Labour backs Tory welfare meltdown

Defend the Welfare State

WHEN even Kenneth Clarke says Labour is too obsessed with cuddling up to the City things must be really bad.
The Labour Party leadership seems determined to rip up ever decent policy in advance of the election.

Chris Smith's recent statements are indistinguishable from the Conservative party front bench. "It is time to get away" he says "from the sterile battle lines between public and private".

So it looks like private finance initiatives will be here to stay under a Labour government. The battering of health, education and housing will continue.

The media have devoted much space to the internal rivalries of Brown, Mandelson, Smith and Prescott. Tensions do exist.

But their differences are all about personal ambition. Not politics.

Many supported Blair's removal of Clause 4 because they thought it a necessary price to pay to secure the election of a Labour government in order to defend schools, hospitals and pensions.

The decision to abolish free universal education shows the direction of the party. Blair has no regard for the lives of working class people.

All the talk about community and stakeholding is hot air—the obsession with keeping down tax means continuing Tory austerity. Beveridge's Welfare State rests on a progressive taxation system.

The post-war settlement was flawed in many ways. It was necessary to fight to defend welfare provision so that benefits were index linked and that services democratically accountable to users and workers.

But the joint anti-welfare offensive by Labour and Tories now throws even minimal provision up in the air.

We are told that final decisions have not been made on removing child benefit from 16-18 year olds.

This cuts little ice where constituency and trade union involvement in real decision making have been seriously undermined.

The recent Policy Forum in Manchester contained no genuine debate.

If Blair has his way there will be no democratic discussion on the manifesto—just a rubber stamping exercise by plebeians.

But there is resistance.
The Welfare State Network organised a picket of Smith's surgery the week of his major speech and held a fringe meeting at the Policy Forum as part of its weekend of action in defence of the welfare state.

Single issue campaigns against cuts and closures in many parts of the country continue to grow.

In Scotland and Oxfordshire action against education cuts has been particularly buoyant.

Socialist Outlook supporters are fully committed to playing their part in all these activities, linking them to the battle inside the Labour Party.
Asylum Bill: Just say no

Simon Deville

THE CAMPAIGN for a Fighting and Democratic UNISON's conference on the Asylum and Immigration Bill was a small but important step in the fight against the Bill, gearing up the union membership in the struggle over policy at UNISON's national conference.

Just under 100 delegates attended. Most were sectional officials. Although the conference was relatively small, clearly the UNISON leadership is worried, as it spurred the NEC to organise its own conference on the Bill just four days later.

Originally, UNISON proposed a conference last October, then again in January. They kept these conferences a secret from the membership, then cancelled them due to "lack of interest."

The opening plenary started with speakers from two campaigns against state terrorism.

Bayo Omoyeni, a UNISON member, was given an update on his case from the Human Rights Secretary that he would be allowed back into Britain if he went on an international inquiry into workers' rights in China. He has subsequently been refused re-entry to Britain by the Home Office.

Pia Power spoke on behalf of the Ibrahima Sey Memorial Campaign of how his son has been killed by police, and more generally about the repression and brutalisation black people face at police hands. There were three workshops on the cuts in benefits and service provision, attacks on workers' rights, and on drawing together a united approach to the various motions to UNISON conference.

There were motions on the Bill and non-compliance than on any other subject this year, and it is quite clearly going to be a central debate.

The NEC is doing all in its power to head off militant action against the Bill while presenting a public face of opposition. As several delegates from Liverpool pointed out, UNISON has just spent two years and an estimated £500,000 trying to witch-hunt four shop stewards after they led a strike against racism. The hypocrisy of the UNISON leadership's "anti-racism" is already quite apparent in a wide layer of union activists.

The conference ended with a discussion on the forthcoming CPBF pamphlet on the Bill, and with moving speeches from Lola Onibayo and Margaret Illin about their struggles against Britain's racist immigration laws.

While the fight against national policy is going to be crucial at conference, reviving the implementation of this racist legislation is going to be a lot more.

How the Bill is implemented will give us some clues into the next. To make this anything more than paper policies will require discussions at branch level on the implications of the Bill and how workers can do to oppose it collectively.

The Bill's success or failure depends on convincing workers of their collective strength, and that UNISON members do not stand alone but are supported by much wider sections of the community.

NO ONE in the ruling class really believes the Prevention of Terrorism Act has any effect on the activities of the IRA. Its main purpose is to stifle political opposition to British rule in Ireland.

Sponged on by Jack Straw, the Labour Party abstained on the renewal of the PTA and helped the government rush through emergency amendments with almost no debate.

The Tories' stated purpose for adding to the PTA was to prevent an IRA spectacular around the 80th anniversary of the Easter Rising. More likely it was to clamp down on any opposition to the peace process.

Labour does not want to be seen as soft on terrorism. As with all other policy areas, the leadership is determined to smash the nearest sniff of political opposition from within the party before Blair comes to power.

Take, for example, the Blairites' recent antics in Jeremy Corbyn's Islington North constituency.

State hounds Asylum Seekers

A NIGERIAN asylum seeker, Bayo Omoyeni, has been refused permission by the Home Office to return to Britain from Hong Kong.

He had gone there in his role as President of Liverpool UNISON branch to attend an international trade union conference on workers' rights.

The Home Office decision violates natural justice. It denies Bayo the right to attend the appeal against the refusal of his own application for asylum.

A member of the Unify Party and well-known supporter of the democracy movement, Bayo would certainly be at risk of persecution in Nigeria.

The Unify Party also separates Bayo from his son.

This is at least the second occasion in recent weeks that the Home Office—without the connivance of British Airways—has attempted to split up a parent and a child.

On April 12th, Audrey Grant was detained and taken to Manchester Airport to be deported. Her infant daughter Sereena was left to be cared for by a neighbour. Audrey was released seven days later after pressure from campaigners, including a picket of Manchester Airport.

Adam Hartman

For a copy of the petition, contact Bayo Omoyeni on the UNISON Campaign, c/o Liverpool UNISON, 4th Floor, Produce Exchange, 8 Victoria Street, Liverpool, L2 5QF. Tel: (0151) 236 1944.

Write to Bayo's MP, Bob Parker, urging him to take up his case. House of Commons, London, SW1A 0AA.

For information and support, contact Audrey and Sereena, write to UNISON Midlands Anti-Deportation Campaign, 1012 Villa Road, Handsworth, Birmingham, B19 1HE.

Free Satpal Ram

Pete Bloomer,
Free Satpal Campaign

SIMULTANEOUS pickets at Long Lartin and Brixton prisons on 18 April were mounted to protest at the brutality of Long Lartin screws against Satpal Ram and other prisoners.

Satpal is in his tenth year of imprisonment, following a racist attack on him by six men, in which he responded to being glassed by one by defending himself with a knife. His attacker died of a stab wound for which he refused medical treatment.

Satpal lost his appeal at the end of 1995. Since then, he has been subjected to continuous abuse, brutality, solitary confinement, a starvation diet and a series of forced and attempted rectal examinations. After one of four assaults by screws in March, he wrote a letter saying: "I now know what Joy Gardner must have experienced in the last moments of her life, they nearly killed me."

Meanwhile the Free Satpal Campaign continues, Unity among the militant slogans, "Self defence is no offence" and "Racists Attacks - We Fight Back" remains an important political task for all those who oppose state racism.

For further information, phone 0121-507 1618 or write to FSC, 101 Villa Road, Handsworth, Birmingham, B19 1HE.

Labour backs PTA crackdown

Labour's backing of the Preventive Terrorism Act, despite pressure from its members, is not surprising. Labour's supporters are well-informed on the issues involved. The previous government was determined to stifle political opposition to British rule in Ireland.

The local party has been threatened with suspension after its General Committee passed a motion in support of Corbyn's vote against the renewal of the PTA. A leader of the Labour Co-ordinating Committee mandated to make this refusal to swear unholy allegiance to Blair, went public and virtually accused Corbyn of supporting the PTA.

Like everyone else Irish people want to be free of the Tories. But they will not be cowed into silence on the British presence in the Six Counties. Likewise, a significant number of Labour Party and trade union members continue to oppose the threat to civil liberties represented by the PTA and its extension for use against other groups. It is also becoming clear to many people that the real aim of the peace process is the strengthening of partition. Getting the Labour Party at its next conference to reverse its commitment to the renewal of the PTA is an important step in opposing this division and fighting for democratic rights in Ireland and Britain.

David Coen

Model resolution: Conference regrets the decision of the Labour front bench to abstain in the vote on renewal of the Prevention of Terrorism Act and thereby break with its long standing policy of opposition to the Act.

Conference resolves to restate its opposition to the PTA, calls on the NEC to continue to publicise its opposition to the PTA and to commit the next Labour Government to repeal the PTA.

We should also demand that repeal of the PTA and opposition to partition should be included in the programme of the other parties and organisations such as the Socialist Labour Party.
SLP foundation: small beginnings---bleak future

Build the left inside and outside the Labour Party

THE inherent problems in the formation of the Socialist Labour Party are increasingly apparent.

When Arthur Scargill first mooted a new party he said that the Labour Party had fundamentally changed with the scrapping of Clause 4; it was now no different to the Tory or Liberal parties.

Yet he decided his new party would not stand for election against the Labour Party where there was a left candidate.

Scargill now seems to have resolved this contradiction. Several recent meetings have been told that it makes no difference whether the Tories or Labour are elected.

Leading SLP member and RMT Deputy General Secretary Bob Crowe said at the conference of Trade Councils that the SLP will stand against all Labour candidates---"including the Heems and the Corbyns".

While this is unlikely---given the problem of resources---it clearly shows a profound political problem.

We think the comrades are mistaken---not just because we call for a vote for the Labour Party, but because the left is a whole needs to unite around campaigning and action rather than electoral adventures.

The foundation conference did nothing to address how the SLP defines itself in relation to the Labour Party or the rest of the left.

Indeed there was very little discussion of policy in general---the National Executive Committee will be left to decide.

Regrettably the policy documents prepared for the conference were posted in terms of the policy for an SLP government! Scargill clearly sees the SLP as primarily an electoral party; a future left depends on it.

The theory question of party democracy remains a serious problem.

The constitution is not up for discussion until 1997, having already been decided by Scargill and his closest circle of comrades. The outlawing of groupings within the party was not discussed.

Those who left the Labour Party for the SLP found themselves at top-decision making and lack of democracy are finding their new situation remarkably similar to the one they left behind.

The ballot paper for the NEC contained a list of those "recommended by the outgoing NEC". Who elected this outgoing NEC in a party which had existed for two days?

Of the few policy debates which did take place, the two around racism around most controversy.

Adoption of a policy for "non-racist immigration controls"---traditionally the line of the CP---reflected the influence of statist politics over many of the party's members.

But it was appalling to see those who had until recently opposed all immigration controls as intrinsically racist changing their minds.

The Trade Union policy before conference committed the SLP to support for the defence of anti-union laws.

Yet Bob Crowe insisted recently repudiated second-order action in Scotland.

The policy document repudiated the SLP to a fight for union democracy and to commit the unions to defending the interests of their members. But there was no mention of building left organisation with other forces in the unions.

Membership was announced as 1,200---that is less than those already in explicitly revolutionary parties.

An ironic touch was the greeting from the Spanish IU (United Left) and the Italian PCR (Party of Communist Refoundation) in which they defined themselves as "like you, alliances of groupings on the Left".

Scargill simply left to set up his own party.

He had not been willing to organise with the Left within the Labour Party, nor within the unions.

The SLP is no such thing. In fact it has always been a divisive component of the labour movement.

It has always been a divisive component of the labour movement.

The Socialist Labour Party is radically unlike the IU and PCR both in functioning and purpose.

Both Italy and Spain have a tradition of mass Communist Parties.

The formations of the left that have arisen in the last few years in these countries rest upon their political fragmentation and reconstitution.

Britain is different.

The Communist Party of Great Britain has never been a truly mass force---certainly not comparable with the continental parties. Although it has had an important implantation in a number of unions, it has always been a divisive component of the labour movement.

For example, to the Labour Party left.

The Labour Party is linked to the structures of the unions far more closely than social democracy in continental Europe.

Unions have delegates to party meetings at every level, right up to conference and the NEC. This is not the case elsewhere.

There is no political or religious divide in the unions. They are all part of a single federation. This makes it possible to talk of a unity labour movement very different from the situation abroad.

It means that those already involved in the structures of the movement still largely define themselves within the framework of the politics of the Labour Party, especially the Labour left. To abandon this terrain to the right is a big mistake.

Despite Blair's stampede to the right, the Labour Party is still based on the organisations of the working class. Militancy in the unions is reflected in the party. Any political fight in the party has implications for the unions.

Scargill will not be able to replicate the patterns of continental politics because the history, politics and structures of the British labour movement are so different.

The call for a new party is therefore no less a jibe ---it is a diversion to help what energy of those who should be fighting elsewhere.

It diverts the left away from the site of battle. This can only strengthen the right.

The lack of democracy and perspicuous flows from a bureaucratic concept of organisation and politics. Scargill, with his flawed analysis of what has happened to the Labour Party, simply announced that he was leaving to set up his own party. Now he has done it.

He had not been willing to organise with the Left within the Labour Party, nor within the unions. There has been next to no debate---even amongst supporters of the project. Instead there has been a number of set piece rallies.

The SLP is in the process of cutting itself off from developments in the labour movement through a combination of securitisation towards Labour and an over emphasis on elections. It is also depriving itself of a policy which can provide a lead to campaign in struggles.

Instead of working with other socialists to build the left through out the labour movement, the SLP leadership have turned away from this task.

Those involved should rethink.

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To Our Readers

Eight pages of Socialist Outlook is not enough!

WE ARE determined to maintain a fortnightly paper, we think it is most suited to reporting and analysing events in the class struggle internationally and in Britain.

We want to improve it and aim to reduce it to 12 and ultimately 16 pages as soon as possible.

However this stretches our resources considerably, given the cost of newspaper printing, distribution and so on. While our sellers are pleading considerable amounts in their efforts to help out, we also need the help of our readers.

We aim to raise £3,000 by the time of the Socialist Outlook Summer School at the end of August. If you think keeping and improving a fortnightly Socialist Outlook is worthwhile, you can help us by:

- Paying the Solidarity price of £1
- Making a donation to our Fund Drive
- Taking some copies of the paper to sell
- Raising cheques and postal orders made payable to "Socialist Outlook Supporters Fund" to: PO Box 1109, London NW1 2UO.

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Socialist Campaign Group (Supporters Network) National Committee meeting Saturday June 1 12.30 pm Lucas Arms Gray's Inn Road, Kings Cross, London NW1 Main discussion on preparations for Labour Party Conference. Encourage your group to attend.

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Kill off Mail’s “Employee Agenda”

A postal worker

THE Communication Workers Union (CWU) is ballotting postal workers on industrial action against Royal Mail’s “Employee Agenda.” The early signs are that a sizeable yes vote will be announced at this year’s annual conference in Blackpool.

Royal Mail seriously misjudged the mood of the workforce. The truth about the Employee Agenda has now emerged. CWU members are not impressed. There are three main points to the agenda—pay, restructuring, safety transparency and workplace environment.

The union took off negotiations when Royal Mail refused to remove teamworking.

Since then, more money has been offered to soften the pay restructuring package. In desperation management has proposed that no jobs are threatened by its proposal to deliver all processed mail on the first attempt.

But they have refused to budge on the issue of teamworking.

Workers have been bombarded with misinformation in the form of team-briefings, special issues of the management paper and direct mail from local managers. Headlines in the tabloid press contained about 15 per cent wage rise.

But the union has struck a real chord with its members. Workers are fed up with the bosses’ bullying tactics and are not prepared to swallow a deal that will force postal workers to police themselves.

Teamworking would require postal workers to cover all vacancies and absences for no extra pay. Each team would be set a mythical productivity figure which could only be achieved by working flat out all day, every day.

Teams would also be expected to deal with any paper work connected with their job in their own time. Then if all the targets were achieved, a monthly bonus would be paid. Union members know that the real agenda is massive job losses and the destruction of the union. Small wonder that even management’s own survey showed that only a miserable 22 per cent felt that the “Employee Agenda” would be good for them.

Opposition to the bosses’ plans must now be turned into the biggest possible yes vote for industrial action.

The union’s joint General Secretary, Alan Johnson, has talked about a series of one-day strikes to force Royal Mail back to the negotiating table. But it may become necessary for postal workers to take action on an indefinite basis. To ensure that the union achieves the best outcomes for its members CWU branches must maintain pressure on the union leadership.

The union’s annual conference is an ideal opportunity for those engaged in the negotiations to turn out and make their voices heard.

Unison ‘too willing to take back seat’

BRIAN GARDNER speaks to GEOFF MARTIN, newly elected Convener of Unison’s London Region about the union’s future.

FOR Geoff Martin there is still a big problem in UNISON: “We don’t do at the moment have an effectively merged union.”

The combination of NATALGO, NUPE and COHSE brought workers together from many different areas. His new job is to make sure that the union is “to develop common themes which can unite all of the members”.

Socialist Outlook is Britain’s best-selling socialist fortnightly. For an internationalist, socialist and working class outlook on world events, subscribe today.

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It is really dangerous to ask people on the left in the Labour Party to vote for someone who supports running against Labour candidates.”

Martin regards Bickerstaffe as one of the better trade union leaders. He cites Bickerstaffe speaking out for asylum seekers and travellers, and is careful to distinguish him from what he terms “the rest of the upper echelons.”

I ask him about his own relationship to the bureaucracy, all of whom may be so well disposed to his ideas and what he might like to do.

He is very optimistic: “I don’t see a problem. I don’t think I am on a very clear platform. It was the profile of UNISON in London, and to create a situation where the former partner unions became welded together as a fighting force. So off we go. If there’s a row there’s a row.”
Liverpool’s Women of the Waterfront

‘Now we’re here we’re not going away’

DOREEN McNALLY chairs Women of the Waterfront (WOW). She was interviewed by GLENN VORIS, the Secretary of St Helens Trades Council on Merseyside.

GV: How was the Women of the Waterfront formed?

DM: At the beginning of March, we started to think about what we could do. I had never been to a meeting before so it was a bit daunting for me. We didn’t know what we were doing, but we thought we might as well give it a try.

GV: What initiatives and activities have WOW been involved in?

DM: As we’ve gained confidence, we started speaking regularly with dockers across the country at Trade Union meetings and at dozens of dockers’ support groups that have been set up. WOW now speaks at meetings on their own and organises our own Tours for fund raising. We’ve linked up with women’s groups, which has been an inspiration, seeing other women organise independently. So far, we have spoken to over 500 meetings. We also attend the picket lines every day at the docks with the men and are not intimidated by the police. If anything, the police feel intimidated because they don’t know how to handle us.

GV: Have you been contacted by women’s groups internationally?

DM: Yes, all over the world, to Europe, Australia, New Zealand, USA, Canada.

The first WOW delegation to go international was to Sweden in March. We were invited by the Swedish Union (SAC) and bookings went on a march through Stockholm rally when we addressed over 500 people. We attended several press conferences. There is more about the Liverpool dockers in the Swedish press than here. We’ve also been invited to San Francisco. The United Secretariat of the Fourth International plans to organise an extensive tour across Europe for the dockers and one member of WOW, which we’re really excited about.

GV: Has your involvement changed your life?

DM: Most definitely. When our men were sacked, we, the wives and partners, were right there with them, and we celebrated their victory to raise the £25,000 offered in March and up to £30,000 for our pensions to save our jobs.

Their fight is not over. We’ve realised that we women have a place in the fight. We’ve become seasoned picketers. We didn’t know each other before and some of us had done anything like this before, but now we’re here we’re not going away. The dispute has changed our lives and we don’t want it to go back to the old days. We want to have a voice and we’re not turning back. We now understand the national and global problems of how workers are exploited; this must change.

GV: How do you think you’ll win the dispute?

DM: We’ll win by building up the international boycott that we’ve developed with dockers all over the world.

The Liverpool port has been the ships going into it now, so it’s only a matter of time before the MDCS is forced to re-consult all the sacked men.

Please send messages of support to WOW c/o Transport House, Islington, Liverpool, L3. Fax: 0151-207 0696 Tel: 0151-207 3388

Send donations made payable to Merseyside Dockers Shop Stewards Appeal to: Jimmy Davies, Secretary, Merseyside Port Shop Stewards, c/o Transport House, Islington, Liverpool, L3.

Unity behind dockers grows

Glenn Voris Sec. St. Helen’s TUC personal capacity

SOCIALIST Outlook supporters saw the need to co-ordinate nationwide support for Liverpool’s striking dockers.

In February we proposed at the Merseyside Show Stewards Conference the idea of gaining the support of the dockers by calling a national conference in support of the dockers. This was fully endorsed by the dockers and the conference. It was further agreed that the MATUC and the dockers jointly organise the conference to be held on 25 May in Liverpool.

However on 28 April the dockers held a national conference where it was agreed to set up a National Dockers Support Committee (NDSC). During the National Trades Council on the 9, 10 and 11 May, discussions were held with Jimmy Nolan, the chair of the Mersey Dockers Shop Stewards Committee, to assist in the setting up of the NDSC at the 25 May conference.

Keith Sinclair, delegate Hull Trades Council (personal capacity)

The Kettering Conference of Trades Councils attracted around a hundred delegates from trades councils across England and Wales. The motions that were passed covered a wide range of issues and included calls to affiliate to the Welfare State Network and to step up opposition to the Asylum Bill.

Support was given to Hull trades council’s campaign against Project Work and a useful emergency motion on education was passed calling on education committees to support FACE. This needs to be followed up by approaches to local education committees for all education campaigns.

Overall £500 was collected for the Liverpool dockers for whom Jimmy Nolan spoke. An excellent motion was passed calling upon trades councils for the dockers and build the May 25 conference organised by Merseyside County Association of Trades Councils. The Socialist Labour Party held a fringe meeting with Bob Crowe from the RMT. Despite his efforts, there was little support. Delegates raised their objections to the timing, policies and the way the SLP had been launched. Other than from the speaker, there was a wide consensus that the key task was to kick the Tories out, calling for a Labour vote while raising demands such as the repeal of the anti-union laws and the defence of the welfare state.

Supporters of Socialist Outlook intervened in all the major debates. We also took on the practical responsibility of organising the funding and raising initiatives for the Liverpool dockers. Overall it was a successful conference.

However, the real test is whether the resolutions that were carried actually make a difference away from the heady rhetoric of conference debates.

What is certainly true of this conference is that the resolutions passed make it much easier to raise campaigns in trades councils and through them in hundreds of trade union branches.

Trades Councils back dockers
Exiled Ivory Coast student leaders Henry Tohou and Nicole Ake speak:

"Comrades were forced to drink the blood of others"

THE Ivory Coast has one of Africa's most brutal dictatorships, it is supported by French armed force. In the 1990s students and worker have started to build up democratic and socialist opposition movements.

THE people of the Ivory Coast have lived through a period of fascism since winning independence from France in 1960.

The regime, established by presi dent Houphouët Boigny, was supported by successive French governments. The country fell into a one-party system. Anyone who opposed the regime was assassinated.

In 1970 attempts were made by Dr Kraghe Gbagbe to create an opposition party, but he was assassinated along with 4,000 people from his tribe. They were killed by the Ivorian security forces and French soldiers, and burned in a communal grave in Gaba, Gbagbe's native village.

In 1990 students arose spontaneously to protest and demand a multi-party system. We won it by the sacrifice of lives of our comrades who were killed during that struggle. But multi-partyism does not equal democracy.
The democratic left parties decided not to enter the 1990 elections if the government refused to adopt a fair electoral system. Gbagbe's FPI decided to enter the presidential elections without informing the other three parties. It weakened the left, and allowed the weak ruling party to legitimate itself through the fraudulent elections.

Young people and students kept on fighting against the dictator. He decided to attack, and if possible to kill the student leaders. We still remember the invasion of 17 and 18 May 1991 when the police and the soldiers descended on the university campus of Yopougon.

Yopougon is one of the biggest campuses in the capital city, Abidjan. The most determined militants in combating the present regime live there—you can find Maestis, Leninists, Marxists, Trotskyists and Guerillas.

The dictator sent special forces to combat us and kill the leaders who lived there. Comrades were killed, injured; the girls were raped and some of our comrades were forced to drink the blood of others who had been seriously injured. Brothers and sisters were forced to have sex.

Many students disappeared.
After pressure the dictator consented to an inquiry into these horrible crimes.

We considered this a victory. The Commission of Inquiry could not deny all the crimes committed by soldiers and police under the special order of the head of state. The inquiry ordered sanctions, but the dictator refused saying: "The army is my own weapon, my own knife. I cannot use my own weapon against myself."

We started huge protest demonstrations to force the government to carry out these sanctions.

The president, unable to punish the militants, decided to attack us. Over two weeks most student leaders were kidnaped. On the day of the demonstrations the government paid unemploy ed people and foreigners to provoke a riot.

The government wanted to unite the opposition leaders to imprison them with the student leaders, to rape the student leaders to rap.

It was only in 1992 that they shut the the conflict in the Ivory Coast.

IVORIAN women have been fighting for justice for a long time. Many fighting for independence were often arrested by French colonisers.

There were important marches by women protesting against these arrests. They became the subject of a novel.

It was the women who won freedom for their husbands.
The Ivorian dictator learned early that women can disrupt his regime. To avoid this he created a women's movement. The Association of Ivorian Women (AFI) became a branch of the party in power. Even in May 1991, when the Ivorian President send soldiers into the Yopougon university campus to rape the girls and to kill students who was the move which was supposed to supress and organize a meeting around the dictator Houphouët Boigny to congratulate him.

Since then opposition parties have created another women's movement the Ivorian movement of democratic women (FEMO). This movement is fighting to promote and defend women's rights in the Ivory Coast.
Obituary
Alec Acheson: a convinced Marxist revolutionary

SOCIALIST Outlook's Alec Acheson died last week at the Loris hospice in Leicester. BERNARD SHEPPARD on the life of a dedicated socialist.

OVER fifty comrades, friends and family remembered Alec by singing the International at his funeral service last week.

Indicating the breadth of Alec's activity, tributes were offered by East Knighton Labour Party, Socialist Outlook, members of the Socialist Labour Party, the Troops Out Movement, the Irish Republican Army and veteran Trotskyite Harry Ramer.

Alec was an active supporter of the Forty International for sixty years of his life.

Since the war Alec spent his time as an activist in his union, the Labour Party and the anti-racist movement. He was an honorary president of the NTE.

He was a founding member of the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament.

He was a teacher, a good friend, a socialist and a leading representative of what he once called the "real tradition" that links the present revolutionary movement to the experience of the twenties and thirties.

While stationed in North Africa and the Mediterranean during the Second World War he was in contact with Trotskyists in the Middle East.

Alec had a deep love of reading, particularly Irish literature and culture.

A wake is to be organised in the near future with Irish musicians and dancers.

We shall miss Alec's friendship, experience, knowledge and personal warmth.

CHARLIE VAN GELDEREN describes his encounters with Alec in the thirties.

THE DEATH of any comrade is a loss to our movement, but to me it is particularly sad to contribute to the obituary of Alec Acheson.

Alec was one of the tiny handful of pre-Trotskyists who was still in the ranks of the Fourth International until his death.

His earliest memories of Alec go back to 1937/8.

He was both in the Islington branch of the Revolutionary Socialist League (RSL). He was closely associated with the veteran Trotskyist, Hilda Lane, John Lawrence and the Finch brothers and sister.

In those days we used to hold open air meetings in Highbury Fields. I clearly remember one evening when a fellow comrade who had to follow me failed to turn up. Alec, who was selling our paper This Fellowship, but who had never addressed a public meeting before, mounted the platform and spoke.

He was clearly nervous but there was a job to be done for the revolution, and he did it.

This was typical of Alec—his never-failing devotion to the fight for social change, which he was synonymous with the building of the Fourth International.

When war broke out in 1939 Alec threw himself into the revolutionary war effort.

On January 6 1940 he organised a conference of sixty delegates from the Labour Party, the Independent Labour Party Guild of Youth, the IFL, the Communist Party and the Unemployed Workers Movement, Leicester Trades Council and local trades union branches. It was addressed by Fenner Brockway and Starkey Jacobs.

When he was conscripted into the army he continued his socialist activities as far as it was possible.

When he went to Egypt he contacted comrades living there. There was an election going on and the Trotskyist group supported the socialist candidates. Alec, in defiance of military discipline, took part in the election campaign, going round to the houses and tenements where the workers were.

Together with another British communist and a Pan-Arabist he drafted a leaflet on the developing situation in Greece, which was distributed by the workers in the Cairo factories. It called on the squatters in the British army to fight against their working class brothers in Greece.

They were nearly caught by the military authorities.

This was Alec Acheson, a convinced Marxist revolutionary.

WHAT WE'RE FIGHTING UP AGAINST mass unemployment, rampant employers with savage anti-union laws, and a war on hard-working public services, the working class in Britain faces a real crisis - an avoidable crisis created by the historic failure of its official leadership.

Socialist Outlook exists to build a new type of working class leadership, based on class struggle and revolutionary socialism. The capitalist class, driven by its own crisis, and politically united by its need to maximise profits at the expense of the workers, has determined, with yawning leadership by a brutal Tory high command. The Tory strategy has been to shovel the unions, and to fragment and weaken the working class opposition. They have alienated the workers one at a time. In response, most TUC and Labour leaders have embraced the defeatist policies of 'new realists', effectively totally surrendering, while ditching any pretence of being a socialist alternative. Every retreat encourages the offensive against jobs, wages, conditions and union rights.

New realism is the latest form of reformism, seeking only improved conditions within capitalism. We reject reformism, not because we are against reforms, but because we know that full employment, decent living standards, a clean environment, peace and democracy, can never be achieved under capitalism. Nor, as we argued long before the collapse of Stalinism, could those demands ever be achieved under the bureaucratically deformed workers states and degenerated USSR, whose regimes survived only by repressing the working class. We are a monist current, based not on the brutish totalitarian parodies of state marxism, nor on the tame, toothless version of 'mariotism' beloved by armchair academics, but the revolutionary tradition of Marx, Engels, Lenin and Trotsky.

OUR SOCIALIST alternative is not based on parliamentary elections or illusions of peaceful legislative change. We fight for a united and unbreakable power of the working class to topple the corrupt and reactionary rule of capital and establish its own class rule.

We struggle against fragmentation by building solidarity, to unite the various struggles of workers, the unemployed, of women, of pensioners, of the black communities, of lesbians and gay men, of students, of youth — and of those fighting imperialism in Ireland and worldwide.

Socialist Outlook is above all an internationalist current, in solidarity with the Trotskyist Fourth International, which organises in over 40 countries. Unlike some other groups on the British left, we do not believe a mass revolutionary party can be built simply by proclaiming ourselves to be one. This degenerates into sectarian posturing and abstention from struggles in the labour movement, playing into right wing hands.

Nor do we believe that the demands of women, black people, lesbians and gays or the national demands of people in Scotland, Ireland and Wales should be left to await revolution. The oppressed must organise themselves and take action which are a part of the struggle for socialism. But propaganda alone, however good, will not bring socialism. The fight for policies which can mobilise and politicise the whole worker in struggle, must be taken into the unions, the Labour Party and every campaign and struggle in which workers who want to assert their rights must act.

To strengthen this fight we press for united front campaigns on key issues such as racism and fascism — in which various left currents can work together for common objectives or remain free to debate differences. If you agree with what you see in Socialist Outlook, and want to join with us in the struggle for socialism, readers' groups meet in cities across the country. Contact us now, get organised, and get active!

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What's Happening
MAY
Saturday 25 National Dockers Conference, 1 Am, Tradeston House, Islington, Liverpool.

JUNE
Friday 14 Fight for Comprehensive Education, meeting 7.30, Union Club, Penrhos Road, Selly Park.

July
Friday 19 to Sat 27 International Youth Summer Camp, Portugal.

Socialist Campaign Group and Socialist Teachers Alliance.
Saturday 20 Respect, anti-racist music festival sponsored by the Liverpool Park, London N4.

AUGUST
23-26 Socialist Outlook Summer School, Aberystwyth, Wales.

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What's Happening
India swings right

K. Govindan

INDIA'S new government is the Hindu right-wing Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP). It won over 185 seats in the 545-member Lok Sabha and 25 per cent of the popular vote. The eleventh general election returns marked a historic victory for the Hindu nationalists and their fascist allies in the annihilation of the Congress (I). Two important issues contributed to the ruling party's defeat. In the Hawala scandal, a business family was revealed to have large sums of money to lead politicians in both the previous government and opposition parties over many years. Corrupt politicians in hack to the rich are the plot of many Indian films. Corruption is assumed by most people.

Congress (I) leader Narasimha Rao has traded on a clean image. The revelations have confirmed the institutionalization of money politics at the highest levels. Another, more diffuse, issue is the effect of the New Economic Policy on the poor and lower classes. Finance minister Manmohan Singh introduced the NEP in 1991. The national economy has implemented the neo-liberal mantra: "liberalization, privatization and globalisation." Transnational plunderers have prised open the economy. The government of the Congress (I). Local members were enraged by this transparently cynical measure. They split the local unit of Congress (I) to form a new party, little better than its parent, which made a coalition with the Communist Party of India. The coalition won a clean sweep of national assembly seats in Tamil Nadu.

The BJP temporarily toned down its activity for the elections. It virulently attacks Muslims and provocative campaigns to "reclaim" the sites of Hindu temples. The destruction of the Babri Masjid in Ayodhya by its supporters in December 1992 opened a series of riots. They spread across India and spilled over into Bangladesh and Pakistan. The attack on the temple outraged liberal opinion and ostracized the BJP. The BJP has made political capital out of Congress (I) corruption. It also led protests against India joining GATT and against transnational food corporations. However, the BJP leaders are implicated in the Hawala scandal. The party claims economic liberalisation would favour India's economy. This reflects its base of support amongst would-be capitalists with greater aspirations than ability.

The BJP attacks and scapegoats India's 100 million Muslim minority. It threatens to "stabilise" them into a mythical Hindu identity or to force them out of India. They threaten nuclear war against Pakistan and Bangladesh in order to defend India from Islamic—while selling it to the World Bank and IMF.

Many hopes rest on a third front of all the secular parties except the Congress (I). It includes the bourgeois populist Janata Dal, regional and lower caste/dalit parties and the two mass Communist parties. Political pragmatists declare they will not boycott elections against the BJP and Congress (I).

The Communist parties confine their abstentions to bastions in West Bengal, Kerala and Tripura. Elsewhere they aspire to be junior partners in " secular democratic forces"—with a liberal share of crooks, charlatans, landlords and others.

A new force needs to be connected. Socialist politics must be committed to secularism, democracy, regional autonomy and an economic programme which serves the oppressed and exploited.

A moderate bourgeois alternative to Congress (I) cannot survive more than one term. Congress (I) has a well-oiled machine. Its national spread and assets are to be reckoned with. Political obituaries writers can put away their pens.

The BJP may not have long to savour its success. Tithi will face a parliamentary motion of confidence on 30 May. Virtually every opposition party is to defeat them.

India's uncertainty and confusion will not end then. A solution rests in linking the strategy and tactics of the Indian left to the needs of those in struggle on the land and in the towns.

BMA revives Tory NHS nightmare

John Lister,
London Health Emergency

HEADLINE-GRABBING complaints by top consultants, backed by the BMA, are the latest reminder of the rolling crisis caused by the Tory government's creation of an "internal market" system in 1991.

They are not the only NHS professional warning that the system is at breaking point.

In February, top consultants and medical doctors from all 23 acute hospitals in South Thames region wrote to Stephen Dorrell, warning of a growing crisis in emergency services, with insufficient beds and health authorities refusing to pay for emergency patients.

They demanded the government step in to halt any further bed closures and asked: 'How much is spent supporting the bureaucracy, annual contracting and the purchaser/provider split?'

In February, March and April, more Trusts become publicly locked in conflict with their purchasing health authorities, claiming that impossible demands were being placed on them.

Newham Healthcare Trust issued a press release denouncing the local East London and City Health Authority for "it has haled all elective surgery.

Many other Trusts have not signed contracts for the new financial year.

On May 8 leaders of the NHS Trust Federation warned Health Secretary Stephen Dorrell that hospitals throughout Europe are facing the deepest crisis for years.

There are signs that the Tories are on the retreat, seeking to defuse a damaging situation. Already an extra £15 million has been shared out between nine floundering Trusts. In Hampshire, Manchester, Leeds, Sheffield, Newcastle, Solihull, and parts of south east London. The two giant acute Trusts in Leeds have been given special sanctions for the second year in a row.

But many more Trusts are struggling for survival, including the Southampton University Hospitals Trust (£1 million deficit), and London's Royal Hospitals Trust. More crises are waiting in the wings.

The market system which was seen by Thatcher as an ideal device to enable the government to stand back and wash its hands of problems in the NHS is proving to be a predictable disaster in the run-up to the next election.

With normally subservient quangos and even pro-market politicians joining the outcry, Dorrell will have a battle on his hands to keep the issue from becoming a major electoral liability. Now is the time for campaigner and health unions to step up the pressure, with a real chance of forcing concessions and saving vital services.