Labour backs Tory welfare meltdown

Defend the Welfare State

WHEN even Kenneth Clarke says Labour is too obsessed with coddling 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 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 rested 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 indexed 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 plebs in the PCP.

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.
POSTAL workers voted two-to-one in the ballot for industrial action against Royal Mail’s ‘Employee Agenda’. Despite previous talk of a series of one-day strikes, General Secretary Alan Johnson’s immediate response was to reduce the vote to a lever in further negotiations with management.

Management answered with their usual talk of how strike action would only endanger jobs. They called for further talks and raised the possibility, dismissed by them earlier, of ensuring that no postal workers lose out financially from their proposals.

Strong support for action indicates that most postal workers recognise that it is not primarily money which is at stake. The Employee Agenda is about massive job losses and destroying the union. Management wants to introduce ‘teamworking’ which 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 be expected to deal with any paper work connected with the job in their own time. If all targets were achieved a monthly bonus would be paid.

It is this issue that Royal Mail refuses to budge on. It took intense pressure from the union membership and the rest of the CWU executive to force Johnson to break off previous negotiations and go to a ballot.

The danger now is that Johnson will do everything possible to avoid calling action, or call the minimum he thinks he can get away with, in exchange for minor concessions from management.

It will take more than a ballot alone or a series of one-day strikes to defeat the centre-piece of management’s strategy. Postal workers need to step up the level of organisation at both the workplace level and nationally within the union to ensure the ballot victory is built on.

The rest of the Labour movement should be cementing links now with CWU branches so they can provide maximum support when strike action takes place.

Greg Tucker, RMT Train Crew National Secretary

EVERY month sees new parts of British Rail being given away into private hands. Whilst Labour continues to fudge on what it will do in office, rail unions have proved unwilling to combat the threat of privatisation directly themselves. While TSSA plays dead and ASLEF have settled for acting as an ‘employment agency’, an honest broker providing a service for the new private companies, the RMT has borne the brunt of direct attacks on its rights to organise. But unlike the other unions, it has at least tried to find ways to fight back.

In the latest move, the RMT is preparing for battle over demands by Train Crew for proper pay and conditions.

Operating companies have had up to last weekend to respond to demands for properly booked meal breaks for guards and for an 11 per cent pay rise for past productivity, standing separate from the ordinary annual pay claim.

Progress has been made with some of the companies over the breaks, pay is a different matter. We are demanding of the National Executive that ballot papers go out urgently and that we open up a campaign of industrial action.

Our claim is clear: we have a 14 per cent wage bill that we have progressively been told has been over 13 per cent and we are asking for parity in productivity.

Whilst we still demand of any incoming Labour government that they immediately renationalise our industry, it is clear that we cannot simply wait for such a change: the time has come to stand and fight on our own demands.

Make Rail privateers pay
Manifesto campaign for equality launched

Peter Purton, LCGR

THE "Manifesto for Lesbian and Gay Equality" published by the Labour Campaign for Lesbian and Gay Rights (LCGR) has been welcomed at a press conference by UNISON general secretary Rodney Rees, who said: "In a comprehensive statement of the changes a Labour government needs to introduce if discrimination against lesbians and gay men in all areas of life is to be outlawed."

The goal is seen as winnable. Every single demand in the Manifesto has been carried by a Labour Party conference - five times since 1945 and the vote in favour in 1994 was 97% per cent. Widespread support exists already - for example, from UNISON and the NUS LCGR Conference. The Manifesto is part of a campaign for detailed discussion with Alan Michael MP, the Liberal Home office minister with the lesbian and gay minister.

The Manifesto is also a campaigning document. LCGR has no illusions that Labour in office will rush to overturn a century of legal oppression in the face of tabloid holocaust. A couple of days before the landslide Labour MPs signed a free vote on ending the ban on homosexuals in the armed forces. Eighty voted against, and most were away. Tony Blair, who did speak out on the age of consent issue in 1994, said that was the vote the house has for the army and for the army's forces chiefs that had to be convinced. No wonder LCGR recognises that struggle to win back in the lesbian and gay communities, where the great majority which have the Tories is understandably doubtful of Labour's commitment

Everyone can play their part in making Labour's MPs conscious that they must not betray these conference commitments to absolutely basic principles of equality. LCGR wants the Manifesto discussed everywhere in the labour movement. It is especially keen to explain why the issues which MPs find "difficult", like fertility rights for lesbians, artificial insemination and freezing and adoption rights, are essential to winning equality.

Points can be gained. Every CLP has been sent a copy of the Manifesto. This is a rare campaign where all wings of Labour have worked together, in LCGR, in pursuit of a principled goal. Ultimate success depends, however, on winning active support from all sections of the labour movement in the run-up to the election.

* Copies of a CLGR at 50 Box 306, London NW3. Copies of the Manifesto available at 30p each plus postage from the same address.

Welfare State Network defends Hackney libraries

Eileen Gersh

ANTI-CUTS activists took over Hackney's Central Library over the Bank Holiday weekend. The contesting protest centre for a well-supported rally and demonstration protesting against the planned closure of half Hackney's libraries. The protest was organised by the Welfare State Network (WSN). Hackney is London's poorest borough. Its Labour council plans to close half its libraries, claiming that this is the only way to bring them up to date with council standards. Support for the protesting committee is very wide. Support for the libraries is helping to build up a wide campaign against other government attacks on the arts, teachers and local branches of the TGWU and MSF unions.

The WSN is keeping library closures in the public eye. Activists are preparing a lobby of the Council with art stalls. Support for the libraries is helping to build up a wide campaign against other government attacks like benefits, pensions, education, health and housing.

Campaigners ended the occupation with a rally and march. The WSN is launching a campaign to defend Hackney's services. Come to the Unity Club in Dalston Lane at 7.30pm on Saturday June 10.

WELFARE STATE NETWORK!

Affiliation: £25 unions and Labour Party branches, £18 pensioners' and unemployed groups. Affiliates receive 10 copies of each issue of Action.

Individual membership: £5 (vouched), £5 (students, senior citizens, claimants). Members receive one issue of Action.


e-mail: Affiliation: £25

£18 for 25 Action

£5 for 25 Action

Name

Address

Amount enclosed: £

Total enclosed: £

Name

Address

Amount enclosed: £

Total enclosed: £

Organisation

Send: WSN c/o Camden People's Centre, 138 Queen's Crescent, London NW5 5DQ.

Cheques payable to "Welfare State Network."

Unionist election ransom

David Coen

AT LEAST part of the reason why John Hume and Bertie Aittken bowed to IRA demands, with David Trimble's demand for elections in Ulster, was that the IRA was in the mood to negotiate, and seeing the need to keep the Ulster Unionists at bay. Ian Paisley's Democratic Unionists refused to play such a game to back Sinn Fein. No Unionists refused to talk with Sinn Fein. No Unionists refused to talk with Sinn Fein.

From one election to the next...

Unionists proposed|

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Despite all the choreography about de-commissioning, the main obstacle to British success in re-making the partition settlement of 1921 is not the Republicans but the Unionists. Socialists maintain that the six-county state is not reformable. What the "peace" process is demonstrating once again is that the British ruling class are incapable of reforming the British state.

It is incapable of making the most minimal concessions in return for an agreement which would actually strengthen the Republic of Ireland by strengthening partition.

Surely a lesson for reformists everywhere.

Exeter tangle

Pete Flinn

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Surely a lesson for reformists everywhere.
A summer of chauvinism

The latest attempt to re-forge the Tory little England alliance around the politics of ‘Allo ‘Allo is a mark of deep desperation.

But Major’s gambit of anti-Europe beef is about more than saving his own tattered hide.

The terminal crisis of British Conservatism is itself intrinsically linked to the failure of the European bourgeoisie to overcome their long-term political and economic crisis.

The never-ending uncertainty over monetary and political union arises out of the combined forces of the traditional parties of big capital, the impasse of social democracy and the continuing capacity of the working class to launch a serious offensive.

It takes a different form in other countries, but the overall pattern is clear.

To a greater or lesser extent, Europe has relied on the US for the past part of a century. Its money was crucial in overcoming the wave of social revolution that began in 1916, went on to conquer state power in Russia and threaten capitalism all over Europe for nearly a decade.

After the Second World War the Dawes and Young support systems were re-built in the Marshall Plan’s huge subsidy packages.

It was the only way of getting western European capitalism on its feet again—battered empires in Asia, bourgeoisie discredited by fascism and a regnant Soviet Union, all forced the USA to intervene to pump up the system.

The arrangement was tempered by the recession of the late 1950s and early 1960s—the end of Brentwood in the 1970s and the bike in oil prices marked a changing strategy. The USA became less able to dole out the dollars.

This put the European ruling classes in a bind.

Even since they have struggled to find a solution. The European Community—now the European Union—was an attempt to find a new way forward.

But Europe has always faced special problems in relation both to the USA and Japan and the EU. And this relative weakness is not primarily caused by national division.

Because of the social consequences of the war European capitalism was obliged to shape its pattern of accumulations around a developed system of welfare. Capitalism, provided some form of working class developed a mass politics of welfare and trade unions were able to win a position of mainstream bargaining.

This explains in part why US production has been generally higher than Europe.

On top of these advantages, the States’ main military competitor—the USSR—was not a capitalist country. And the only other capitalist country capable of presenting a challenge to Uncle Sam was divided into West Germany and the GDR.

Maastricht is the latest development in the attempt to overcome these innate weaknesses of Euro-capital. To achieve the level of profitability they desire will require a complete re-working of the post-war order.

The convergence criteria aims to limit overall debt to 60 per cent of GDP. It means severe conditions on jobs and borrowing, unemployment, choking down on immigrant communities and moving power increasingly to unaccountable rulers.

The bitter fruits of the proposals are already being gathered. Long-term unemployment is at record levels throughout the Union—at least twenty million.

Yet despite the bourgeoisie’s willingness to sign up to crippling cuts in state spending, they have not been able to persuade their populations that “it hurts them because we work.”

Profound political crises are gripping every country that tries to qualify for the Union of sections of the petty bourgeoisie—small shopkeepers, farmers and small white-collar workers.

But this sector is getting hammered in the new Europe—small enterprises being driven out of business quicker than you can say Barclays Bank unhappy. This is both the destruction of European capital and its penetration into retail and agro-industries.

Such a breakdown at the base of the big parties of capitalist monetary union—from Switzerland, Sweden to Germany and elsewhere.

The ridiculous task of forcing the cabinet in Major’s little England version of the same. He is trying to cash in quick, hopping that a summer of chauvinism will re-unite the reactionary alliance at the core of the Tory party and tap into the deep-seated chauvinism of British culture.

Blair’s response has been predictably pathetic, wagging in behind the Tories with a complacently politically incorrect argument over National Unity.

A campaign in the labour movement against Maastricht is long overdue. We need to add our voice to the debate.

For all the capricious drink it is clear that Blair has never been willing to publicly break from the little Englishism of his Conservative colleagues—much to the annoyance of the soft left intellectuals he is trying to court at the moment.

And a lack of guts does not make up for the fact that behind the rhetoric there is a massive void of policy. Just what is a Labour government going to do about health costs? About unemployment? About beef for that matter?

It is clear to most activists in the labour movement that Blair’s radicalism does not extend much further than re-labeling the doors on the corridors of power.

Hoping to benefit from the Tory crisis over European direction by turning the Labour Party into the champion of integration only makes his unswerving to break from the nonsense of the Tory beef war more hypocritical.

It is not as if Blair is the first to tread this path. Throughout the eighties social democratic parties came to office in Europe with similar aspirations.

It worked for a while—when the German balance of trade deficit was able to fund some reforms. But now the Deutschmarks stopped flowing the crisis hit quickly. The parties went into decline in France, Italy, Germany and Spain.

Blair will not even get the short period of honeymoon. It will be straight into austerity, accompanied by a right-wing social agenda.

Any attempt to move to a single currency would involve £22.000 million in cuts.

A campaign in the labour movement against Maastricht is long overdue. We need to add our voice to the debate.

Increasingly the implications of Maastricht are becoming generally apparent as European governments come to try to force through cuts.

The attacks on welfare and the rise of the far right are all products of the same process. Those who define Maastricht, or try to work within its framework—such as large sections of the British intelligentsia—will find they have been completely discredited.

Blair’s strategy will founder almost immediately—people simply will not accept the destruction of the welfare state for the sake of monetary union.

This is why the new Alternatives to Maastricht initiative sponsored by over fifty Labour MPs is so important.

The platform rejects both Maastricht’s sado-monarchical framework and the jingoism of the right.

The left has to fight for an alternative to the bosses’ Europe, one based on full employment and democratic control rather than isolation and nationalism.

This can only be achieved by linking the battles inside the labour movement to the struggles of those at the sharp end of the Euro-efficiency.

The left has to work toward an alternative that shows a way out of capitalist decline and crisis. The Alternatives to Maastricht conference helps make this possible.

For more information send donations and support to: A Peace Europe c/o Alan Simpson MP, House of Commons, London SW1A 0AA.

Dockers launch network

Glenn Voors

THE NATIONAL Dockers’ Support Conference was attended by 135 delegates. They represented support groups, Trades Councils and union branches from around the country.

A number of workshops discussed practical support, employment law and contracts, anti-trade union laws, women’s support groups and developing national and international solidarity. The delegates condemned the TGWU leadership for not raising money, let alone making the dispute official. Donations are slowly drying up so it is necessary to get more labour movement support.

The docks have received tremendous support from the social movement, which is having a real effect. The United Nations, the Fourth International, 30 branches of the Independent Workers of Great Britain, the 1,000 or so dockers who will be on strike, supporters and over 200 regular delegates attended.

National Dockers Support Committee is set up in a broad and democratic manner.

The conference decided to begin

Alternatives to Maastricht Conference
Saturday 6 July 12.30pm-4.30pm
Congress House, Great Russell Street, London WC1

For more information contact Keith Laming, House of Commons, London SW1A 0AA.

At 3071333
Solidarity with the fight against Neo-liberal war on workers and peasants

The West’s new Crusades

Rather than opening up a period of peace, the new world order has seen the big powers even more willing to indulge in military adventures. Conflicts in Rwanda, the break-up of Yugoslavia, the massacre of Chechnya, the civil war in Algeria and the Gulf war all revolve around the same question. Although the era of imperialism’s long-term direct military subordination of its dominions is past, new economic relations of control remain in place. The general withdrawal from occupation since the Second World War has been used by some liberal commentators to portray the West in a benevolent light, gradually helping to convert democracies to their feet. Decades of support for some of the most murderous and brutal torture regimes the planet has ever known contradicts this claim. But increasingly it has been primarily through economic means that the West has sought to shape the economies and politics of the world to suit its own interests. The last decades’ neo-liberal offensive spear-headed by the International Monetary Fund and World Bank has a devastating effect on the peoples of the so-called third world. At the altar of competitiveness whole populations are being condemned to misery, with structural readjustment programmes forcing massive attacks on living standards. But the attacks have not been accepted without a fight. The Zapatista National Liberation Army has been able to sustain a fight against the Mexican state backed up by US imperialism with huge success.

Zapatistas launch worldwide fight

The Zapatista National Liberation Army (EZLN) is the first left-wing guerrilla army to emerge since the collapse of Berlin Wall. It is something new in the struggle of the masses throughout the Latin American continent and beyond. ALAN THORNETT recently attended a two thousand-strong conference held last week in solidarity with their struggle.

Europe’s first ‘Meeting for Humanity and Against Neo-liberalism’ in Berlin was a direct response to an appeal by the Zapatista National Liberation Army (EZLN) for such events world wide in preparation for their Intercontinental Meeting for Humanity and Against Neo-liberalism to be held in Chiapas from July 27 to August 3.

The Tragedy of Liberia

A BOAT-LOAD of refugees from Monrovia travels back and forth along the coast of West Africa, desperately seeking a port or country which will give it haven. A young girl flies to Britain from Freetown to have a bullet removed from behind her eye. The media images surrounding the brutal six-year long civil war in Liberia, and its spill-over into neighbouring Sierra Leone, portray yet another tribal conflict in faraway Africa. But the west is far from innocent. BOB WOOD examines of the roots of the war.

The state of Liberia has its origins in the settlement of freed slaves from the United States in the early nineteenth century. The existence of freed slaves was a problem for both southern planters and northern liberals. Those who set up the American Colonisation Society could see no better way of ridding themselves of this embarrassment than shipping the ex-slaves back to Africa.

The first settlers arrived on the West African coast in 1822. Their leaders were often of mixed race, their views of Africa essentially those of nineteenth century United States whites. The indigenous people were sometimes referred to as “heathen savages” and the tribal people reciprocated by calling the American Liberians “whites”, a habit that persisted well into the twentieth century.

Independence was declared in 1847, the settler regime maintaining its cohesion through a single party, the True Whig Party, and its dominance through limiting the franchise through a property qualification, a practice that continued as long as the True Whig Party maintained its ascendancy. Trade and a plantation economy kept the new state viable but the worldwide depression in the 1880s led to a period of instability before the potential for rubber production was seen by Firestone, who established their first plantations in 1894. Much of the labour required on the plantations was forced and at one stage the Liberian government was implicated in the "recruitment" of forced labour for the Spanish Island of Fernando Po, a tremendous irony given their origins as freed slaves.

From the mid-forties, Liberia was ruled by one man for nearly thirty years, President Wil- liam Tubman. Following the defeat in the early fifties of the “patriotic” wing of the ruling class, who wanted to develop an independent capitalism, Tubman proceeded to open up Liberia to international capital through what became known as the Open Door Policy. Huge deposits of iron ore were discovered in the north of the country, near to the border with Guinea, to supplement the income from rubber, and the Liberian rain forest was plundered by a new timber industry. In the sixties and seventies, the economy grew steadily at an average of 7 per cent per annum, but this growth was without development. The mining and agricultural businesses operated as enclaves within Liberia without any noticeable links to the local economy.
Six days against the night-time nightmare: "Lyman 96 - Unemployment, Debt, War: Enough is enough!"

Come to the counter-summit from 21, 22 and 23 June Details: Contact Pierre Rousset on 00 33 14 87 42 33 or by fax on 00 33 14 89 23 28

An over-advertised showing of Ken Loach's "Land and Freedom" and a discussion long on the night around the Spanish revolution.

Despite this diversity of discussion the event really most strong to the EZLN and all the other indigenous peoples of Mexico. In its opposition to the Mexican Federal Army, its demands for democracy and justice and liberty for all Mexicans, its opposition to discrimination against indigenous peoples, its fight against devastation and exploitation, its anti-capitalism and its opposition to imperialism and neo-liberalism - the EZLN has created the wave of international solidarity of which the event was a part. The event reflected the weakness of the EZLN in particular and their resistance against the Mexican state.

Yet the Declaration is a call to mount present powers and substitute them with the power of the people. It calls for the ending of the current system and the extension of democracy. This cannot be achieved without dealing with the problem of state power.

In fact it is this state power which currently surrounds the EZLN in its jungle and its struggle against the massive forces which is to be judged by the event.

This ambiguity over the state was strongly reflected throughout the event in terms of the need to confront neo-liberalism. The introduction repeatedly stressed that the fight against and the defeat of neo-liberalism was not a struggle for state power and that neo-liberalism can be confronted through raising an understanding of what it represents and the effects it is having on the people. It is an idea that the anarchists currently call "self-activism" with all the positive accounts for their enthusiasm for the project.

This was reflected in the debates, and in the forum, on internationalism. The Zapata- nistas are not Marxists and there was little talk of internationalism with a revolution any programme and strategy to establish working class power and a socialist society.

They call for what they term an International of Hope. This would reflect their themes of justice and liberty and the struggle against neo-liberalism but it would not be a socialist organization and would not provide a framework for what is to be accomplished on an international network. Their purpose would be the spreading the ideas of such an international and developing a critique of, and alternatives to, the relentless march of neo-liberalism.

There was recognition of the role of the working class in revolutionary change at the event, but there was a sense of a sectarian attitude to their problems and organisations to their traditional forms of organisation. The opposition to organisation is a contradiction in terms since the EZLN is itself a highly organised force militarily con- fronting the Government in Mexico.

The processes may limit the impact of the movement in support of the Zapatistas at the present time but it does not negate its importance as a political development.

The left is having to come into terms with new conditions after the collapse of the internationalist movements in the 70's and 80's. While it is an important part of that discussion.

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WORLD OUTLOOK

Israeli elections: swings to the right

Roland Rance

TWENTY years ago, Israeli journalist Uri Avnery was critical of Israeli policy makers. He had a secret map of their country, which showed it in an alienized Middle

Atlantic. He argued that they could not comprehend the land with the state of the Near East.

The recent Israeli election indicates that the half of the population is still valid. Indeed, for a fifth of the electorate, the country is not even located in the nineteenth century, but rather three hundred years ago, in the phlegers of east Europe and the outfields of north Africa.

The replacement of Prime Minister Shimon Peres by Benjamin Netanyahu is a setback for this process.

The likely coalition, in which Likud will be outnumbered by the Jewish fundamentalists and reliant on the votes of the ever-farther right Tzomet, the populist Gahal, and Natan Sharansky's Russian immigrant party - all with their sectional demands - will restrict any freedom of action Netanyahu may have had. It looks like being the most right wing government in Israel's history.

The new electoral system, which includes a vote for Prime Minister as well as for parties in the Knesset, forced Peres to appeal to the Palestinian citizens of Israel, who voted in unprecedented numbers, and overwhelmingly for Peres. Among Jewish voters, Netanyahu led Peres by 5 per cent.

In the eyes of many Israeli racists, this would in any case have invalidated a narrow win for Peres. Although non-Jewish citizens have the vote, politicians - including in the Labour party - have always sought a majority among the Jews.

In a desperate bid to hold on to the Jewish vote, Peres simultaneously launched the murderous "Operation Grapes of Wrath" against Lebanon.

This seems to have done little to stop the harassment of Jewish voters, while possibly alienating enough Palestinians to ensure Netanyahu's narrow victory. Not for the first time, the militarised racism of Israeli liberals has brought about their defeat.

The election of Netanyahu is a humiliation for PLO leader Yasser Arafat, who had all but-publicly endorsed Peres.

But would the election of Peres mean any difference? The peace process in Soviet Outlook has consistently maintained, is a device for maintaining the occupation of the West Bank, Gaza and East Jerusalem and for continuing Palestinian dispossession, while recruiting the PLO to police the occupied territories and control the population.

Netanyahu has the same interest, though expressing greater sincerity than Peres over the ability and willingness of the PLO to act as Israel's agent. If he sticks to his opposition to any further concessions in the Pales-

tinians, we can expect to see a renewal of Palestinian resistance to Israeli rule. Led by a new generation of young activists schooled in Israeli prison camps and torture chambers, and without the re-

straining influence of a discredited PLO, this is likely to be more militant than the earlier Intifada.

Although such a rising would not be motivated by Islam, the fundamentalist parties remain the only force capable of mobilising and generating the protest.

Meanwhile, in Israel, the growing influence of the Jewish fundamentalists is likely to be seen in further restrictions on women's rights, separation of education from religious control, bans on the sale of Kosher food, Sabbath observance laws, and other attacks on democratic rights.

The polarised Israeli electorate has thus a double victory to the faces of religious irrationalism in both Israeli and Palestinian communities.

US Labor Party to launch

Jonathan Joseph

JULY NINTH could be a historic day in US history. Along with US Labor Party set to come into being.

The founding convention has been or-

ganised and the new members of the American Federation of Government Employees, working as senior managers of the Cleveland convention.

The organisers are conscious that other groups - such as women's organisations and thedocom- ments need to be mobilised. However, many black workers will be/trans. Many Labor Party spokesmen see their inspiration Eugene Debs, the Socialist Party leader who ran for US President from 1900.

However, the Labor Party will initially be non-representational. Instead, it will concentrate on building up its own base and acting as a pressure group to push the policy agenda of the Cleveland convention.

She declared the strike illegal and ordered the mass arrest of strikers.

The trimmers of the threat gun-

men opened fired at the telecommunici-
r Anonymous. Although he escaped unharmed it had been a close shave. Several members of the NSSP have also received death threats.

The NSSP is calling for a camp-

aign against state terrorism, war and privatisation. A picket will be held on May 5 in Colombo.

Like the fire of letters of protest to:
The President of Sri Lanka HE Chan-
raka Kumaratunga, Colombo 01, Sri Lanka. Fax 0049 1334822. Send a copy to the NSSP fax 0049 1334822.

Police storm NSSP Centre

ARMED police have raided the head-

quarters of the NSSP in Sri Lanka. The Nava Sama Samaja Party's leadership were meeting when about thirty police opened fire on the contraceptives, grenades and sub-ma-

chines guns broke in under the pretext of suspecting illegal activi-

ties.

The NSSP, the section of the Fourth International in Sri Lanka, is the principal organisation supporting the electricity workers' strike which began on May 29. The raids are clearly linked.

The 14,000 strong workforce are demanding that the government give up its plan to privatise the electricity board.

The state has moved against the NSSP earlier this month with a violent police attack on the NSSP-led May Day demonstration. The electricity chairperson Chandrika Kumaratunga vowed at a press briefing that she will resort to any means "short of killing" to get the workers back after the four day blackout.

What's Happening

JUNE

Friday 21 to Sunday 23 Counter- Cup series at the G7 meeting, Lyon, France. Details: Dr Simon Vella, TEL 00 34 5 181 1111 FAX 00 34 5 181 1111

Saturday 1st June: FL and Friends on Man-

date.
This issue's Feedback

T here has been quite a response to last week's in-

terview with Geoff Martin. As a forum for discus-
sion and debate Socialist Outlook is always keen to
receive feedback so we welcome letters from the
left, even if we do not agree with all their positions.

We would, for example, that Geoff's decision to
break from the Campaign for a Fighting Democratic Union
is the right one, nor did we support Rodney Bickerstaffe in the
election for General Secretary.

Although Bickerstaffe is certainly one of the better union
leaders, we believe that part of the role of the left in the
union must be to raise questions about the policies of the
leadership. wf

Rodney Bickerstaffe's candidacy is not the
declerative criteria in deciding on a General Secretary.

Socialist Outlook supports the CFPU. It is the best way of
drawing together activists in the broadest possible left organ-
isation in the union.

What we are fighting for

UP AGAINST mass unemployment, rampant employers with
 savage anti-union laws, and a war on hard-won public services,
the working class in Britain faces a vast new war - the crisis
created by the historic failure of its official leadership.

Socialist Outlook exists to build a new type of working class
leadership, based on the struggle of women and men for social
freedom. The capitalist class, driven by its own crisis, and politically
armed by its need to maximise profits at the expense of the
workers, has, in fact, determined, vanguard leadership by a brutal
Tory high command. The Tory strategy is to divide and to
shackle the working class, and to weaken the resistance of the
workers. Every retreat encouraged the offensive against jobs, wages,
conditions and union rights.

Our socialist alternative is not based on parliamentary
elections or illusions of peaceful legislative change.

We fight to mobilise and unleash the power of the working class
to topple the corrupt and reactionary rule of capital and establish
a socialist society.

We struggle against fragmentation by building solidarity,
against the divisions of the working class, between
men and women, of pensioners, of the black communities, of
lesbians and gays, of Catholics and of those fighting
oppression in Ireland and worldwide.

Socialist Outlook is all about an internationalist current, in
solidarity with the trade union and socialist movements in
organises in over 40 counties. Unlike some other groups on
the left, Socialist Outlook has direct links with local trade
unions in the UK and also with socialist movements in
other countries. Like the trade union movement and
apolitical workers, our goal is not to build a
partisan parliament or a parliamentary party, but to
build a movement for the first time in history which
unites the working class to engage in socialist
struggle.

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 wait for
revolution? The oppressed must organise themselves and
fight now for their demands, 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 politi-
cally educate workers, must be taken into the unions, the Labour
Party and every campaign and struggle in which women and the
oppressed fight for their rights.

To strengthen this fight we press for united left campaigns
on key issues such as racism and fascism - in which workers
must join with us in the struggle for socialism, radicals' groups meet in cities across
the country. Contact us now, get organised, and get active.

Contact us now!

☐ I want to know more about Socialist Outlook.
☐ I would like to sell Socialist Outlook.
☐ Please send me your introductory pamphlet: 'Socialism after Stalinism'. I enclose a PO or cheque for £1.00 payable to 'Socialist Outlook'.
☐ I want to support Socialist Outlook.
☐ Please send me details of the Socialist Outlook Fourth International Supporters Association.

Name: ____________________________
Address: _________________________
Post Code: __________ Tel: __________
[Boxing in a phone number here]
[Boxing in an address here]

Opinions welcome from readers!
THE GOVERNMENT is frustrated that parents are not opting for grant maintained status. So now they are passing more legislation to make opt outs compulsory in certain circumstances.

The Tory election manifesto is likely to contain proposals for all schools to become self-governing, an increase in selection and for compulsory education to end at 14.

Meanwhile the Tories continue to create a smokescreen, blaming teachers and Labour local authorities for failing standards in order to cover for their own inadequate researched.

The project of the Tory right is to return to the dark ages of education in which those who can afford to pay will receive the best on offer.

Clarke claimed to be giving council's an average £774 million for education. But many councils were already over their allocation to avoid cuts in schools budgets.

The next result is small.

A survey by the Times Education Supplement found that more than a quarter of all education authorities are planning to cut spending, and a third standing still.

A third of authorities expect to cut teaching jobs, and almost half expected to axe other education jobs.

There are now 10,000 fewer teachers than in 1993, but 14,000 more pupils. Over a million children are being taught in classes of more than thirty.

Instead of challenging the Tories Labour Party policy on education has collapsed. It is hard to tell the two parties apart.

Shadow spokesperson David Blunkett says that a Labour government will crack down on failing schools and sack teachers who do not come up to scratch.

Two weeks ago he announced that student grants would be abolished and replaced with a system of loans. University vice chancellors are now toying with the idea of a £300 flat-rate registration fee.

Education is yet another area in which Labour seems hell-bent on outdoing the Tories and shedding the safety net of the welfare state.

Through the Welfare State Network and campaigns like FACE, these attacks on education can be stopped.

Hands off Langham School

AN ACT OF political thuggery is about to be carried out against the people of Tottenham in North London. On May 9 the government announced that it is "counselled" to transfer control of Langham Secondary School to an education association on the grounds that it is a failing school.

A final decision is likely in June. If the government goes ahead with the decision it will become the first school in the country, after Hackney Downs, to be taken over by an education association.

The implications locally are immense.

Control of the school and all its assets will pass from the governing body to a bid squad of business- men and academics chosen by the government. At the same time £200,000 will be removed from Hack- eney Council's education budget. Cuts will almost inevitably follow.

The story began in 1994 when the school was declared to be "failing" following an inspection by the Office of Standards in Education - OFSTED. This required the school to draw up and implement an action plan to improve the school.

Since then everything the government might have hoped for has occurred. The existing headteacher is sacked, new management brought in and action taken to "improve" curriculum delivery in a way likely to appeal to inspectors.

The government's decision to take over the school has nothing to do with improving educational standards. Follow-up inspections of the school have revealed improvements and the implementation of the action plan still has a year to run.

Nationally one hundred and forty schools have been designated as failing, yet none have been taken over by an education association.

Nor can the government claim a local popular mandate. Last month, parents from a neighbouring school voted overwhelmingly against going grant-maintained. If the education association take over local people will have no say.

The announcement was an attempt to divert attention from the Westminster scandal. There was no regard for the interests of the pupils.

The press knew of the decision before the school and the council were told. Students leaving the school on May 9 were greeted by the press telling them their school would soon close—a great boost for those going away to revise for their exams.

A local campaign has been launched by the school to stop the bid squad taking over. The local MP Bernie Grant has given his support. A petition has been drawn up and a letter-writing campaign to Gillian Shephard begun. Large public meetings supporting the campaign have been held.

• Demonstrate against the closure of Lang- ham School.
• Saturday June 8, Assemble 11am, Bury Road, Wood Green, N22.

Through the Welfare State Network and campaigns like FACE, these attacks on education can be stopped.