

Socialist OUTLOOK

Blair and Major unite in bi-partisan moral hypocrisy

Criminal conspiracy



Tony Blair

THE HYPOCRISY of the new 'moral crusade' and law and order hysteria whipped up by the Tory government is nothing new: John Major's first ill-fated Back to Basics scam bit the dust a couple of years ago.

But what is really disgusting is the way Tony Blair's Labour Party has turned the issue into

a bi-partisan exercise, in which each attempts to outbid the other's reactionary proposals.

17 years of Thatcherism have created the classic polarised society in which millions in the bottom third of the population have been stripped of dignity and hope, reduced to abject and hopeless poverty

and alienation, and in the process triggered a crime wave.

Now the party of sleaze are now eagerly mounting the reactionary law and order bandwagon, and joining the hypocritical, hyped-up calls for a 'moral crusade'. Of course this is aimed not at the anti-social behaviour of big-time City swindlers and profiteers, but at individual explosions of violence and ill-discipline by deprived sections of working class youth.

The new preoccupation with morals dovetailed neatly into the stock, reactionary rhetoric of the Tory conference. Ministers pushed all the populist buttons, with calls for workfare, crackdowns on social security 'fraud', new powers to sue strikers, and hints that the London Underground and Royal Mail could be privatised.

The subsequent Queen's Speech embraced a more limited but again largely populist agenda, with gun controls and laws against easy targets like paedophiles, while Michael Howard pledges even longer jail sentences and a bottomless budget to build new prisons.

Exploiting the media hype which propelled the Dunblane parents and Francis Lawrence to centre stage, all manner of brutal and reactionary nostrums have been promoted.

Gillian Shephard apparently has wide Tory support for her belief that youth can be beaten into submission with a return to caning. An opinion poll claims majority support for electronic tagging, to impose strict curfews on young people.

Parents will be required to sign contracts to get their children into school - while the NAS/UWT campaigns to have ever larger numbers expelled.

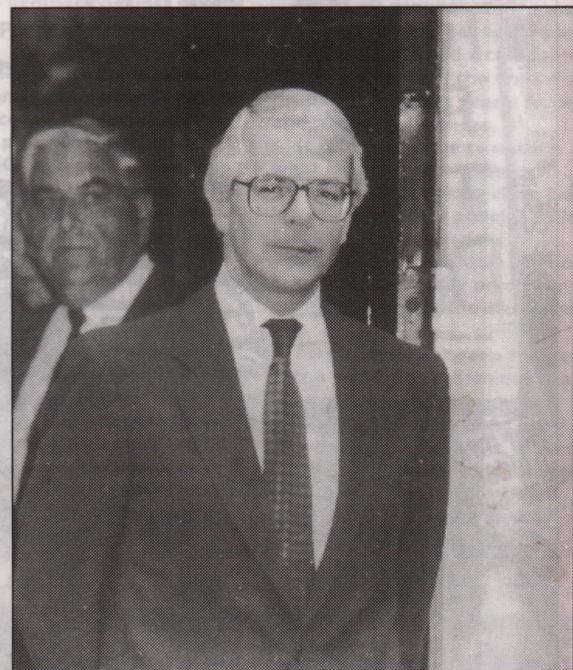
But the backlash reaches beyond law and order. Catholic bishops castigate Tony Blair for not condemning abortion.

All this has visibly shifted social policy to the right. But will it win the Tories the election? By harping on the moral discord after 17 years in power, the Tories are undermining any sensation of a 'feel good factor' among key middle class supporters.

Opinion polls suggest that Tony Blair, by shamelessly matching and trumping Tory repressive proposals blow for blow, has actually increased his lead as a result of the moral crusade.

Blair may well get in, but who will win?

While a growing reactionary consensus looks for ways to restrain and repress the growing frustrations of the most deprived layers of society, whether by beating them with



John Major

canes or police batons, or boring them with two-faced sermons on abstract morality, the widening gulf created by Tory social engineering and economic policy can only be bridged by far-reaching socialist policies - precisely the policies which Tony Blair has most firmly rejected.

Denis Healey - the former chancellor whose policies triggered massive demonstrations against the last Labour government 20 years ago this month - is right: if Labour wins and opts for the cuts needed to implement Maastricht, there could be riots against Blair. And the left needs to ensure it is in a position to lead that revolt.

Postal workers should fight on

Brian Gardner

LAST WEEK postal workers delivered a powerful new mandate to continue strike action. Communication Workers Union members voted 64,919 to 40,581 for renewed industrial action against Royal Mail's plans to restructure pay and introduce flexible working.

The overall "yes" vote – 61 per cent on a 78 per cent turnout disproves the claim of both the employer and the government that the strikes this summer only happened because of manipulation of the membership by a politically motivated executive.

Fearing such an outcome union leader Alan Johnson has already held behind-the-scenes negotiations with Royal Mail. As we go to press it is likely that he will be putting an as-yet unquantified package to the executive. It is believed to involve referring the central issue of flexible team working to non-binding arbitration by ACAS and hiving

off the discussions on pay restructuring into the annual pay negotiations.

Whether such a package can satisfy the membership and the executive remains to be seen. It will not be the first time that arch-Blairite Johnson has attempted such a stitch-up. Previously his executive has sent him packing.

If this is the deal on the table it may only serve to put off the fight to another day. So far Johnson's overall gambit has been to keep postponing the fight until

The vast majority of postal workers are in no mood to compromise.

such time as his members will grow so tired and demoralised that they either vote against any further action or abstain in large numbers.

The latest vote came about after earlier strike action was suspended when Royal Mail threatened legal action over an anomaly in the balloting procedure.

It is doubtful whether Royal Mail would ever have carried out such a threat and even if they had, whether such a challenge would have been successful. Their case rested on the fact that in addition to a return of something like 100,000, 425 spoilt papers were undeclared.

However the real reason that CWU leader Alan Johnson decided to re-ballot was not the threats from the employer but the intervention of the Labour Party leadership.

It is not only that Blair and the rest of the leadership see all flexing of union muscle as threatening their electoral prospects.

Labour's industrial policy seems to be moving towards compulsory ballots on settlements reached under arbitration.

What a good idea then to insist to Johnson that he ballot his members on an offer made under the auspices of the arbitration service, ACAS.

The decision to re-ballot ran the risk of seriously destabilising the dispute. The fact that in these circumstances the



Postal workers take to the streets

"yes" vote has held up should sound alarm bells for the union leadership as a whole.

The vast majority of postal workers are no mood to compromise. Even if this new fudge creates a breathing space in

the longer term action may still happen. Leaving the dispute simmering on the back burner may mean it eventually exploding – not only in the faces of Royal Mail and the Tories but in those of Johnson and Blair as well.



Health workers on the march

Women defend welfare state

Terry Conway

AS WORKERS and as users, women depend on the welfare state to a huge degree. Whether in campaigns against closures of nurseries or fighting for our jobs like the Hillingdon hospital strikers we have been at the forefront of campaigns to defend these services that we need so desperately.

We have also not been slow to see the flaws in existing services, even before today's cuts began to bite so deep. In fields like health care – whether in terms of day care clinics for abortion or the extension of breast cancer screening – and education we have not been prepared to put up with second best, but have fought for a service that is responsive to the needs of all its workers and users.

Not only are women at the sharp end of all attacks on welfare provision but many of the recent attacks by the Tories have been specifically targeted at us. Raising women's retirement age to 65 saved the government £5 million pounds which to hand out in tax cuts to the rich. Single parents have lost £11.5 a week on average since the freezing of benefits for existing claimants in 1995 – and 95 per cent of single parent households are headed by women. Cuts in the health service have led to rationing of abortion and fertility treatment – and are surely connected to scandals such as the errors in tests for cervical cancer. And the ideological backlash which has surrounded issues like selective abortion

and the Mandy Allwood case will restrict our choices even further.

For all these reasons and more, the Welfare State Network, together with the NUS Womens' Campaign is organising a conference: 'Foundations for Freedom: a womens' conference putting the case for defence and rebuilding of the welfare state' at

the University of London Union, on November 30. This conference will provide an opportunity for women involved in existing to share experiences and convince others that the fight to defend and improve welfare provision is a key task for all socialists and feminists.

Welfare State Network

Foundations for freedom

A womens' conference putting the case for defence and rebuilding of the welfare state

Saturday November 30

University of London Union, Malet Street London: Goudge Street tube. Creche and food available. Registration £5/2 to: WSH Womens' conference, 183 Queens Cres., London NW5 4DS. Tel 0171 639 5068

Have the Tories given up?

Senior NHS managers are circulating the rumour to fellow senior managers that the Tories have abandoned any hope of winning the next General Election and are now embarked on a scorched earth policy to make life as hard as possible for a Labour government.

THE CONCLUSION they draw is that there will be no extra cash to bail out the health authorities and NHS Trusts which face an even more desperate plight this winter than last, and which are staring down the barrel of unprecedented spending cuts from next April.

The full impact of some of these cuts would be felt after a May general election, forcing Tony Blair to take early, tough decisions on public spending. The same could also be said of education, which in many areas faces another vicious squeeze, even while the media re-

sounds with agonised debate about the collapse of discipline in school classrooms.

There are other nasty skeletons buried under the Tory patio: the massive levels of borrowing incurred by Tory governments since 1979 to finance their tax-cutting bonanza for the rich and big business, for example, will make themselves increasingly and painfully obvious as a Labour government faces a soaring bill for interest payments. (See page 6)

The growing impact of the Job Seekers Allowance will also begin to take an ever heavier toll from next spring, when those currently receiving JSA are told their 6-month entitlement is ended, and the tightening restrictions on social security benefits force growing numbers deeper into desperation.

And, nastiest of all, and one possible reason why John Major might be less than desolate at the thought of losing the next election, is the immense problem of the Maastricht Treaty and the massive costs of meeting the criteria for a single European currency.

The uneasy truce drawn between the two rival wings of the Tory Party around a formula of postponing any decision would fly apart at once if Major were to win a fifth term: and it is most doubtful whether a Tory government could survive the strains of European Monetary Union.

Some Tories and some sections of big business who favour monetary union feel that their best approach is to allow Tony Blair's party to suffer the backlash from



John Major sups with Neil Hamilton during better times

imposing the combination of tax increases and huge cuts in public spending needed to bridge the £20 billion-plus gap between Britain's current spending deficit and that allowed under Maastricht.

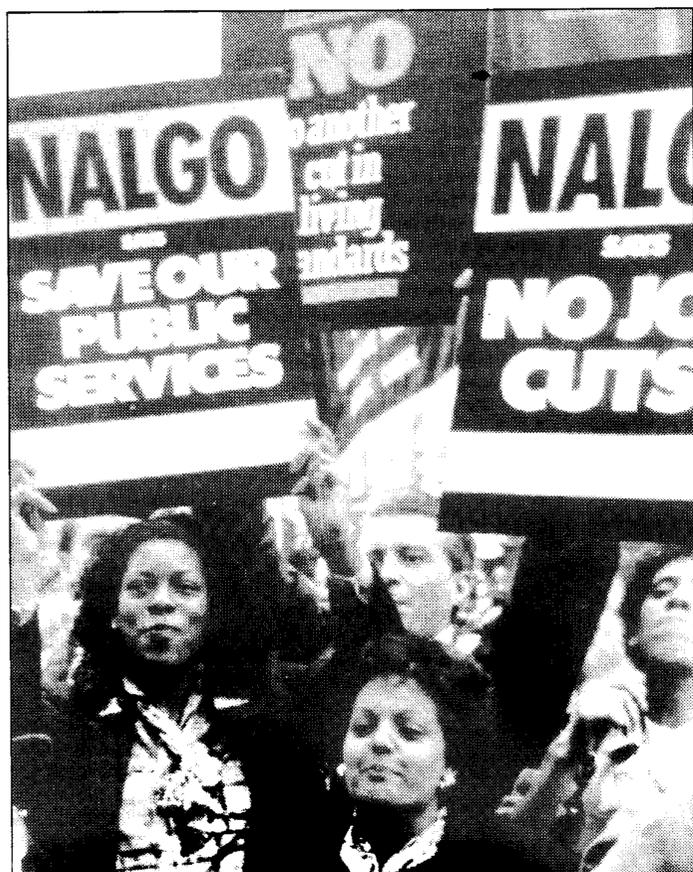
With such hard political and economic questions lurking in the background, it is hardly surprising that the Tory campaign thrust has switched to an increasingly

non-political 'moral' agenda. Back to Basics II, coupled with a predictable if desperate attempt by Kenneth Clarke to line-up a vote-winning, tax-cutting budget.

The problem is that Blair's team is happy to connive not only at the Tories' cynical 'moral crusade', but also at the suppression of vital information on the

economy, the implications of the Maastricht Treaty and the very future of the welfare state.

While such silence may appear to offer short term electoral rewards, these are at the expense of storing up a massive crisis for the first few months of a Labour government. From their point of view the Tory tactics may not be so crazy after all.



Mobilisations against cuts the last time around

Neil Murray

THE FUTURE of the Labour Party will be at the centre of British politics in the next few years. The programme it has adopted and the course set for confrontation with the unions ensure this.

This year's Party conference again saw the leadership winning every vote, despite a few close calls. They were ably assisted by union leaders. Blatant and repeated appeals to delegates for "unity" and "not to expose divisions in front of the media" did the rest.

The Party's programme is now encapsulated in *New Labour, New Life for Britain*. Conference was not allowed to amend this, and was not even permitted a debate before the vote.

The programme now commits Labour to the further dismantling of the welfare state (the latest U-turn is on fund-holding for GPs), retention of the anti-union laws, support for a single European currency "if the conditions are right" and a national minimum wage only after the employers have had their say. Neither the Jobseekers Allowance nor the Immigration and Asylum Bill will be repealed, only parts of them.

Blair on confrontation course with the unions

But the postal ballot referendum on the manifesto did not produce the rush of enthusiasm the leadership hoped for. They resorted to "reminding" members to vote, both in writing and by 'phone.

They can identify who has voted (and therefore how they voted) and have offered a prize to the CLP which gets the highest turnout. They offered to send a replacement to people who said they had lost their ballot paper!

Hardly the way to run a democratic ballot, but indicative of how worried they were that not enough people would vote, thus undermining the whole sorry exercise.

They expressed concern at the unexpectedly high number of members voting "no" – but for Blair one dissident is one too many.

While those opposing the leadership will remain a small minority, their votes show there is a layer of members who reject not only the leadership's programme, but also the argument for not breaking ranks in the run-up to the election.

Despite an increased vote for the Left and retaining two of the constituency section places on the NEC, the Labour Left is weak. Many members either believe Blair will deliver despite everything he says, or accept that they shouldn't "rock the boat" in advance of the election. Only a small layer actually agree with everything Blair is putting forward.

Blair will not reverse the damage done by the Tories and in addition he and those around him

are declaring war on their own party.

Knowing that their policies will be unpopular and meet resistance, they have set out to make it clear to the ruling class that they will stand up against the unions, and further, that they want to sever the union link to prevent any fightback against their policies spilling over into the Party.

Proposals are waiting in the background to scrap the link and conference, to sideline the NEC, to vet all potential MPs, and to abolish GCs as a policy-making forum at constituency level.

Much of this will be posed as giving more influence to ordinary members, as the referenda on Clause IV and the manifesto were. The real result and aim will be to concentrate more and more power in the hands of a few people at the top of the party.

These are the battles to come, but they are certainly not lost in advance. Trade union leaders may need to be dragged into the fight over the link, but they will have to fight, and it will be no pushover for Blair.

While Blair may enjoy a certain honeymoon period in government, his policies will provoke a backlash from the working class.

Even Denis Healey predicts that moves to a single currency will prompt a repeat of the strikes in France last December.

The Left cannot simply await developments, it has to prepare now. It has to build a campaign around defence of the union link, preparing for next year's union and party conferences.

It must continue to outline what Blair's programme will mean for the working class, building up support for policies which address its real needs.

Ultimately the battle will not take place primarily on conference floors but in the class struggle.

Strong links between the Left in the party and the unions ready for a concerted fight against Blair's anti-working class programme in government, are essential, as is support for struggles taking place now as the best preparation for those ahead.

Making Labour deliver

Conference

Saturday November 9 1996
10.30-5 London Welsh Centre
157 Grays Inn Road London

Organised by the Socialist Campaign Group Supporters Network

Break the reactionary consensus

Susan Moore

WE WERE all stunned by Dunblane – sharing the grief of the parents and community – and feeling that it could have happened anywhere.

Anger and fear are understandable responses to many of the desperate situations people find themselves in as life decays almost visibly around them.

Disintegration in the very fabric of society partly results from government policies, but it is also the consequence of a deeper crisis of the system in which we live.

That system, based on the heartless profit motive, not only doles out economic disaster to the poorest as benefits are cut and homelessness rises, as hospitals close and schools fall apart but dishes up personal human misery to people, often regardless of their economic position.

That sense of alienation is experienced differently by different people and produces different responses.

But hard as it may be to accept, many of those who carry out dreadful acts of violence are themselves victims.

Feelings of powerlessness and despair which result from personal loss are not the right places from which to make a response.

The laws for which the parents of Dunblane have campaigned would not have prevented the tragedy. Thomas Hamilton, like others who have committed similarly ghastly massacres, killed himself at the end of the slaughter.

Finding and using an illegal weapon would not have been a barrier.

Both Tory and Labour politicians have been quick to jump on the moral bandwagon with a series of new measures.

Calls for teaching of 'civics' from those involved in layer upon layer of sleaze don't ring true.

The introduction of the national curriculum and other recent education reforms has made it harder for teachers to discuss issues with young people in ways that are relevant to their lives. Howard's proposals for mandatory sentencing and crime checks on Job Seekers must be vigorously opposed.

This will lead to more cases of innocent people being punished for things they did not do – as if there were not enough miscarriages of justice already.

More prisons and harsher sentences have not made people's lives or streets safer – why should we think it will work this time.

On the contrary, there is much more evidence that it is steps such as properly resourced rehabilitation which begin to tackle real social problems.

It is vital that trade unions and labour parties take up the debate on these issues and begin to break through what is being presented as a consensus by all but the judiciary on these vital issues.

The situation that led to the recent massive mobilisations in Belgium recently where in many ways specific to that country and those particular circumstances.

But they do provide an example that it is possible to turn fear and anger into powerful solidarity, that it is not inevitable that from bitter loss will come reactionary social demands.

Child abuse moral panic and the crisis of the family

The debate on morality – including child abuse, paedophilia, unruly school children – is all part of a 'moral panic' about children in our society.

Punishment not prevention is the cure. The people concerned are 'evil', 'infecting' our schools, 'polluting' our communities.

This is used in the pre-election bandwagon where it is increasingly difficult to tell the two main parties apart, and where the Liberal Democrats have a more radical social policy than either the Tories or Labour.

UNDER THATCHER of course, 'There was no society - only families!' The apparent collapse of society now is presented as anything but the result of government policies.

The breakdown in schools is the 'teachers' fault', or a result of 'lack of parental control'. The fact that the Halifax school competes with four grant maintained schools leaving the most deprived children to sink, is left unmentioned. The fact that resources have been cut while pupils with special needs have been integrated into mainstream schools, that a national curriculum has been imposed giving teachers little leeway to teach material with any relevance to children, that league tables make the school's need to succeed paramount over the child's need to learn – all this goes unsaid.

Similarly the perpetrators of child abuse are typecast as solitary, evil, and untreatable misfits. But the fact is, like the Ruth Neeve case in Cambridge, most child abuse, whether sexual, physical, verbal or emotional, is carried out in the family –

where Tory 'family values' are presumably to be found. Even in the West case, while not all those abused were blood relatives of the perpetrators, there was abuse within the actually family and in some ways the other young women were treated almost as 'adopted' children.

The closest most reports get to recognition of this is to describe such families as 'dysfunctional', part of a cycle of abuse, not exactly genetic, but very difficult to break, and nothing to do with 'normal' families.

So the publication of the NSPCC report on child abuse (National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children: Childhood Matters) whose definition includes sexual, physical, verbal and emotional abuse and which claims a million children a year abused in Britain, has not been welcomed. If lack of discipline at home and in school is the explanation for the apparent social breakdown, the Tory remedy is for greater discipline, including the right of parents and teachers to smack and cane their

charges. The Tories who call for the return of the birch and capital punishment can be sidelined as 'nutty extremists', by their own side, but Tory social policy in general, and on education in particular leads inevitably to pressure to reintroduce abusive measures to maintain control. Even the Secretary of State for Education, Gillian Shepherd, a teacher herself, is in favour of the return of corporal punishment.

The contradictions between Tory policies and their rhetoric on education and the family are glaring. Surely Tories ask, some form of physical punishment – a quick slap, a sharp smack – does no harm? The attack on such disciplinary necessities in a report on child abuse – surely this is taking the liberalism of the 1960s too far? The Report is wrong to equate sensible discipline with child abuse, junior health minister Simon Burns is quoted as saying.

The Report claims that much abuse is committed by ordinary people under extraordinary pressures. Not solitary misfits, but ordinary individu-

als. While it is well known that abuse in families is no respecter of class or wealth, nonetheless the stress of living in poverty has clearly exacerbated the problem for many.

But for a government which denies the very concept of poverty, (at the same time as one in three British people see themselves living below the poverty line: Bristol University Statistical Monitoring Unit) the idea that their policies could have produced a society which ill treats its children in such large numbers is unpalatable indeed.

As for the solution, how much easier to exclude more children from school, build more prisons (especially private ones so that the Tories' business friends can profit) and make life sentences mandatory for second-time serious sex and violent offenders. For the proper funding of special needs, the introduction of counselling and treatment for people who can't cope, is a much more long-term, expensive affair: and no way to make money! Switching funding from investigation to prevention, as the Report proposes, will not ensure all these new prisons are profitably full to capacity.

For socialists and for feminists, the Report's findings on the scale of child abuse are not such a shock. Feminists in the 1970s, analysing the role of the family in capitalist society, located it as the place of oppression and of the abuse of power, usually by men against women and children. More recent prominent cases – the West case in particular – have also exposed the fact that women too are capable of the abuse of power against those who are vulnerable.

For a feminism that sees women as a class and men,

whatever their class, as the oppressor, the idea that women can abuse children (as well as other women), has been impossible to understand. But for socialist feminists, whose analysis combines class with sex oppression, and who characterise capitalist society as a society based on power and privilege, whose overriding concern is with profit rather than need, defended if necessary by force, it comes as less surprise that sex and power are intimately linked, that in certain circumstances people are capable of violence, including extreme and sexual violence, against others.

With the Labour Party spokespeople vying with the Tories for greater punishments for offenders, any analysis that places crime in the context of the society in which it is perpetrated; that uses statistics to show the correlation between criminality and unemployment, with all its accompanying attacks on human dignity – homelessness, poverty, lack of self-worth and high levels of suicide – such analysis is unheard. Instead we are left with the judiciary opposing the draconian proposals for mandatory sentences introduced by Michael Howard for the new session of Parliament!

Far from reversing the abuse children suffer, or solving other social ills of Britain today, this bipartisan approach on morality and punishment is entirely reactionary. It will put Britain's prisons on a par with Singapore and Thailand.

And as California has found, simply putting more and more poor people in prison does not make the city streets any safer.

Pupils scapegoated for education crisis

by Roy Leach NUT National Executive Member (Personal Capacity)

DESPITE THE highly publicised statements of NASUWT General Secretary Nigel de Gruchy, disruptive pupils are not the single biggest problem confronting teachers. Pupils are not the cause of the many problems experienced by teachers.

Unless a correct analysis of who is to blame is made, the conclusions which are arrived at are inevitably going to be wrong. By targeting individually identified pupils, the NASUWT lets the real culprits – the Tories – off the hook.

Take the case of the Ridings school in Halifax. There are undeniably a large number of pupils with challenging, and, in many cases, unacceptable behaviour. No teacher should have to put up with either verbal or physical abuse and trade unions have a responsibility to protect their members from such treatment. But why are there so many pupils with emotional and behavioural difficulties (EBD) in the Ridings? Could it be the presence nearby of two selective grant-maintained and two church schools, all of which shun the less academically successful working class pupils who go to the Ridings? Margaret Tulloch of the Campaign for State Education has called upon Gillian Shephard to "be willing to admit that the problems could be due to her policy in encouraging selection".



The introduction of opting out and exam league tables has led to a massive increase in the number of pupil exclusions. Major's obsession with "a grammar school in every town" and a return to full-blown selection will, if not defeated, lead inexorably to under-resourced sink schools.

Local management of schools also contributes to the problem, as the re-

quirement upon LEAs to delegate ever more of the education budget to individual schools leaves them unable to target resources to where they are needed. Take Manton school in Nottinghamshire.

Here a solution – one to one tuition for the boy at the centre of the dispute – has collapsed as the school's budget is unable to support the £7000 per term

it would cost (and parents of other pupils have, not unreasonably, argued that the money should be for the education of all pupils in the school). The LEA is not allowed by LMS regulations to give the school the £14,000 or so it would need this year.

More generally, LEAs simply don't have the resources to allow for the educational needs of individual children to be met. Furthermore, the cuts in school budgets and the inexorable rise in class sizes are making the situation more difficult. As EBD children, frustrated by their own problems, receive less and less of the individual attention they need, is it surprising that their behaviour becomes less and less acceptable?

And the government's solution? Certainly not resources but a cheap and reactionary moral crusade against "bad" parents. In this they are aided and abetted by the leadership of the NASUWT who are only too happy to see the scapegoating of teachers (remember OFSTED supremo Chris Woodhead's attack upon 15,000 "failing teachers") replaced by the scapegoating of "failing parents". If parents had blamed teachers for the underfunding of education, a campaign such as FACE would never have been possible. It is vital that parents and teachers unite to campaign for the only viable long-term solutions – adequate funding and the dismantling of the education "marketplace".

Social protests rocks Belgium

Elkie Dee and Veronica Fagan

MORE THAN 300,000 people marched through Brussels in a the country's largest ever demonstration held in memory of the children who died after being abducted by Marc Dutroux.

Demonstrators made it very clear who they held responsible for the children's deaths: the Belgian legal system and the government, as increasing evidence of corruption, inefficiency and official cover-ups came to light. Dutroux seems to have been part of a wider paedophile network with a profitable business operating under police protection. Links with the mafia-style murder in July 1991 of Andre Cools a former Deputy Prime Minister of Belgium and Socialist Party leader in Liege were also becoming more apparent.

During the week leading up to the national demonstration in Brussels, thousands of workers and young people took part in strikes, school protests and demonstrations

around the issues raised by this case.

The protests were sparked by the supreme court's removal of Jean-Marc Connerotte, the investigating magistrate leading the official inquiry into what had occurred, for publicly appearing to take sides on the issue by eating a spaghetti meal at a fundraising dinner organised by campaigners against child abuse. The irony that the state, fearful of having the corruption at its heart exposed, should dismiss Connerotte who had achieved almost folk-hero status by this time was understood by huge swathes of Belgian society.

As *La Gauche*, the paper of the Parti Ouvrier Socialiste, Belgian section of the Fourth International explained:

"The ideology of the dominant class is always the dominant ideology. But it is not always the only ideology of society. The demonstration and the week of strikes by workers and school students which preceded it are living proof that an alternative to liberalism is possible, that the feeling of



Belgians march in remembrance and for justice

powerlessness can be conquered.

This march was necessary to give people the opportunity to assemble together, to speak and to give them a consciousness of their numbers and their strength. Without this, anger and sorrow will just stay bitter, with no positive expression. Fears that the far right might cash in were not borne out. They didn't appear.

This apparently non-political march was a magnificent demonstration of politics, an assertion of the need for social change. The majority of people, who suffer socially and are politically dispossessed, want something different for their children.

In the response of the government, one can see three different tendencies. Firstly, the removal of Connerotte was because he could not be relied on to maintain the official silence. Secondly, the prime minister met the parents of the dead children and made some promises on continuing the inquiry. Thirdly, the government is now aiming to normalise the situation, and re-establish the dominant ideology: the myth of consensus, of a family-oriented society reunited beyond its contradictions of class and gender.

People must now do all they can to prevent normalisation. For this there is only one means: to continue to mobi-

lise, petition, demonstrate, go on strike".

While the march on October 20 was billed as a peaceful, non-political demonstration, the authorities were taking no chances and obviously saw the week of protests as a challenge. On October 20 the Ministry of Justice was sealed off from demonstrators. The authorities recognised that this was a powerful political issue. The king himself intervened – a clear sign that those at the stop were worried.

Before the Brussels demonstration, protests had taken place in other towns, and there had been a number of confrontations between protesters and the police. In Malines, 186 young people were arrested, 40 of them under 16. In Gand, 20,000 young people demonstrated. They demanded that information about the case and the accused was made public, but made it clear that they were opposed to reactionary demands for the death penalty, the strengthening of the gendarmerie and restrictions on sexual freedom.

While some calm has returned to the streets of Belgium, there is clear dissatisfaction with the only concession so far made by the government – that political appointments of the judiciary will be stopped. As one journalist sympathetic to the protesters commented on a popular talk show on Belgian television devoted to the crisis two days before the Brussels demonstration "This means that the justice system will be reformed in 20 years time."

While no actions can take away the grief of those whose children were murdered or the horror of those young women who were found after long incarceration, *La Gauche* was certainly right that the protests gave an opportunity to turn anger and bitterness into something much more positive. The strength of solidarity will surely stay with those who were there for a long time to come – and the fear of it with those who have attempted to brush aside their rightful calls for justice.

Ireland: the promise of socialism

Joe Craig, John McAnulty and Paul Flanagan Belfast, August 1996

Reviewed by David Coen

This book is a timely intervention into the debate about the future of socialism in Ireland. It takes issue both with those who believe that the national question is an outdated distraction from real class politics and with those who put their hopes for socialism in a blind tail-ending of the Republican movement.

Wide ranging in scope, it analyses the struggle in Ireland within the framework of the collapse of Stalinism in Eastern Europe, European integration, the relationship between for socialism and womens' liberation and the question of the environment.

It starts from the failure of both partitioned states; the South, paralysed by a massive international debt and saved only in the short term by European aid, and the North, dependent on political, military and economic aid from Britain.

It denounces Maastricht but argues that the alternative is not a revitalised nation state. It correctly points out "the nation state is no longer a convincing framework for regulating economic life but it retains its key role in legitimating capitalist rule on a world scale." Opposition to European union in no way implies support for national capitalist or even socialist development. Counterposed to the capitalist project for European unity is a United Socialist States of Europe.

Neo-colonialism

Some, including the Dublin ruling class and John Hume of the Social Democratic and Labour Party believe the solution to the problem of what Hume calls the divided people of Ireland is regional self government within a federal Europe. Unfortunately for them a large section of the Conservative and Unionist Party of Great Britain and Northern Ireland does not share this Euro ideal.

After 1960 the south exchanged dependence on Britain for dependence on the EU. The attempt at native economic development between 1932 and 1958

had run into the sand by the late fifties. The Fianna Fail government made an abrupt about turn – opening the economy to foreign capital and dashing for EU membership.

The influx of foreign capital led to a rapid growth in the number of jobs controlled by multinational capital and the decimation of domestic industry. The accumulation of capital in Ireland is now largely determined by the capital flows of the imperialist countries. But despite those sectors which have sprouted since the 1960's, there remains a high dependence on the British market. This was clear in the devaluation of the Irish punt after sterling crashed out of the ERM in 1992.

About 12% of GDP is repatriated by multinationals. The lack of investment accompanying such massive capital outflows means that manufacturing productivity in both parts of Ireland is about 75% of that in Britain and Britain is by no means a world leader in this area.

The National Question and the armed struggle

Consisting of a Southern neo-colony and a Northern colony, Ireland's national question remains unresolved. British rule has never been accepted by the majority of its people and Britain can only maintain this rule through repression and sectarianism.

For socialists there is only one response to this oppression – immediate withdrawal and disbandment of the repressive forces which it has brought into being.

Workers in Britain have a responsibility to demand British withdrawal, because a nation which oppresses another can never itself be free – a phrase borne out repeatedly in the history of relations between Britain and Ireland.

But the democratic demands for self determination and British withdrawal should never be counterposed to the struggle for socialism itself. While the struggle for self determination may create the conditions for the struggle for socialism, the two things are in no way synonymous.

The book defends republicans who fight against imperialism and their right to use armed force. It does not demand they adopt a socialist programme as a

precondition for this stance. None of this however implies support for them or their methods.

Military struggles by their nature are elitist and many republicans elevate the armed struggle itself into a principle. The republican movement has combined militarism with reformist politics. More recently it has linked up with the Northern and Southern bourgeoisies in the so called 'pan-nationalist alliance'.

Central to the book's thesis is that the form of expression for the self-determination of the whole of the Irish people is itself a matter of struggle.

For socialists, it is clear that real democracy and equality will only be possible in a workers republic. This is what socialists fight for as the concrete expression of self determination.

Republican politics offers no solution to the problems of the working class north or south. Breaking out of this impasse requires mass action and a programme which addresses the needs of workers especially in the South.

Workers Unity

The Protestants are not a separate nation. Because they cannot clearly identify themselves as British, Irish, Northern Irish or as an Ulster nationality they define themselves by religion.

Calls for Protestant self-determination attempt to give their reactionary and pro-imperialist role a democratic cover. The Northern state was and is based on a sectarian headcount.

Sectarianism cannot be reduced to the ideas in peoples heads – this feeds easily into the view promoted by the British that the war is an irrational feud which needs the presence of themselves to keep the fanatics apart. Socialists need to challenge the sectarian ideas held by many Protestant workers, not capitulate to them.

The struggle for national self determination is not a diversion from the so-called bread and butter issues. On the contrary, the fight to dismantle the sectarian state grew out of such issues as discrimination in jobs and housing.

But attempting to unify the working class around these issues while ignoring the political divisions will not succeed. Sooner or later they will fall apart under

the pressure of the Unionist ruling class which bases itself on sectarianism.

The trade union leadership in the North responds to sectarian murders with calls on the British State – in the guise of the Army or the RUC – for protection, in spite of the collaboration between both of those and loyalist murder gangs.

All attacks on workers because of their religion must be condemned and all organisations which claim to defend workers must campaign against sectarian attacks. Such a campaign would necessarily be anti-Loyalist since loyalism is based on Protestant sectarianism.

Republicans who target mainly Protestant towns and accept Protestant civilian casualties but not Catholics ones and who refuse to confront the bigotry of the Catholic Church are rightly denounced by socialists.

While rejection of Protestant self-determination is correct it should not mean rejection of the need for minority rights in a united state.

The struggle in the South

The Southern working class is the key to the destruction of the sectarian northern statelet. But even though a vast majority favour Irish unity they will not be mobilised simply around a demand for self determination.

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US election walkover

Clinton is the chosen candidate of US big business to run the country on their terms. Terry Conway looks at the non-Republican Republican



Powell has left Clinton a free run at re-election

THE 1996 U.S. presidential election campaign has been the quietest ever – despite attempts in the closing minutes to awaken interest with news of supposedly falling support for Clinton.

Prior to that all attention had switched away from the presi-

dential contest to the more close to call battle for Congress.

While a Democratic victory in either the House or the Senate is anything but assured despite the dramatic fall from popularity of Newt Gingrich and the death of his Contract with America, this is not necessarily bad news for Clinton. The president had a tougher time in the first two years

of his presidency when his own party controlled Congress than in the latter two years when the Republicans held sway.

Of course, the man who is almost certainly to be re-elected president did not carry out his campaign pledges. His inauguration four years ago coming after twelve years of Republican rule was greeted with high hopes by

those who believed his promises to rebuild the country's infrastructure and defend health care.

Instead he secured passage of the North American Free Trade Agreement despite majority sentiment opposing it, and slashed government spending – except for the military budget.

The trumpeted increase in the \$4.25 an hour minimum wage, which had been in effect for five years, was to the princely sum of \$4.60. Next year it will go to \$5.15.

This is hardly a living wage even for a single person. None of the anti-union legislation from the Reagan-Bush era including a bill which meant strikers could be "replaced" was repealed by Clinton.

Indeed except over abortion, the Republican challenger, Bob Dole, has trouble distinguishing his positions from Clinton.

One of the Republicans' biggest criticisms of Clinton is that he has stolen their campaign themes. Be it crime, welfare benefits or reducing the deficit, Clinton has embraced the Republican's platform.

The areas of agreement between Clinton and Dole include:

- The assault on the living standards of women and children by limiting their rights to benefits to no more than two years, with a lifetime maximum of five.

- Cuts in Medicare and Medicaid and introduction of the market into health care

- Attacks on Mexican immigrants without papers including the construction of a wire fence at the border

- Legal immigrants excluded from social service benefits.

- Expansion of the death penalty should be expanded and of jail terms

- Civil liberties sacrificed to fight "terrorism."

- Gays and lesbians denied a series of rights including that of legally recognised marriage, spousal Social Security and pension benefits etc.

- Reduction in controls which protect either the health of consumers or the environment in the interests of profit.

In foreign policy Clinton and Dole also are on the same wave length. They support bills such as the Helms-Burton bill, which attempt to penalise any government that does business with Cuba.

Despite the historic launch of the American Labour Party at a convention of 1500 mainly union delegates in Cleveland this summer, the new party is not standing candidates in these elections and indeed has agreed not to do so for the next two years.

While there are positive arguments for such a decision such as

the need to concentrate on building a real base for the new party before getting embroiled in the machinations of electoral politics, it would be naive to suggest that it was the positive arguments that influenced the outcome. The convention did agree that the new Party would campaign on political issues such as the living wage, reform of anti-union laws and in defence of health care.

But the dominant view of the purpose of the new party was expressed by Maryanne Young, elected to the Constitution Committee at the Congress who told a local paper immediately after the meeting that she saw the the labour party initially playing a role like that of the Christian Coalition. 'if we are a unified voice' she said, 'maybe one of those other parties would listen to us'.

Despite such confusion, and the fact that the AFL-CIO is pouring vast sums of money into Clinton's election campaign, the launch of the new party remains one of the most hopeful signs in American politics for some time.

Whether its potential will be realised or whether eventually, like earlier attempts at an independent voice for the American working class it will eventually be absorbed into the democratic machine remains undecided.

It is the outcome of this battle rather than the presidential election which will decisively shape American politics for many years to come.

Whose economic miracle?

TORY POSTERS have started to boast about the state of the British economy, something which would have seemed impossible a year ago. The Guardian editorial of October 10 backs up Tory claims in stating that "Mr Clarke has hardly put a foot wrong in macroeconomic management" since 1992. The truth is a bit different.

Andy Kilmister

COMMENTATORS have begun to argue that if Labour wins the next election it will be despite the government's economic success, rather than because of their failure. What is behind all this? Are these simply pre-election slogans, or do they point to something more substantial?

Since 1979 the Tories have tried to do two things with the economy; to

raise profits by attacking the working class through high unemployment and an offensive against trade unions, and to enable those profits to be realised by ensuring growth and a stable economic environment. Their central problem has been that, because of the nature of British capitalism, it has been very difficult to achieve these two objectives together.

The Lawson boom of the 1980s brought some growth, but inflation rose

and wage claims followed suit. The experiment with the ERM reduced inflation, but only at the cost of recession.

Clarke is being feted by the media and by the employers because it appears that he has broken this vicious circle. By devaluing the pound and cutting interest rates the Tories have raised growth rates, yet inflation remains low. However, under the surface the old problems remain.

A central issue is the continued weakness of investment. In 1995 investment was still 11 per cent below the peak level of 1989. Manufacturing investment fell back even further in the first half of this year.

In the early stages of "recovery" weakness in investment was made up for by high export levels. The global linkages of British capital, especially in the USA and Far East, and devaluation, provided advantages in competition with the rest of Europe. But these advantages were temporary. British exports are now just rising in step with world trade growth. In 1995 Britain depended on a record surplus on investment income abroad of £9.6 billion, to avoid an even larger balance of payments deficit. That is good news for increasingly mobile multinational firms,

but does nothing for employment or growth at home.

With exports slowing and investment weak it is increasingly becoming accepted that any growth will come from consumer spending.

The Financial Times talks of a "two-speed" economy with consumer goods production speeding ahead of manufacturing. But the employers' offensive creates inbuilt limits to this process. With real wages hardly rising any big increase in consumer spending will have to come either from increased debt or from tax cuts.

Debt levels are beginning to rise. But while headline interest rates are low, real interest rates (which take into account inflation) are still at historically high levels. In addition a growing number of elderly people are living off past savings. Their spending is cut if interest rates fall.

On the other hand the Tories are desperate to cut taxes and fuel a pre-election boom.

The problem here is that, despite cuts in public expenditure, the government budget deficit continues to rise stubbornly because of the massive rise in tax evasion by companies. This was shown dramatically earlier this summer

when it turned out that VAT receipts were £6 billion lower than expected.

In the short run then the Tories are in a difficult situation. The National Institute of Economic and Social Research predicts higher growth in the future but comments ruefully that "despite this generalised optimism, there is as yet little evidence that growth is picking up substantially".

In fact the long run outlook is even worse. Poor investment is now affecting productivity growth and manufacturing productivity failed to grow in 1995.

It is true, as Tory ministers never fail to remind us, that growth is lower and unemployment higher elsewhere in Europe at present. But that is not a reflection of British economic success but of the crisis of capitalism in the European Union and the effects of the Maastricht Treaty process.

Perhaps the Tories will engineer a mini-boom just before the election. But the chances of any growth strong enough to affect the result remain much less. And any such boom will simply postpone the re-emergence of the underlying problems of British capitalism, which the Tories are no nearer to solving now than at any point since 1979.

Labour set to inherit cleaned out Treasury

"But when he got there The cupboard was bare, And so the poor workers got none".

17 YEARS of Tory government tax cuts and profligacy have cleaned out the national kitty, according to official figures released in September.

Interest payments on staggering levels of government borrowing are now the fourth biggest category of public spending — above defence, and below only social security, health and education.

The indebtedness of the British state has tripled since 1979: indeed the national debt has doubled to £385 billion since John Major took over, while billions have been handed to the very richest in Tory tax cuts.

The Tories have squandered £77 billion in North Sea Oil revenue and a massive £64 billion from privatisation, as well as borrowing an extra £223 billion since 1979.

So serious is the imbalance — with the economy on track for a budget deficit equivalent to 5% of national income by the year 2000 — that most objective analysts predict that whichever government wins the next election they will have to put taxes up sharply — or savage the remnants of the welfare state to cut spending.

Simply to cut the deficit to 2.5% would require the equivalent of a 7p increase in income tax.

Tony Blair's team are not like Old Mother Hubbard. They know already that the Tories have left the cupboard quite bare.

Yet instead of examining ways in which the rich, the banks and big busi-

ness can be made to pay the cost of the crisis created by the Tories they have joined in the conspiracy of silence and the crazy Dutch auction in which Tories and Labour bid for the middle class vote, claiming to be the party of lowest taxation.

Alan Simpson MP has pointed out that a tax of just one eighth of one percent on the speculative dealings conducted through the City of London would yield over £50 billion a year. A turnover tax on multinationals trading in Britain would bring billions more, without touching the pay packets of working class people. But even such radical reforms are too daring for New Labour.

It's time to demand some honesty from Labour's front bench moralisers and religious fanatics.

John Lister

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Bob Pennington: revolutionary militant

Jane Kelly

SADLY, BOB Pennington died of a stroke in a Brighton hospital in mid-September: he was 69. Although for the last nine years he had not been active, he was involved in revolutionary politics from joining the Young Communist League until the age of 60 when he was still on the editorial board of Socialist Outlook.

Bob left the Communist Party over the reformism of The British Road to Socialism, and was recruited in 1952 by Mary Archer to Socialist Outlook, (which became the Socialist Labour League in 1959, forerunner of the Workers Revolutionary Party). By 1953 he was a full time organiser.

The period he was most proud of was when, from 1954-1957, he was a full time organiser for the "Blue Union", the National Amalgamated Stevedores and Dockers Union, in Merseyside, despite never having worked on the docks. It was a period of explosive militancy, with dock strikes against appalling conditions, over safety and for pay rises even before the war ended. There were seven national unofficial strikes between 1945-1954 and troops were used against the strikers in 1945 and 1949. The TGWU, which organised the majority of the workforce, was increasingly seen by many rank and file dockers as traitorous, selling out strikes, holding down pay and generally doing the bosses' bidding.

Despite the achievement of the National Dock Labour Scheme of 1947 the TGWU refused to take advantage of the dockers favourable position:



"The TGWU... preferred to collaborate with the government and the employers than to allow scope for a politically militant leadership, and so the advances that could have been made did not take place."

Bob Pennington: 'Decades of betrayal that led to the dockers' last stand', Socialist Outlook No.15, May 1989.

A series of betrayals and the undemocratic nature of the TGWU eventually led Hull and a little later Birkenhead, Liverpool and Manchester dockers to leave and join the NASD, the "Blue Union".

Socialist Outlook was influential amongst the rank and file leadership of the Birkenhead dockers, having recruited a number of them during a six week unofficial strike in 1950. Bob's organisational skills and political acumen was seen by the "Blue" dockers as important in their fight for the recognition of their union.

By May 1955, when the recognition strike started, two-thirds of the labour force in the Liverpool docks were in the "Blue", along with the majority in Manchester and Hull. Within a week 12,000 men were out.

The six week stoppage, without strike pay and with the full force of both the bosses and the TGWU ranged against them, was characterised by rank and file democracy. There were mass meetings of 3-4,000 people, one of 7,000, and mass mobilisations:

"We organised a march through Liverpool... from the Pier Head to Bootle down to the Gladstone Dock and we took our collecting tins and we went into every pub and cafe on the way collecting for the strike."

(Interview with Bob Pennington by Dave Baines in 1982)

Although the strike failed, sold out by the National Executive of the NASD, there were still 8,000 out in Liverpool at

the end. The Northern members of the "Blue" were then excluded from the NASD, and its ex-General Secretary, Newman, turned on its leaders, including Bob. Writing in The Empire News on July 3, 1955, he accused him of being solely responsible for the strike and denouncing him as a "Trotskyist troublemaker", even though the same Newman had nominated Bob as full timer for the union only seven months earlier. Although forced to readmit the "North-erners" by the courts the "Blue" union declined from 16,000 in May 1955 to around 3,000 by 1960.

During this process virtually the whole of Birkenhead Port Workers' Committee was recruited to Socialist Outlook - which provided leadership for the unofficial movement on Merseyside, though the CP remained the political leadership in London.

Bob worked for the SLL again from 1957 until he left in 1960. He briefly flirted with a libertarian grouping, Solidarity, then in the late 1960s joined the International Marxist Group, then growing fast in the leadership of the Vietnam Solidarity Movement.

He became a national organiser, travelling around the country, speaking at meetings, helping recruit new members, until an accident made him less mobile. From then on he worked as a journalist and educator in the group.

It is in this latter role that he is perhaps best remembered. The education provided for him by Mary and John Archer was never forgotten and he recognised the importance of theory and education for a revolutionary, just as they had.

Always accessible in his language, engaging in his style, he taught newer

members about Stalinism, the history of the unions and the Labour Party, the achievements and betrayals, the history of the Fourth International and the rest of the left, in a way which is still memorable.

I remember at my first IMG meeting in South London he explained why CND, despite its pacifism, was such an important movement. He said: "Any movement which threatens to deprive the ruling class of its weapons, is radical" - undermining in one sentence any tendency to sectarianism or ultra leftism.

He was especially tolerant of newer members, though his line on youth was - they should grow up! Though he didn't suffer fools gladly and could be cutting if you got on the wrong side of him, his experience and "nose" for politics made him a far-sighted and astute political leader.

He was one of the first to fight for a reorientation to the Labour Party in the Bennite period, the first to insist on the implications of the defeat of the Miners' Strike of 1984-85.

In Socialist Outlook, formed by a merger between International and Socialist Viewpoint after a split in the FI group Socialist Action (formerly IMG), he was one of the first to recognise the importance of the Poll Tax.

Although in the last years he was alone and no longer politically active, the many years working for revolutionary organisations having taken their toll, his role as political activist and educator in the revolutionary movement, as humane and humorous companion, will not be forgotten.

Hungary 1956

Turning point for Stalinism

By John Lister

FORTY years ago this month, on November 4, 1956, Nikita Khrushchev ordered Soviet tanks to open fire on the Hungarian working class districts of Budapest.

The bombardment left 20,000 dead and eventually crushed the revolutionary upsurge which had gripped the city: but it also delivered a decisive blow to the prestige and authority of the Kremlin leadership in the eyes of countless thousand members of Communist Parties around the world, who were appalled at the brutality of the repression of a workers' struggle. The British Communist Party alone lost over 10,000 members as a result of its shameless defence of the attack.

Confidence in the 'progressive' role of Moscow's Stalinist leadership had already been severely shaken earlier in 1956 by Khrushchev's astonishing Secret Speech to the Soviet CP's 20th Congress, in which he had revealed a monumental list of crimes committed by the previously idolised Joseph Stalin.

Among the revelations which rocked the packed assembly of Stalinist bureaucrats (accustomed as they were to uncritical acceptance of Stalin's leadership and policies) was Khrushchev's admission that the traumatic split between the Kremlin and Yugoslavia's Stalinist leader Tito in 1948 could have been avoided.

This caused especial embarrassment for Hungarian leader Rakosi, who had executed former Interior Minister Laszlo Rajk in 1949 and jailed other leading Hungarian CPers for alleged collaboration with the "fascist" Tito. The following month Rakosi was forced to admit that the show trial had been a gigantic frame-up.

As Rakosi faced a growing storm of dissent reaching beyond students and intellectuals into layers of the police and army, and was eventually replaced by the equally objectionable Kremlin stooge Erno Gero, a wave of strikes and demonstrations broke out in Poland, with workers demanding far-reaching reforms.

On October 23, 100,000 Hungarian workers and students demonstrated in Budapest in solidarity with the Polish

struggles, but also with their own political agenda. Some carried placard pictures of Lenin, others pictures of former Prime Minister Imre Nagy, who had been ousted from office in 1954, and become a focus for oppositional groups demanding democratic reforms and independence from Moscow: but all factions united to haul down a gigantic statue of Stalin.

Gero broadcast a heavy-handed attack on the demonstrators: crowds immediately converged on the radio station - where they were fired upon by the hated AVH secret police. As fighting spread, Soviet troops garrisoned in Hungary moved in.

October 24 saw the start of a general strike, and fighting spread beyond Budapest. Moscow reluctantly agreed that Nagy should take over as Prime Minister as the man most likely to restore control.

Nagy moved only timidly at first, offering little to the angry workers but inviting two leaders of the suppressed right wing Smallholders Party to join the government.

The workers, however, linking up with students and with rank and file soldiers, were strengthening their resistance. Rapidly they organised workers' councils which challenged the control of the hopelessly bureaucratised Communist Party.

On October 31, with Soviet troops withdrawn from Budapest, a Parliament of Workers' Councils drew up a far-reaching statement of demands for workers' control over production, while on the streets joint patrols of workers, soldiers and students had taken to beating up members of the AVH secret police, who kept files on more than ten percent of the 10 million Hungarians.

Under this popular pressure, Nagy called for the complete removal of Russian troops from Hungarian soil, and then went on to propose leaving the Warsaw Pact and declaring Hungary neutral.

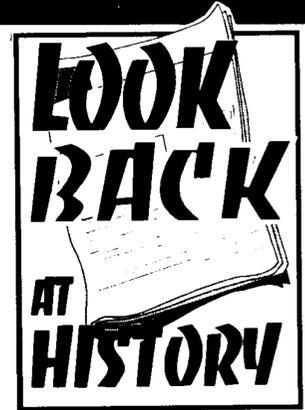
The Kremlin would not tolerate this level of independence. Instead it set up a new stooge government headed by veteran Stalinist Janos Kadar, and sent in heavy reinforcements to the Red Army detachments which began their attack by a massive artillery bombardment designed to keep troops out of contact with Hungarian workers.

200,000 Soviet troops were deployed: but neither they nor the shells that rained down could crush the spirit of the workers: the workers' councils and sporadic strikes continued through to January.

When Kadar's regime, backed by Russian troops, arrested delegates at the Budapest Central Workers' Council on December 11 it triggered a fresh general strike the next day.

The military force of Stalinism eventually won the day, but at the expense of exposing its inability to accept any degree of internal democracy, and the humiliating subordination of the 'national' bureaucracies of Eastern Europe to their Soviet masters.

1956 had seen the first substantial fractures in the Stalinist monolith; and



these were to develop into a succession of new crises: but it had also seen a glimpse of the working class response, in all its strengths and weaknesses.

Workers had grasped the need to organise independently of the bureaucracy: but they had not developed a coherent revolutionary programme, and the vacillating leadership of Nagy, himself a bureaucrat schooled in Stalinism, was inadequate to the task of ousting the parasitic bureaucracy.

But forty years on, as Hungarian workers face the grim reality of the capitalist market and privatisation, it is the revolutionary heritage of 1956 which offers the best starting point for a response.

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Socialist OUTLOOK

Euromarch campaign on the road

Pete Cooper

A 50 STRONG meeting on October 26 in Manchester came together to formally launch the British campaign as part of the European marches against Unemployment, Job insecurity and Social exclusion planned for next spring.

The call for the European action was initiated by the French organisation AC! (act together against unemployment) who organised successful marches on the issues in France in 1994. Meetings in Florence and Paris attended by representatives from unemployed and trade union organisations from most European countries have endorsed the call for marches across the European Union converging at the Amsterdam Inter Governmental Conference with a 30,000 strong demonstration on June 14 1997. Marches are currently planned in Italy, Spain, France, Germany, Belgium, Denmark and Holland.

The marches are in opposition to the implementation of the Maastricht convergence criteria for the creation of the European single currency. The requirement that budget deficits are reduced to 3% and overall debts to 60% of Gross Domestic Product is leading to slashing of welfare budgets, given that governments are unwilling to raise taxes. This is further exacerbating already chronic unemployment - implementation could create an additional 10m unemployed on top the 20m already out of work. Cuts in Britain required are £19bn or equivalent to the whole of the NHS hospitals' budget.

The Manchester meeting was chaired by Mike Hindley MEP for Lancashire South. He explained the devastating effect attempts to meet the convergence criteria are having across Europe and pointed to the protests occurring including massive strikes and demonstrations.

Two proposals for action were before the meeting. Glen



German car workers demonstrate against cuts in welfare. Their banner reads "cutting sick pay stirs up poverty".

Voris of St Helens TUC Resource Centre proposed that we should attempt to build 3 marches; the first starting from Scotland on May 10 1997, a second from the North West

and a third march from South Wales. Between them they would go through most major cities on this island. There would be local meeting, rallies and feeder marches along the way and a major demonstration in London on June 7. The marchers would then cross to Belgium and march with the other contingents to Amsterdam. The British march should have its own slogans; for full employment; defend the welfare state; scrap the ISA.

He argued that while the plan was ambitious, it was

achievable. A draft budget of about £50,000 would be required. Numbers of marchers and routes covered could be scaled down if not all the money was raised.

He pointed to the success of the recent Welfare State Network (WSN) Hull - Blackpool march as evidence of what could be achieved. Over half the WSN marchers had already pledged to march to Amsterdam.

Organisations such as Reclaim the Future who mobilised in support of the dockers demonstration and Groundswell campaigning against the Job Seekers Allowance could be involved in building for this exciting project.

The National Unemployed Centres' Combine represented by Kevin Hynn and Martin Cantor proposed on the other hand a Rolling Roadshow with Regional TUCs organising marches rallies and concerts at each stop, to take place over a 10 day period before going on to the Amsterdam demonstration.

They argued that full blown marches were not only over-ambitious but were not actually desirable. Their position, they stated, was in line with the view of the TUC and STUC; while the other proposals could end up being 'anti-trade union and anti Labour.'

They received little support for their view. Delegate after delegate spoke in favour of the

political logic and practical viability of 'full blown marches'.

Scepticism was expressed that regional TUC's would do nothing, that even the modest proposals of the Combine would not be carried through. Given the fact that the TUC itself is in favour of monetary union the likelihood of any action from these quarters is minimal.

After a long debate the St Helens proposals were adopted unanimously on the suggestion of Kevin Hynn, with the Combine reserving its position.

A committee was elected with a place reserved for the Combine should they decide to support the decision.

The meeting was confident to set ambitious tasks at both a political and organisational level.

Every locality will need to follow the lead of Birmingham where the local Community Conference, which has a proud record of fighting cuts locally, agreed on Nov 1 not only to back the march but to call a local meeting to start serious local organisation.

Beginning to challenge the supposed truth that European monetary union is in all our interests in no small job. Raising £50,000 in less than a year and planning marches and meetings in every corner of the land is hard work too. But it can and must be done!

Dutch left prepares for Euro-protests

ON JANUARY 1 the Netherlands assume the presidency of the European Union. In response, the Dutch Left are mounting a counter-campaign of protests.

On the weekend of the 26-27 October, 70 people met to launch the campaign. Those present included the Green Left, Amnesty International, Greenpeace, 'Defence of the Environment' (the Netherlands equivalent of

Friends of the Earth), the former Maoist Workers' Party and the Socialist Party, Dutch section of the Fourth International as well as international guests from France, Belgium, Mexico and Denmark.

The debate in the Netherlands, one of the countries at the heart of the European Union, is not whether it should be 'in or out' of Europe, but about what kind of Europe. The meet-

ing drafted a Dutch 'platform for a different Europe', for a social, ecological, feminist and democratic Europe, and intends to stimulate debate on how to get there.

A counter-summit is planned just before the meeting of the heads of government meeting in June, and at the meeting workshops discussed different aspects of an alternative. These groups are intended to be the embryo

of future working groups during the Dutch presidency and the counter-summit.

An enthusiastic meeting declared support for the European march for jobs, although the campaign around this is semi-autonomous from the 'platform', given that it will be possible to win wider support from the labour movement. Protests are being prepared for the meeting of European

transport ministers in January, and a Europe-wide anti-racist conference will take place during the counter-summit.

The Zapatistas ambassador to Europe was also present at the meeting and pointed out that the Mexican government is preparing various deals with the European Union. He said he would ask the Zapatistas to send delegates to the counter-summit.