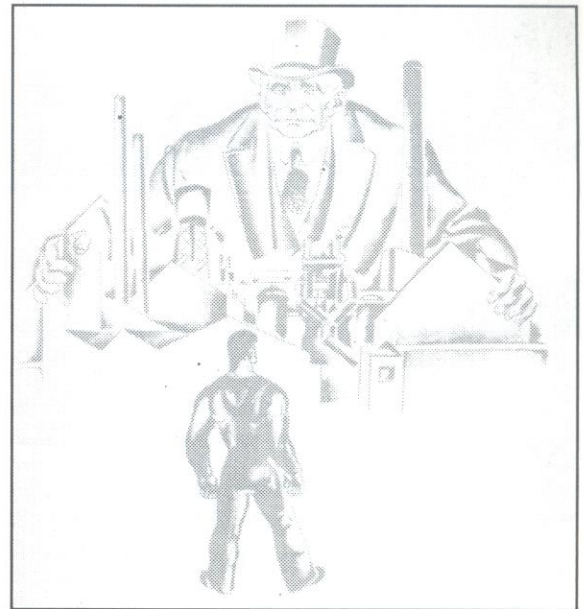
# Profit

ous that the food he eats is the fruit of his own labour. Under capitalism there is a division of labour within the workplace as well as the division of labour imposed by production for the market. No one worker can point to the product and say 'this is mine'. A commodity such as a mass-produced car passes through the hands of hundreds of detail workers. It is the product of the collective labour of the factory 'hands'. This is a broader concept than just assembly-line workers. A big factory is likely to hire separate cleaning staff. The alternative, of course, would be to stop work while the production line workers clean up. Likewise the Coventry toolroom agreement recognises maintenance engineers as productive workers by cutting them in on any bonuses or piece work agreements.

Secondly the surplus is not all consumed by your direct employer. Marxists have used the formula - rent, interest and profit - to explain the division of surplus value among the different fractions of the capitalist. Actually it's even more complicated than that, as we shall see. But if the

by the boss, for raw materials, machinery heating, light and power, and so on, are called constant capital by Marx. These are called constant capital because they pass their value unchanged to the final product. They contain surplus value from workers further down the chain of production.

This is easy to see in the case of raw materials. Nobody thinks that the chocolate coating to a sweet adds any value apart from its cost for the capitalist who buys it. Machinery does aid the productivity of labour but does not itself add value. To take the simplest case, the capitalists (or rather their managers) know a machine will produce one million widgets over a ten year period, by which time it will be clapped out. If the machine costs £1 million they will assess the depreciation on the machine embodied in each widget at £1. So if they put £1 aside every time they sell a widget they will have £1 million when it's time to buy a new machine. In practice capitalists will have to take account of the fact



from the surplus value generated in the productive part of the economy.

\$18 goes on materials. The manufacturing firm just buys these in.

\$16 is manufacturing overheads and profit. This is a tricky one to analyse in Marxist terms. Heating and lighting are costs, just like fabrics and zip fasteners. But some of the 'costs' will really be a share of the profits. Rent, for instance, is really siphoned off by another section of the property owning class. To keep it simple, we'll assume that \$15 of those \$16 really are costs and the poor old manufacturer only makes \$1 on a \$100 dress (a rate of profit of just 1%).

The worker who makes the dress gets \$12 back in wages.

Now let's look at this in Marxist terms:- Constant capital is \$33 - \$18 for materials, \$15 for other production costs.

Variable capital is \$12

Surplus value is \$55, of which \$1 goes to the immediate boss and \$54 on Oxford Street rents and the pay of salespeople, who no doubt work very hard, but do not generate new values through their work.

The rate of surplus value or rate of exploitation is the amount of time the worker puts in to reproduce the elements of his/her wages compared with the amount of time the worker devotes to enriching the capitalist class. In this case the rate of exploitation is more than 450%!

Such is the way in which the capitalist class produces surplus value. This surplus is then reinvested to make more capital and more profit. This gives the system its dynamic. However, this also introduces a major contradiction into the system. The workers do not receive enough in wages to buy back all they produce. At a certain stage this gives rise to a crisis of overproduction and a paralysis of the system. Inherent in capitalism is crisis. Slump is a necessary partner of boom. ●

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**No one worker can point to the product and say 'this is mine'. A commodity such as a mass-produced car passes through the hands of hundreds of detail workers. It is the product of the collective labour of the factory 'hands'. This is a broader concept than just assembly-line workers.**

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banks raise interest rates or industrial rents go up, that will hit the industrialist's profits quite independently of the struggle of the workers for higher wages, for a bigger share of what they produce.

Finally the capitalist has other costs than labour. For a modern multinational, wages may represent no more than 5-10% of total costs. Though the value added by the worker may be divided into necessary and surplus labour, the value of the commodity comes in three parts. There is surplus value, the unpaid labour of the working class that the capitalists all feed off. Then there is the time put in by the worker to reproduce the elements of his/her own wages. When the capitalist 'advances' this to the worker in the form of a wage, Marx calls this variable capital. It is variable because it is part of the money capital which is capable of yielding a surplus in the process of production. All the other outlays

that the machine will probably be obsolescent and have to be scrapped before it is physically worn out, but the principle is clear. Machinery just passes its value unchanged to the final product to the extent that it depreciates. It aids the worker in creating surplus value but does not itself create new value. That is why all the other elements of the production process apart from labour power count for the capitalist as constant capital.

Let's look at exploitation in practice. Figures come from the research department of the American textile workers' union, UNITE. If an American woman spends \$100 on a dress:-

\$54 goes to the shop. But all the retailer does is pass the goods along and hang them up for people to look at. Where does the money come from? The sales effort squanders huge resources in modern capitalism. These resources can only come



# No votes and then no growth

**Well it was a landslide. It was an unprecedented result. No, I don't mean a Labour landslide or that it was unprecedented that Labour won a complete second term for the first time. No, I mean that for the first time since every person of 21 years and over was allowed to vote (and it was 1928 before women got the vote), the No Vote party polled more than the party with the largest number of votes.**

by Michael Roberts

In 1997, Labour polled 31% of those eligible to vote, squeaking past the No Vote party, which reached 29.1% of those registered to vote. This time, despite allowing anybody to register for a postal vote if they wanted to for the first time, and despite four years of New Labour (or maybe because of that!), the No Vote party got a massive 40.7% of those registered, while New Labour polled just 24.8%, or less than one in four. The Conservatives found that less than one in five voters was prepared to turn out and vote for them. It was landslide for the No Vote party.

What did the No Vote party stand for? The pollster organisations found three arguments dominated the views of the No Voters. First, it didn't matter whether New Labour won as it would make no difference to people's lives. Second, none of the parties would do anything for them. And third, politicians are not to be trusted as they always renege on their promises. These were powerful enough arguments to win for the No Vote party by a wide margin for the first time in nearly a century of electoral history.

The Queen's Speech has come and gone. In this second term, New Labour says it is making a priority of delivering decent public services to the population. Better schools, a working health service and a functioning transport system within four to five years - these are the promises. As a previous column explained, after two years of cutting public services to win the support of big business of New Labour (1997-99), the government finally launched new spending programmes in 2000. Government spending expansion is supposed to rise from 2.5% a year (about the same as inflation) this year up to 4.2% a next year.

But as the Institute of Fiscal Studies has rigorously pointed out, after 2003 the government cannot sustain improved public spending without either raising the tax burden, measured as tax revenues as a share of national output, or as a share of average household income. The alternative to that is boost the underlying level of economic growth in the British economy so that national output outstrips increased spending.

That would mean the British economy would have to expand at 4-5% a year in real terms for the foreseeable future. Yet the underlying levels of economic growth in Britain

seem locked at about 2.0-2.5% a year. A faster rate of growth depends on raising the productivity of the existing labour force and also increasing the amount of people employed.

The irony is that Gordon Brown has made it his key aim in the second term of New Labour to create an 'enterprise economy', with the objective of raising the UK's pitifully low productivity levels. Despite manufacturing employment declining, output per employee in that sector has risen only 1.5% a year since 1997. That compares with the 4-5% growth seen in the US. And without faster productivity, the UK cannot grow faster.

## Improvement?

There seems little likelihood of improvement. The key to faster productivity growth is investment in new technology that will make workers more productive. Sure, you can boost output per worker by reducing the size of the workforce and making the others work harder or longer each day. But British workers already work the longest hours and have the shortest holidays in Europe. Sweating more production out of British workers has been maximized.

So there is a need to invest in new technology to create Gordon Brown's 'enterprise economy'. In 1997, British manufacturers invested £19.8bn in their companies. This year, they are likely to invest just £17.8bn. If it weren't for increased investment in the financial sector and other services, total business investment would have fallen in the last four years. The huge profits made by British business have been invested abroad instead.

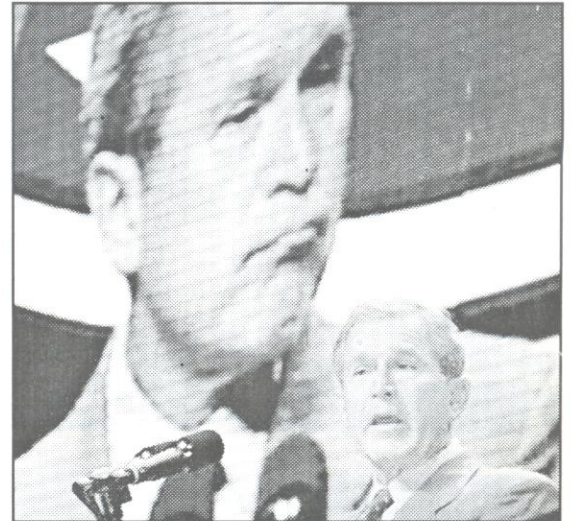
And even the low growth already achieved is now in jeopardy. There was one significant statistic released quietly on Election Day. Manufacturing output in April had fallen 2% from December's peak figure and manufacturing profitability has slumped.

The reason for this slump is hidden in the statistics. The UK's very small information technology (IT) sector has nevertheless contributed 0.5% points a year to the UK's growth rate since 1997. Since 1995, IT output more than doubled while the rest of manufacturing production actually declined 1.5%. But, just as in the US, this sector is now in decline as investment in IT equipment falls back. In the last year IT manufacturing has fallen back nearly 1%, with the rest of manufacturing output being flat.

But, say the capitalist optimists, manufacturing contributes less than 20% to the UK's annual output now. It is no longer that important.







The service sector- communications, transport, financial services and tourism - is now the heart and soul of modern British capitalism. But here also, there are worrying signs.

A key area for UK prosperity is the financial services sector. The UK is now the rentier economy of the capitalist world. Financial services accounted for nearly 7% of UK annual output in 2000. But in this sector, everything depends on stock markets around the world continuing to rise, particularly as the UK is a net exporter of financial services, with around 40% of its sector's sales going as exports. So any downturn in world stock markets spells doom for a very important sector of the British economy. And what have we seen since March 2000? -a general fall in world markets

And that also means a lot of jobs. Since New Labour came into office, total employment has risen 1.4m. But manufacturing has seen a loss of 250,000 jobs, while so-called service jobs have risen 1.7m. Of this increase, the financial sector took on a net

and information technology revolution led to massive speculative investment in the new industries, particularly in 1999 and 2000. Dot.com companies were given money to burn. And burn it they did.

Now the pain has come. As Marx explained, capitalists will continue to invest money as long as they think they can make a profit on their investment. They all start off thinking they can. But in investing ever-larger amounts in capital equipment (computers, new semiconductor plants, new mobile telecom technology etc), they increase the difficulty of delivering sufficient profit in return. Last year, the stock of investment in what Marx called 'dead capital' rose 5%, but the return on that capital stock did not rise. In other words, the profit on each new amount of investment fell.

US profitability is still at a high level historically, at around 8.5%, the highest level since the late 1960s. But it has peaked and is heading back down. Indeed, it's falling so fast that the overall mass of profits created by American

Many American teenagers have decided not to look for summer jobs. Once the autumn sets in, the real struggle for disappearing jobs will begin.

The most telling statistic of the American economy's future is capacity utilization. This measures how much of the existing factories and businesses are being used. At the peak of the 1980s boom, the figure reached 85.5%. It fell to 78% in the depth of the slump of 1991. It recovered to 84.5% in mid-1990s and stayed in the 80% until last year. This year, there has been a dramatic collapse. The May figure hit a new low of 76%, below the slump of 1991. And we are not officially in a recession in the US yet.

The American colossus is tottering. It will fall and when it does it will take

## So any downturn in world stock markets spells doom for a very important sector of the British economy. And what have we seen since March 2000? -a general fall in world markets

700,000 new employees.

But the fall in world stock markets last year is now telling. Nearly all of that 700,000 increase was in the years 1997-99. The big banks and financial companies in the City of London took on hardly any new employees in 2000 and they are now preparing to sack thousands this year unless stock markets pick up.

But the real impediment to the UK economy is not the failure of British capitalists to invest in the future of their national capital and preferring to invest abroad. It is the global economic slow-down and oncoming world recession. The huge economic colossus that is the United States is slipping fast into slump. And leading the way is the great saviour of American capitalism in the last five years - the hi-tech sector. The wild expectations in the internet

workers for American big business will fall this year by around 8% before tax.

What do capitalists do when profits drop? They stop investing and they lay off workers. Both are now happening in the US. In particular, orders for new IT equipment have plunged 36% in the last four months. This collapse in the IT sector in turn has led to a huge crash in IT company shares. The NASDAQ index, which sets the overall stock market price for this sector, is down 45% from its peak in March 2000.

At the same time, companies are beginning to lay off their workers in their thousands as profits drop back. Since January, employment has dropped 900,000 in the US, a decline not seen since the 1950s! Official unemployment is on the rise, but not by much so far. That's because the number looking for work has also fallen.

out the UK and Europe with it. Already, Europe's growth rate is plunging below 2%. That does not make the prospect of closer integration with the European Union and the replacement of sterling by the Euro appear to offer any benefit to British workers and their families. And as for Japan, it has seen little growth in the last ten years and the Japanese government is now admitting that there will be no recovery this year again. Capitalism is now on the brink of global recession and Britain's New Labour government will not escape the consequences.

The No Vote party argued that politicians are not to be trusted as they won't keep their promises. And New Labour won't make any substantial difference to their lives. The economic future suggests that New Labour may confirm the No Vote cynics before this parliament is over. ●



# YFIS

## Youth For International Socialism

# SURVIVOR

## Competition or co-operation?

**H**ave you been watching Survivor on ITV? There is an important point to be made about it from a socialist point of view. If there was really a group of people stranded on a desert island and they had to fend for themselves, look for their own means of living, don't you think they would tend to co-operate amongst themselves? They wouldn't survive long if they didn't.

Instead what we have in this TV show is people plotting against each other, stabbing their tribe members in the back, and why? Because there is a competition element in the programme which has been introduced artificially, the struggle not for survival, but for a million pounds!

If you removed the competition for that million pounds (which by the way is only of any use away from the island, and not needed for anything on the island) which is something completely alien to life on the island, then you would see completely different behaviour.

The primitive societies who lived in such conditions, during what Frederick Engels called primitive communism, where there was no money, no private property, no classes and people would only have all their basic needs covered through the collective work of the tribe, encouraged precisely that kind of behaviour: not competition with each other, but co-operation. It was actually quite funny that one day when Survivor was on, the BBC had another programme at the same time about a group of people who had to live in stone age conditions in some place in rural England. These people, left to their own initiative, gradually started to co-operate to get things done, especially as there were quite a lot of tasks that could only be undertaken as a group effort. Rather than developing any sort of competition or even hierarchy, they had daily meetings where they decided on all common matters and so on.

But that wouldn't really make "good TV" would it? At least not in the sense that the commercial channels understand it.

Survivor is completely flawed if it is trying to prove the point that a group of castaways would behave in a nasty way to each other.

Ever come across the argument that "socialism cannot work because human nature is greedy and selfish?" That argument is inherent in this show.

We need to answer it clearly. Dog eat dog competition is not human nature. Our species would not have survived long without the co-operation that enabled tribes to survive, develop and

expand. What makes our TV desert islanders nasty and greedy is the cash incentive, the struggle to become a millionaire in a society that worships wealth. For ninety nine percent of humanity's time on this planet there was no such profit motive. For real human nature to flourish once more we need to transform society, taking the wealth of society into common ownership and democratic control, to be used in the interests of all, not fought over and owned by a tiny minority.

For more on the question of primitive communism and the development of human society read *The Origins of The Family, the Private Property and the State* by Frederick Engels. ●

by Jordi Martorell

**T**he sun is shining at last so why not get out on the streets campaigning. Perhaps you've just finished your exams, and now (after the celebrations) you can devote those few extra hours you promised yourself to campaign for socialism. Copies of the latest YFIS mag can be ordered from us for street stalls and activities and why not order some of the Socialist Appeal pamphlets advertised here too.

Plans should be discussed now for intervening in the new term's freshers' fairs in September and October. We intend to hold a weekend school in October for new supporters (and old ones). Our last school, at the end of term was cut across by exams in the colleges. Nonetheless very useful discussions took place on Anarchism and the anti-globalisation protests, Cuba and socialism, as well as a discussion on how to build support for YFIS. Keep in touch and let us know how your campaigning goes. ●

Contact us at [espe@newyouth.com](mailto:espe@newyouth.com)



# Six months of Vicente Fox Government are enough

**During his election campaign, Vicente Fox, the right wing candidate of the Partido Accion Nacional (National Action Party), had promised a huge increase in employment, education, welfare, and peace in Chiapas, etc. Not only that, he also claimed that these changes would be introduced quickly. Campaign slogans like "today, today, today!", "7% economic growth in the first year!", "peace in 15 minutes!", meant that from the moment Fox was elected the workers and youth demanded they be carried out..**

**by Ruben Rivera**

Referring to the peace promise in Chiapas, the possibility of a peace agreement in the short term is quite small. An agreement with the EZLN was possible because the leadership of this movement has shown by all means possible their willingness to negotiate. The EZLN's demand for autonomy doesn't demand a profound change in social relations in the countryside and a major concession from the government which would endanger the system and its legitimacy. Even so, the majority of the president's party, uneasy about appearing too soft, have decided not to give any concessions, and with that the conflict has arrived at a new impasse.

The line of the EZLN of trust in the president and the parliament, has led this movement into a blind alley. After big mobilizations to Mexico city, tiredness and demoralisation is taking hold of the pro-zapatista movement and the only thing that prevents a new offensive from the government against the EZLN is the convulsive situation that they face from other fronts.

Either way for the government or for the

EZLN this will only discredit them in the eyes of the youth and the workers.

Only the working class can lead the way out of the blind alley in which the zapatist movement finds itself and avoid a new escalation in the repression against the zapatist bases.

## Economy and the workers answer

According to reports for the Bank of Mexico, there was economic growth of 1.9% in the first quarter of last year, compared with 7.9% in 1999. This is a very sharp decline and it is reflected in 160,000 lays off recognised officially and the closure of several enterprises related with the export business. The new economic crisis is a fact, and the Fox's government's response is to use measures that are very well known in Mexico: a new external debt that can be up to 20 thousand millions of dollars, a cut in the budget of more than 3,500 millions of dollars, the threat of privatising state industry, and the proposal to increase the VAT for food and drugs to 15%.

One of the reasons why such new attacks are even possible considering the general level of disgust is that the trade union leaders have not taken up the fight at all. Even so, workers have shown on May Day that the government won't have it easy.

For the first time in history all workers, even the trade unions con-

trolled by the PRI, showed open disgust towards the president's policies, even during an official act, the slogans of protest where so unanimous that the president had to stop several times during his speech.

As was to be expected, the trade union leaders were very careful not to make declarations that could engage them, although, due to the pressure of the rank and file, some of them, like Hernandez Juarez of the trade union of communications, had to say that if the policies of the government continue on the same course, a general strike will be necessary.

## Is struggle the solution?

The decline in the image of the president is as strong as the one in the economy. The slowdown in the export market has not been qualified, but as time passes its effects will strike. The government will devalue the currency once again and it will repeat the old method of attack known by the working class, the only difference is that now, the capacity of the trade union leaders to contain the working class is minimal, this time they will have to fight back if they want to preserve their heads on their shoulders, things will be different.

Fox's government will retaliate. The crisis of the USA and Mexico won't leave room for anything other than cuts and this government hasn't got the same means at its disposal that the PRI had. Although their fall is not something that you can predict in the short term, it is not completely out of the picture.

The future for the working class in Mexico is the struggle, or there is no future at all. ●





# The Spanish Revolution Betrayed

By Alan Woods  
August 1986



The victory of Franco was not a foregone conclusion. It is a fact which is not generally realised that the Spanish ruling class, having embarked on the course of civil war came within an inch of losing everything.

The Spanish workers could undoubtedly have smashed the fascists - as they succeeded in doing in Catalonia - and set about the task of transforming society on one condition - that the workers' leaders would have had a revolutionary policy.

The conduct of the war would have to be taken out of the hands of treacherous capitalist politicians. The resources of Spain - the land, the factories, the banks - would have to be taken over by the workers and peasants. The masses would have to be armed in defence of their social conquest and the leadership of the struggle would have to be in the hands of the known and trusted representatives of the workers' cause.

But the liberal capitalist ministers would never accept such a programme - far better to hand Spain over bound and gagged to the fascists than allow the workers and peasants to take over the running of society.

The unwillingness and complete incapacity of the Republicans to fight the fascists was revealed from the very beginning. The treacherous and cowardly behaviour of the Republican leaders in the face of the coup, their suppression of the news and refusal to arm the workers was no accident. It flowed from their class point of view.

Yet the Socialist and Communist leaders continued to prop up the Republican ministers with their authority. Only in September 1936 did the left Socialist leader, Largo Caballero, under the pressure of the masses, become Prime Minister.

The most pernicious role in all this was played by the leaders of the "Communist" Party, who took their orders from Moscow. Stalin was terrified of the possibility of a victorious workers' revolution in Spain.

The example of a healthy workers' democracy in Spain would exercise a powerful effect on the Russian workers, who were growing restive

under the impositions of the bureaucratic totalitarian regime.

It is no accident that Stalin unleashed the infamous purge trials precisely at this time. The bloody extermination of all those who had been connected with the democratic and internationalist traditions of Lenin and the October Revolution was a "one-sided-civil war" of the Stalinist bureaucracy against Bolshevism. It was meant as a pre-emptive strike to prevent the danger of a resurgence of a Leninist opposition in Russia, inspired by the movement of the Spanish workers.

Having abandoned Lenin's revolutionary internationalist policy, which based the defence of the Soviet Union fundamentally upon the support of the world working class and the victory of socialism internationally, the Russian bureaucracy attempted to get the support of the "good", "democratic", capitalist states (Britain and France) against Hitler.

At one stage, they even supported "good" Italian fascism against the "bad" Germany variety! The strangling of the Spanish revolution would thus have had the additional advantage of proving Stalin's "respectability" to London and Paris.

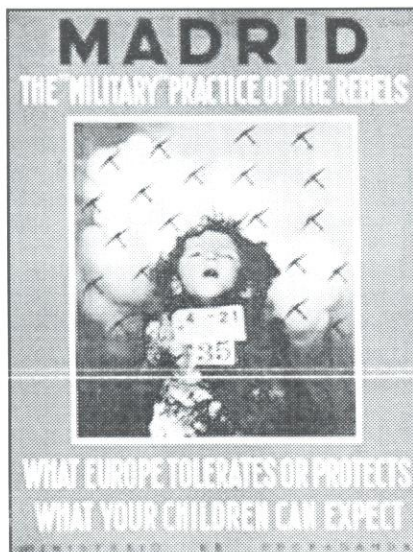
The real policy of the British and French capitalists was not dictated by their alleged love of "democracy" but by naked class interests and, above all, fear of the revolution in Spain. Hiding behind the monstrous policy of "non-intervention" they hypocritically turned a blind eye to the help given by fascist Germany and Italy to Franco.

For his part, Stalin sent limited arms supplies to Spain - not enough to achieve the decisive military defeat of Franco, but more than enough to help the Republicans - in cahoots with the Spanish Stalinists - to rebuild the shattered capitalist state machine.

The leaders of the Spanish "Communist" Party became the most fervent defenders of capitalist "law and order". Under the slogan "first win the war, then make the revolution", they systematically sabotaged all independent movement of the workers and peasants.

The Spanish Stalinists, who had at first opposed the idea of the socialists taking over the government, preferring to support the Republicans from outside, put pressure on Largo Caballero to abandon the socialist policies which he had earlier defended, at least in words.

For their part, the anarchist leaders of the CNT, who had refused to set up a workers' government in Catalonia, where power was in the hands of the working class, now proceeded to ditch all their previous





### Anarchist workers setting up barricades

ideas and do a 180-degree somersault by joining the capitalist popular front government.

The "theories" of anarchism, as Trotsky once observed, are like a leaky umbrella - useless precisely when it rains.

All the forces of the old society thus conspired to defeat the heroic movement of the Spanish working class. In the moment of truth, the leaders of all the workers' organisations passed over to the camp of the capitalist class. They justified their policy of class collaboration on the grounds of the need to fight fascism, "for democracy". The workers understand the need to fight against fascism and to defend those democratic rights won in struggle against the very "Republican" employers, bankers and capitalists.

The question is how victory was to be achieved. Trotsky answered in this way:

"You are right in fighting Franco. We must exterminate the fascists, but not in order to have the same Spain as before the civil war, because Franco issued from this Spain. We must exterminate the foundations of Franco, the social foundations of Franco, which is the social system of capitalism." (Spanish Revolution 1931-39, p.255)

In 1936, as we have seen, the Socialists and Communists united, not with the imaginary "progressive capitalists" but with a phantom. The real capitalists, bankers and landlords had in the main fled to the side of Franco at the beginning of the civil war.

The only social force which remained to fight against fascism were the workers and peasants. What were they supposed to be fighting for? For the "Republic"? But the capitalist Republic had failed to solve any one of the basic problems of the workers and peasants.

Not for nothing did the fascists demagogically use the slogan: "Qué te da a comer la República?" ("What does the Republic give you to eat?")

The way to defeat Franco was not by clinging to an alliance with the "liberal" capitalists - who were striving all along to reach a deal with the fascists - but linking the military struggle against fascism to the revolutionary struggle for real democracy, a workers democracy!

The POUM (Workers' Party of Marxist Unification) was a party which,

in words, stood for a socialist policy. But the lack of theoretical clarity and inconsistency of Nin, and the other ex-Trotskyist leaders of the POUM proved fatal to the workers' cause.

The POUM allowed itself to be ensnared in Popular Front ministerialism, joining the Catalan government, the Generalitat. Andres Nin, ironically in view of his fate, became councillor for justice.

The POUM leaders naively tried to persuade the Catalan popular-front to take the road of revolution from inside the government. They reduced themselves to the role of unpaid advisers of the capitalist and reformist politicians, instead of pursuing an independent-class policy.

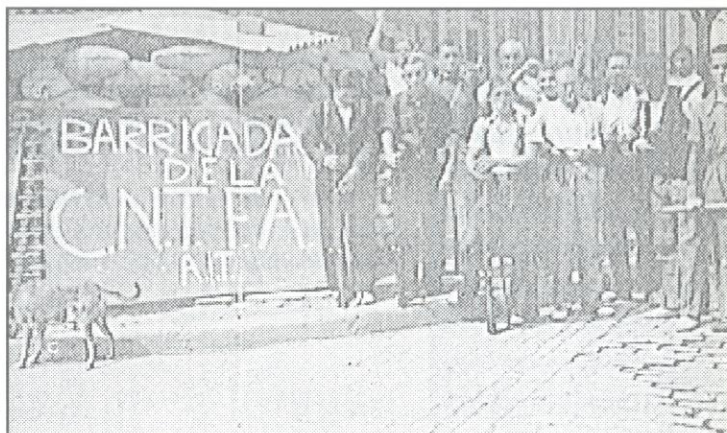
### Disorientation

This policy of the POUM disorientated the leftward moving workers who were looking to it for a lead. Large sections of the anarchist CNT - especially the youth - were disgusted with the sell-out of their leaders and looking for an alternative. By joining the popular front, the POUM leadership threw away the opportunity of providing that alternative.

Under pressure from the Stalinists, Largo Caballero agreed to replace the workers' militias with a "regular army". Using this as an excuse, they set about liquidating the gains of the revolution, not flinching from the task of bloody executioners where the workers attempted to defend themselves against the counter-revolution.

The main cutting-edge of the counter-revolution was provided by the "Communist" Party, particularly in Catalonia:

"Communist members formally increased to 250,000 by the end of 1936. Their championship of peasant ownership and opposition to revolution everywhere gained them ground. The Catalan writer, José Agustín Goytisolo, later wrote that his father joined the PSUC [The Catalan CP - AW] since, though a man of the right, he wanted protection against the anarchists who desired to take over the factory where he worked as an engineer.



"José Diaz was to tell the Communist Central Committee in March that no less than 76,000 (almost a third) of party members were peasant proprietors and 15,482 (6.2 percent) members of the urban middle class. There were thus more peasant proprietors than agricultural workers, an extraordinary situation." (Hugh Thomas, *The Spanish Civil War*, p. 522)

The old capitalist state machine in Catalonia had been destroyed by the workers in July 1936. The Stalinists of the PSUC now helped the Catalan bourgeois nationalists to rebuild their power base. In order to do this, the anarchist and POUMist workers must be crushed. The Stalinists assumed the main responsibility for this hangman's task.

Towards the end of 1936, they began to agitate in favour of the dissolution of the workers' committee under the slogan: "All power to the Generalitat!" (The Catalan capitalist government.) The Stalinist Food Minister Comorera abolished the anarchist-controlled bread committees, which had controlled a key section of food distribution. By degrees, the elements of workers' control were being whittled away.

As happens in every revolution when it begins to ebb, the workers began to realise that power was slipping from their hands. The anarchist leaders of the CNT did nothing to halt the Stalinist-led onslaught.

Internal differences began to appear in the ranks of the anarchist workers. The "Friends of Durruti" represented a genuinely revolutionary tendency which was in the process of breaking from anarchism and moving towards Marxism. Had the leaders of the POUM maintained a real revolutionary policy, they could have now won over the majority of the CNT activists.

But the lack of an independent class policy, the shamefaced illusions in popular frontism and continual centrist vacillations and ambiguities meant that



**Having prepared the climate of reaction for six months, in May of 1937, the Stalinists struck. The anarchist workers had seized the Barcelona telephone exchange during the 1936 insurrection. Now the Stalinists sent troops and tanks to seize the exchange.**

the POUM, in the decisive moment, played a fatal role. Up to the last moment, the POUM leaders clung to the policy of collaborating with the very people who were plotting counter-revolution, the PSUC.

Even when they were expelled from the Popular Front government as a result of pressure from the Stalinists, they demanded re-entry. Like Hilferding who, at the time of the German revolution in 1918 advocated a "marriage" of the soviets with capitalist parliamentarianism, the POUM leaders put forward the naive idea of a special conference - convened by the capitalist Generalitat - to create soviets!

This overlooked the minor detail that the Generalitat, as the centre of counter-revolution, was bent upon destroying the elements of soviets - the workers' councils - that already existed.

Having prepared the climate of reaction for six months, in May of 1937, the Stalinists struck. The anarchist workers had seized the Barcelona telephone exchange during the 1936 insurrection. Now the Stalinists sent troops and tanks to seize the exchange.

The anarchist workers resisted. A general strike was called and barricades set up all over Catalonia. An attempt to use the foreign International Brigades against the Barcelona workers was thwarted by the refusal of the former to intervene. Power was once more firmly in the hands of the proletariat in Catalonia.

This was the last chance to carry out the revolution in Spain. With correct leadership, the May days could have ended in victory for the workers. After the event, the anarchist newspaper *Solidaridad Obrera* stated that: "If we had wished to take power, we could have accomplished it in May with certainty. But we are against dictatorship."

It is a disgraceful fact that the leaders of the CNT and the POUM came to the rescue of the capitalist state each time it appeared in danger of overthrow. The leaders of the anarchists, Garcia Oliver and Federica Montseny called on the workers to lay

**With correct leadership, the May days could have ended in victory for the workers. After the event, the anarchist newspaper *Solidaridad Obrera* stated that: "If we had wished to take power, we could have accomplished it in May with certainty. But we are against dictatorship."**

down their arms and return to work. The anarchist centre, the Casa CNT ordered the workers to leave the barricades.

For four days the workers effectively controlled Barcelona.

Had the POUM called upon the workers to take power, nothing could have stopped them. The example of a workers' and peasants' revolutionary government in Catalonia would have spread like wildfire through the rest of Spain.

"Had the POUM taken power, they could have offered a united front against Franco to the government in Madrid. The government had no troops on

which it could rely. Very rapidly the masses in Madrid, Valencia and at the fronts would have rallied to the banner of socialism in Barcelona. The power of the Madrid government would have crumbled and disappeared." (Ted Grant, *The Spanish Revolution 1931-37*, p. 56)

The defeat of the Barcelona proletariat unleashed an orgy of counter-revolution. The Stalinists began to round up anarchists and POUMists and to disarm the workers. The workers' committees and collectives were destroyed. The POUM was made illegal, under the lying pretext that it had plotted with Franco. Nin and other leaders were brutally tortured and murdered by Stalin's agents in Spain.

To his credit, the left Socialist leader, Largo Caballero attempted to protest against the activities of the Stalinists in Catalonia. This sealed his fate. The Stalinists ganged up with the right-wing Socialists led by Prieto to provoke a cabinet crisis which led to the fall of Caballero.

Caballero was replaced with the right-wing Socialist Juan Negrín, described by Hugh Thomas as "a man of the grande bourgeoisie, a defender of private property, even of capitalism." (*The Spanish Civil War*, p. 667) Under Negrín, the left Socialists and anarchists were systematically purged from all positions of responsibility.

With the enthusiastic assistance of the "Communists", Negrín rebuilt the old capitalist state apparatus and placed the armed forces under the control of "loyal" (i.e. pro-capitalist reactionary) army officers, like General Miaja who held a CP card (in fact he seems to have held a card for all the political parties!)

The old judges, police chiefs, prison directors and civil servants again climbed out of the woodwork. Radical lawyers, who were considered to be too sympathetic to the workers' cause were dismissed. The peasants' collectives were broken up and their leaders arrested.

As early as April 1937, Leon Trotsky warned that capitalist democracy was doomed in Spain irrespective of which side won the war. The line of thinking of Negrín was revealed even before his coming to power when he said that Spain "required a dictatorship under democratic rules [!] which would prepare the people for the future." Trotsky's prediction was confirmed by subsequent events.

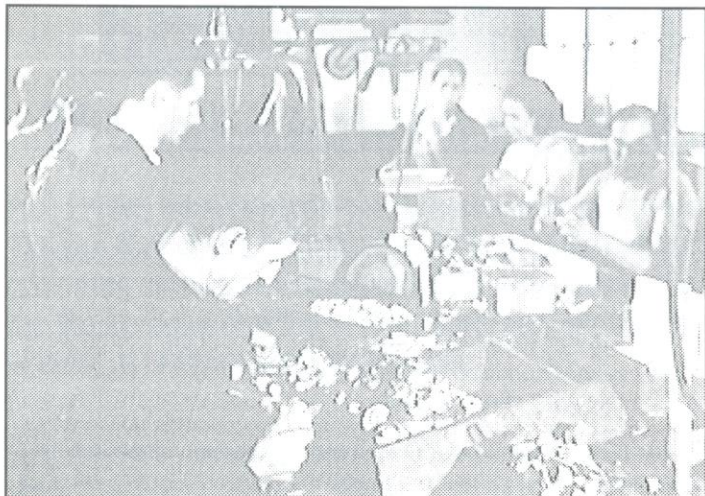
Negrín's government, cynically styled "the government of victory" by the CP, presided over a series of crushing military defeats. The morale of the workers had been broken by the liquidation of the gains of the revolution.

In reality, the Republican government was not looking for a military victory but a deal with Franco. The right Socialist Prieto secretly offered the fascists a coalition with Gil Robles and...himself! But Franco had no intention of making any concessions.

The much-heralded offensive on the Ebro ended in defeat, which placed Catalonia at the mercy of Franco. The crushing of the workers of Barcelona destroyed the fighting spirit of the capital, which soon fell to the fascists, who unleashed a nightmare of repression.

As Trotsky had foreseen, the defeat of the working class would inevitably spell the victory of counter-revolution, even if the Republic won the war. The





The war industry was the only one working during Barcelona's May General Strike

to Mexico with enormous quantities of gold and precious stones, to live out a comfortable

Stalinists had helped reconstruct the capitalist state and deliver the army to the control of the old officer caste. The latter now proceeded to kick the "Communists" to one side and carry out a coup d'etat behind the lines.

Generals Casado and Miaja (still with a CP card in his pocket) conspired with Negrín to illegalise the "Communist" Party and attempt to do a deal with Franco. Casado offered to arrest and hand over to Franco many CP and other leaders.

Right-wing Socialist leaders like Besteiro were involved up to the hilt in the conspiracy. Besteiro even offered to meet Franco to surrender in person.

Getting wind of the plot, La Pasionaria and other Stalinist leaders fled to France, leaving the ordinary CP members to their fate. The "Communist" Party paid for its treachery by being crushed - not by Franco, but by those very "democratic", "progressive" Republican generals and politicians whom they had put in power.

With the elimination of the Stalinists, General Casado tried to negotiate with Franco. But by now there was nothing to negotiate about. On midday, March 27, 1939, Franco's forces occupied Madrid with virtually no resistance. Negrín, Prieto and the other right-wing Socialist leaders took a plane

exile whilst the Socialist rank-and-file were left to the tender mercies of Franco's executioners.

Besteiro stayed behind, foolishly imagining he would be spared, and died in gaol. Largo Caballero, along with thousands of other Spanish refugees, was caught up by the German invasion of France and sent to a Nazi concentration camp.

The Spanish working class paid an appalling price for the false policies, cowardice and outright betrayal of its leaders. The fascists took a terrible revenge on the workers. Up to one million people were killed in the civil war itself. Thousands more were murdered in the immediate aftermath of defeat.

In every village there is a lonely path which leads into the countryside. To this day, old people will describe how the "nacionales" came and took so-and-so for a 'paseito' (a "little stroll") along that road, never to be seen again, as the landlords and capitalists settled old scores.

The prisons of Spain were filled to overflowing. By 1942, it is estimated that maybe two million people had passed through the prisons and camps. Many were sentenced to death. Others were "fortunate" to have their sentence commuted to 30 years imprisonment.

The most elementary rights of the workers were taken away; their political and trade union organisations outlawed. A dark night of barbarism settled upon Spain which was to last nearly 40 years.

The defeat of the Spanish workers also settled the fate of Europe. Trotsky had predicted that such a defeat would make the second world war inevitable. The "democratic" British and French ruling classes who connived at the victory of Franco (Chamberlain wrote in his diary: "I think we ought to be able to establish excellent relations with Franco, who seems well disposed to us.") prepared the ground for Hitler's onslaught on Poland and France within a year of the fall of Madrid.

For his part, Stalin was already negotiating secretly for a deal with Hitler even while the war in Spain was continuing. The second world war, with its tens of millions of dead, which brought humanity to the brink of barbarism, was the direct result of the failure of the Spanish working class to take power in 1936-37.

"He who does not learn from history is doomed to repeat it." The present-world crisis of capitalism will once again place on the order of the day the socialist transformation of society.

It is the duty of all conscious workers to study the lessons of the Spanish revolution in order to equip themselves to carry through the struggle to a victorious conclusion. ●

## **General strike in Galicia (June 15th, 2001): The workers start to move**

On 15th June a regional general strike took place in Galicia, Spain. The strike was a tremendous success in spite of the fact that the leadership of the Workers' Commissions (CCOO) had attempted to play it down. The workers overturned the position of the leadership of the CCOO not to call the strike. A leading CCOO activist from Galicia, Xaquín García Sende (Regional Executive of CCOO Galicia), sent us this report.

[http://www.marxist.com/Europe/galicia\\_strike601.html](http://www.marxist.com/Europe/galicia_strike601.html)



## Bloodshed at Esfahan workers' orderly and calm protest!

Following successive gatherings of the workers of Tehran's Chit-e Rey factory, and the workers of Baresh textiles in Esfahan, with the support of a section of the workers of Esfahan's Bafnaz and Simin factories, march a march took place on 6 May (16 Ordibehesht). This unity and co-ordination is the result of May Day (11 Ordibehesht), the result of learning from experiences and finding new ways of getting their trampled rights. This co-ordination and unity was learnt from the dead-end reached by single unit or factory movements; these experiences finally bore fruit.

Over 1500 of the Esfahan textile workers took part in this orderly and co-ordinated march. This protest, which the county authorities had been informed about, moved in an orderly way towards the city centre, with the workers' demanding eight months' unpaid wages. The workers intended to continue their protest in front of county hall until their unpaid wages were paid. Before the protest the workers had sent every type of appeal, to the various authorities about their situation. No one replied to the workers; it was not important for anyone how the workers' families were supposed to continue their hand-to-mouth life.

The demonstration was moving towards the city centre when the workers could not believe what they saw with their eyes. Groups of riot police were standing in front of them, equipped with shields, electric truncheons and other tools of suppression. On the one side there were the robbed and hungry workers, empty handed and with worried eyes and kind hearts, but settled on getting their unpaid wages; and on the other, groups of the army of capital, equipped with the most advanced weaponry of repression and trained for committing violence. In this unequal confrontation, a number of workers called the riot police brother and explained their sad situation to them. But they quickly understood that the line opposite were brutal animals that had only come for violence and bloodshed.

The riot police began its attack with teargas, the workers, including those who had come with their children, ran this way and that way in confusion. The riot police started beating the workers with truncheons and over 30 workers were injured and 50 were

arrested. Some of the workers who had avoided being arrested were then trapped by the plain-clothes police. They had been hiding and waiting for the workers in the surrounding side streets and avenues with their chains and knuckle-dusters ready.

People who witnessed the clash estimate the arrests as over 100 and over 50 injured and reported that some of the injured were in a very serious condition. Some say that the arrests even continued for a few days after the clash.

The brutal attack of the riot police and plain-clothes police on the workers' line was reminiscent of the suppression of the Jahan Chit workers of Karaj under the Shah.

But today there is a different situation: the textile workers of Esfahan will not remain alone in this battle. Today the workers of Iran and the whole world, and anyone who only has the slightest thought about human freedom rights, will condemn this bloody suppression and will support the demand of the Baresh textile workers of Esfahan.

As well as condemning the brutal attack of the riot police and the plain-clothes police, the Workers' Independent Union of Iran, will try to get condemnation of this brutal attack and gather support for the textile workers in Iran and internationally.

Workers' Independent Union of Iran  
8 May 2001 (18 Ordibehesht 1380)

Copy and distribute this statement if possible.

IWUI is independent of any government faction or opposition organisation or party.

Messages of support to: Iran Workers Solidarity Network  
<http://iwsmtopcities.com>  
[iranwsm@yahoo.co.uk](mailto:iranwsm@yahoo.co.uk)

## Summer Appeal

It is the duty of Socialists in Britain to help these comrades who are working under extremely difficult conditions to advance and defend the ideas of Marxism. A recent example is Pakistan, where a number of activists of the Pakistan Trade Union Defence Campaign were arrested for celebrating May Day.

Our aim is to raise £2,000 to defend and spread the ideas of Marxism internationally, from helping the Pakistani activists with the legal costs to paying for the travelling expenses of Indonesian comrades to an international meeting, or helping comrades in Nigeria produce a regular Marxist publication, you can rest assured that every penny will be well spent.

Please send your donations to:

Socialist Appeal, PO Box 2626  
London N1 7SQ  
(cheques/PO to Socialist Appeal)

As every year in the *Summer Socialist Appeal* launches an *Internationalist Appeal*. The struggle for socialism has always been the struggle of the workers all over the world against capitalism, but internationalism is today more relevant than ever with the growing integration of world capitalism.

Over the last two years we have seen the growth of the anti-capitalist movement. Youth and, increasingly, trade unionists are coming together at every meeting of the international financial institutions to protest against capitalism. The latest example is the World Bank summit against poverty in Barcelona which has been cancelled for fear of the protests that had been organised.

But it is not just a question of demonstrations at WTO meetings. Workers and poor peasants are organising against capitalism in the countries hardest hit by its crisis. The recent general strike in South Korea, the uprising in Ecuador last year and again this January, the insurrectionary movements in Argentina, the overthrow of Suharto in Indonesia, etc.



# Reaping the Whirlwind

## The Taliban Movement in Afghanistan

Pluto Press have recently published a new book, *Reaping the Whirlwind, The Taliban Movement in Afghanistan*, by Michael Griffin. He has done a service in providing some quite detailed information about the origins of the Taliban and the background that led to their emerging as a force capable of taking control of most of modern-day Afghanistan.

reviewed by Fred Weston

Afghanistan has always been at the mercy of foreign powers. It was created artificially as a buffer state between British dominated India and the Tsarist Empire. The frontiers drawn by the imperialist powers did not take into account the peoples that inhabited the area. This is now part of the problem in Afghanistan today, with warring groups based on the different ethnic groups living in the country.

Apart from Kabul, most of the rest of the country remained at the level of the Middle Ages. There was hardly any working class, as industry was very sparse. In these conditions it was the army officers that took upon themselves the role of trying to push Afghanistan forward and to modernise it.

As Michael Griffin explains, "by 1970, some 7,000 officers in the armed forces had received training in the USSR." This officer caste was able to witness the high level of development of the USSR and could compare the standard of living in the Soviet Republics such as Tagikistan, Uzbekistan and others, with the awful levels of underdevelopment in Afghanistan. That explains why the Afghan Communist Party, that took the name of the People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan, was based heavily on the officers in the Afghan Army, who would eventually carry out a coup in 1978 and attempt to set up a regime modelled on that of the Soviet Union.

Whatever the bourgeois media may try and say today, that regime was undoubtedly the most progressive that Afghanistan has ever seen. It tried to impose land reform and compulsory education for women. It also attempted to stop the selling of women. These measures which would seem reasonable to any civilised person, were to provoke the reaction of the most backward elements of Afghan society. Within Kabul itself, and a few other cities, there was general support for these measures. Kabul was regarded as a vibrant and modern centre of culture. But in the more isolated rural and

mountain regions there was another world.

From these regions a jihad, a holy war, was launched with the aim of overthrowing the new regime in Kabul. That explains why the Soviet Union decided to send in its troops in 1979. The fall of the regime would have had the effect of destabilising the southern Soviet Republics such as Tagikistan and Uzbekistan. Thus the Soviet Union intervened for its own internal reasons.

Although Michael Griffin gives us a lot of very useful information and insights into the situation in Afghanistan, we feel that he does make one important mistake. He claims that Taraki, the then leader of the PDPA, carried out his coup in 1978 "with support from Moscow". In reality Moscow would have preferred a cosy relationship with the former king Daoud. After all, the Stalinist bureaucrats in Moscow had supported the Indian bourgeoisie for years, just as they had done in several parts of the world. The Moscow bureaucracy had put a brake on many revolutionary movements around the world who turned to them for help. The situation in Nicaragua is one of the more blatant examples of this.

In discussions with some of the officers concerned we know that the 1978 coup was carried out without support from Moscow. Moscow wished for no social change in Afghanistan. It preferred to keep Afghanistan as a buffer state and had very good relations with Daoud. But some of the factions within the PDPA had other ideas, especially after king Daoud had arrested some of the leaders of the PDPA. Rumours were spreading that these would be executed. At the same time the leader of the PDPA was assassinated. The young officers thought the king was responsible. [It later turned out that the KGB was responsible]. So they decided to organise a raid on the prison. They blasted the prison and bombed the royal palace. The Russians thus found themselves with a fait accompli and had to make the best of it.

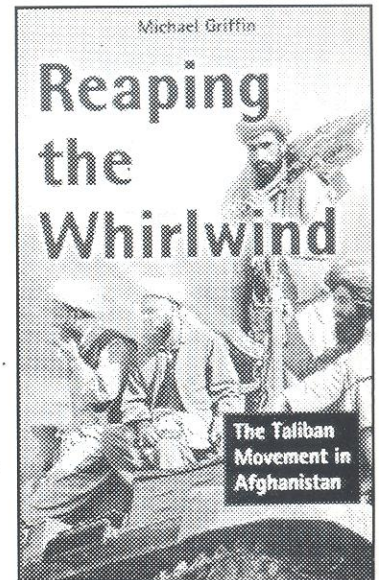
The coup of 1978 was an enormous step forward for Afghan society and there were many gains for the people as a result. But the huge areas of underdevelopment meant that there was a great potential for reaction. The Pakistani secret services, the CIA, the Saudis, and others, were keen to see the overthrow of the new regime in Afghanistan and thus began supplying aid and weapons to the so-called "freedom fighters".

Michael Griffin describes in detail how the Islamic fundamentalists took over and how in turn these were replaced by the more virulent Taliban. He reveals their links with the CIA, drug barons and the oil tycoons. Today the US government condemns the Taliban as a "rogue regime", but it conveniently hides its past involvement in financing them when they were useful in their attempt to overthrow the PDPA regime and in pushing back the Soviet Army.

Now these "freedom fighters" have imposed a despotic regime on the peoples of Afghanistan. The plight of women is especially bad. And Griffin gives a lot of information on their condition. Women have been banned from most jobs and are isolated to the four walls of their homes. As the book points out the Taliban "quickly came to be seen as an army of occupation".

The book provides an interesting quote from Najibullah, the leader of the PDPA, overthrown by the Islamic fundamentalists: "If fundamentalism comes to Afghanistan, war will continue for many years. Afghanistan will turn into a centre of world smuggling for narcotic drugs. Afghanistan will be turned into a centre for terrorism." (11.3.92) How true those words sound now!

We would recommend this book to anyone seeking the truth about what has happened in Afghanistan. ●



by Michael Griffin

Published by Pluto Press,

Price: £19.99 hardback







# Defend Greek trade unionists against mafia attacks!

On the night of 27th of May 01 DIMOS DIMAROGONAS, a member of the E.C. of the Workers Federation in the Ministry of Culture was the victim of a vicious and unprovoked attack outside his house from two "unknown" men.

As a result of this attack, he sustained a serious eye injury, a broken nose and many stitches. This attack was executed by professionals - members of the Mafia who are paid to carry out this kind of attack on trade unionists who speak their mind.

The reason behind this attack is clear. Dimos Dimarogonas has been conducting a struggle, together with other left-wing union members, against corruption in the union at the Ministry of Culture. This is an important union in Greece because many workers are employed in museums and other sites as caretakers, guards etc.

The most scandalous case of corruption involves the large-scale theft of union funds through a crooked deal organised by certain union leaders.

The latter used the money of the workers at the Ministry of Culture to buy land for the workers at 250.000 dr per 1,000 square metres which they then sold to the workers for 1.000.000 dr.

In an attempt to expose the fraud, Dimos and others, including Takis Tsitonis, the former President of the Museum Workers' Union of Greece, took those responsible to court. The case is now in the hands of the Public prosecutor. If, as seems certain, they are found guilty, they face gaol sentences.

Faced with the prospect of gaol, the guilty men have decided to resort to criminal measures to protect themselves. Already these people have repeatedly threatened Dimos and Takis, menacing their lives and the lives of their children unless they agreed to take back the accusations.

So there is no doubt whatsoever that this attack was ordered

by these elements.

The Minister of Culture and one of the leading figures of PASOK, EVAGELOS VENIZELOS, knows everything, since he has been informed by Dimos and Takis and the others. But he has not lifted a finger about it, because he has traditionally enjoyed a cosy relationship with these "trade unionists" who never strike.

We ask you to denounce this attack and demand that the minister of culture EVAGELOS VENIZELOS, and the Greek Workers Federation of Private and Public Sector Workers come out clearly against this attack and its perpetrators and stop covering up for corrupt and mafia elements in the unions.

Comrades! The lives of honest Greek trade unionists and their families are at risk. The latest attack shows that these people will stop at nothing. The next one may be even more serious.

Only the most energetic protest by the international labour movement can deter them. Let them feel the glare of working class public opinion on them.

We ask you to raise your voice NOW before it is too late!

**Messages of protest to be sent to these addresses:**

**Minister of Culture:** [minister@culture.gr](mailto:minister@culture.gr)  
**Greek Federation of Culture Ministry Unions**  
 fax: ++301 3236294

**Greek General Confederation of Labour:**  
[info@gsee.gr](mailto:info@gsee.gr) and [president@gsee.gr](mailto:president@gsee.gr)  
**Supreme Administration of Greek Civil Servants Trade Unions**  
 fax: ++301 3246165



## Ireland: Capitalism has no solution

Barricades are burning once more in Belfast. Even before the start of the marching season, the peace agreement lies in tatters. Only an insane person would not want to see peace, therefore a great deal of hope was concentrated in the Good Friday agreement. Now there can be little doubt left that genuine and lasting peace, cannot be found while power remains in the hands of British imperialism. The Frankenstein monster of sectarianism which they created cannot be controlled. Secret deals between sectarian politicians can solve nothing because they fail to challenge the capitalist system. Only tackling the real problems of workers from all communities can undermine and destroy those divisions. In other words there can be no solution to the national division of Ireland without a solution to the social and economic problems which are also the responsibility of capitalism.

The British ruling class have failed to solve the problem of Ireland, a problem they created. In reality their position has altered little since the time of Cromwell. Seem like an exaggeration? Don't take my word for it. Listen to former top diplomat Sir David Goodall in a BBC documentary *Endgame in Ireland*. Discussing negotiations with the southern government Goodall recalls a conversation with Thatcher: "She said...if the northern (Catholic) population want to be in the south, well why don't they move over there? After all there was a big movement of population in Ireland wasn't there?"

"Nobody could think what it was. So finally I said, are you talking about Cromwell, prime minister? She said that's right Cromwell." Not satisfied with ruining the lives of millions of workers,

it seems she wanted to go a little further and butcher Northern Ireland's Catholics, as Cromwell did in their tens of thousands in the 1640s and 50s.

Sir Charles Powell also confirmed to the programme that she wanted to redraw the border as a 'straight line which would be easier to defend than one with kinks and squiggles in.' This plan for ethnic cleansing would be accompanied by the establishment of a security zone either side of a new border.

It would also have been accompanied by thousands of deaths and a brutal civil war that would have spilled over into Britain too. The cabinet secretary had to explain that the problem would be the partition or ethnic cleansing of Belfast.

After 350 years the solution of the British bourgeois to the nightmare they created in Ireland is that they have no solution but more carnage and slaughter. Only the workers of Ireland can solve that problem. As for Thatcher, we've got a place for her with all the rest of the mad cows. ●



# Raise The Red Flag!

Now that all the excitement and thrills (sorry - only joking!) of the general election have passed into history we are faced with the realities of the second term Labour government. Trade unionists in particular will be looking with some concern at the plans for public services for the next few years. We were told that the election was all about schools and hospitals. Certainly it wouldn't have taken much imagination to have worked out what the election of a Tory government would have meant in terms of cutbacks and privatisation scams in order to fund tax cuts for the rich. But what is New Labour offering instead? They call it "radical reform" but in reality that means a watered down version of what the Tories would have given us. This is a recipe for disaster, first in the council elections and-sooner or later depending on how long the Tories keep shooting themselves in the foot-at a subsequent general election. It is already clear that the government is squaring up for a fight with key public sector unions-in the post office, the railways, the schools and in the town halls. A fightback is needed to combat this process both in the unions and in the Labour Party itself. The issue of the trade union links with the Labour Party-itself

under continuing threat from the Blair 'project'-needs to be taken up. These links should be strengthened but also made more accountable. From the top downwards there needs to be a drive to ensure that the real aspirations and policies of the movement are heard and campaigned for. Some disillusioned elements think that the answer is to run away and set up their own "mass parties", surrendering the Labour Party to the right wing. This is a blind alley and must be rejected by all trade union activists. The banner under which we march should be "Contract in not contract out! Build the links! Fight for socialist policies and a leadership prepared to fight for this!"

But how is this to be achieved? The mood of opposition in the union ranks at last year's Labour Party conference, achieved in the face of strong Blairite pressure, shows what can occur in the near future but on a much higher level. But this movement needs to be coordinated, given a voice, a focal point for those who wish to see Labour change course. This is the aim and ambition of *Socialist Appeal*. For nearly 10 years now we have been campaigning in the unions and in the Labour Party, as well as amongst the youth and workers

generally, for Marxism and a socialist programme. But to continue and build on this we need your help. The Blairites get their cash from big business, we get it from ordinary men and women. This is a direct financial appeal to all our readers and supporters to help us keep the flag flying-and raise that flag ever higher. Last month was a considerable improvement over the previous months target with over £1400 being raised. This included 3 big donations, one of £500 and one of £250 both from London readers as well as a number of other amounts including £100 from Dai Davies in Swansea, £10 Leicester readers, £25 from Miles Todd together with a further £25 for Pakistan trade unionists, nearly £200 raised at CWU conference, over £100 from London readers collected at a post-election meeting, over £40 from Mersey readers and more. Next month's figure should also show the benefits of collections at Unison and AEEU (over £120 raised and 40 journals sold) conference-watch this space! But we need to keep it up. Every bit helps, please send what you can to us at Socialist Appeal, PO Box 2626, London N1 7SQ.

by Steve Jones

[www.socialist.net](http://www.socialist.net)

## Socialist Appeal, The Marxist voice of the Labour Movement



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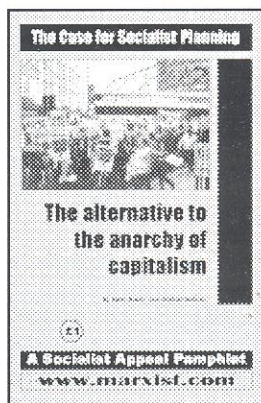
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☆ **For a Labour government with a bold socialist programme!** Labour must break with big business and Tory economic policies. Vote Labour and fight to reclaim the party.

☆ **A national minimum wage of at least two-thirds of the average wage.** £6.00 an hour as a step toward this goal, with no exemptions.

☆ **Full employment!** No redundancies. The right to a job or decent benefits. For a 32 hour week without loss of pay. No compulsory overtime. For voluntary retirement at 55 with a decent full pension for all.

☆ **No more sell offs.** Reverse the Tories privatisation scandal. Renationalise all the privatised industries and utilities under democratic workers control and management. No compensation for the fat cats, only those in genuine need.

☆ **The repeal of all Tory anti-union laws.** Full employment rights for all from day one. For the right to strike, the right to union representation and collective bargaining. Election of all trade union officials with the right of recall. No official to receive more than the wage of a skilled worker.

☆ **Action to protect our environment.** Only public ownership of the land, and major industries, petro-chemical enterprises, food companies, energy and transport, can form the basis of a genuine socialist approach to the environment.

☆ **A fully funded and fully comprehensive education system under local democratic control.** Keep big business out of our schools and colleges. Free access for all to further and higher education. Scrap tuition fees. No to student loans. For a living grant for all over 16 in education or training.

☆ **The outlawing of all forms of discrimination.** Equal pay for equal work. Invest in quality childcare facilities available to all. Scrap all racist immigration and asylum controls. Abolish the Criminal Justice Act.

☆ **The reversal of the Tories' cuts in the health service.** Abolish private health care. For a National Health Service, free to all at the point of need, based on the nationalisation of the big drug companies that squeeze their profits out of the health of working people.

☆ **Reclaim the Labour Party!** Defeat Blairism! Fight for Party democracy and socialist policies. For workers' MPs on workers' wages.

☆ **The abolition of the monarchy and the House of Lords.** Full economic powers for the Scottish Parliament and the Welsh Assembly, enabling them to introduce socialist measures in the interests of working people. ☆ No to sectarianism. For a Socialist United Ireland linked by a voluntary federation to a Socialist Britain.

☆ **Break with the anarchy of the capitalist free market.** Labour to immediately take over the "commanding heights of the economy." Nationalise the big monopolies, banks and financial institutions that dominate our lives. Compensation to be paid only on the basis of need. All nationalised enterprises to be run under workers control and management and integrated through a democratic socialist plan of production.

☆ **Socialist internationalism.** No to the bosses-European Union. Yes to a socialist united states of Europe, as part of a world socialist federation.

