The Trades Union Congress (TUC) has decided to extend their Workfare scheme — "Project Work" — which has been piloted in Hull and Kent. This reactionary scheme forces the long-term unemployed to work for a mere £5 per week plus their benefits. Refusal to do so will mean that all benefits are stopped.

Activists in other areas can learn from the experience of the campaign against the pilot schemes in North Humber. Opposition to the schemes has to be mobilized quickly and needs to involve a range of tactics.

In Hull we combined high profile public campaigning, including a demonstration involving hundreds, with persuading organizations not to be involved. Local councils will be approached early on or be involved in placemaking. It is vital that the scheme is opposed. With unions Labour groups will be key. Council opposition will obviously reduce the number of placements. It is also important because it raises doubts with others who might get involved and builds up an image of "Project Work" as being unfair.

Union opposition has to be central not only from the civil service unions (PSA and PTC) but also unions that represent workers where "Project Work" schemes may take place (eg NUT and TGWU in schools).

Most councils will be consulted on the plan, which have proposals involving "Project Work". All council unions need to be lobbied to ensure that they oppose these schemes — do not forget the small unions.

The role of the unemployed is important in terms of publicity and information. From "Project Work" activists attract a lot of local and national media attention. Be bold with press releases and activism: leaflets, pickets and stories all have a role to play.

Of course the scheme is a fraud: the Tories don’t care a damn about the unemployed. As soon as night falls down, stories will be planted in the media about the so-called "job offers". Be ready with instant rebuttals from advice bureau workers and real live examples.

Building opposition to "Project Work" also means taking up arguments about the national minimum wage and the fight for full employment.

Fighting for the rights of unemployed people is a fight in the same battle — campaigning on one strengthens the other.

George Thompson

The brutal new Jobseekers' Allowance (JSA) is the latest Tory government plan to steal money from hundreds of thousands of claimants and drive down the wages of all workers.

They risk being a ringing of the bell of rebellion prior to a General Election as the unemployed and employed say enough is enough.

More and more people are ring the bell of their local JSA campaigns to join the struggle against the real benefits theft, the Tories.

Despite the Labour Party's failure to oppose the JSA and the TUC's near invisible campaign against it, there are the beginnings of serious opposition to the new law. Anti-JSA groups exist now in most cities and several bodies are trying to coordinate national opposition.

Although the civil service union in the Benefits Agency (the CPSA, under the leadership of Militant Labour) has dramatically wound down the campaign for better health and safety under the JSA without even consulting the membership, there is some genuine discontent among this move.

It is an important test for the new "Labour Unity" in the CPSA is whether it can relaunch a genuine fightback against the Act at the January JSA conference of Benefit Agency and Employment Service workers.

Abandoning the fight will only weaken future CPSA struggles to stop privatisation and further job losses.

Anti-JSA groups must build links with union members and encourage them to write not only on the health and safety issue but on the wider impact of JSA. Distancing ourselves from the "Three Strikes and you're out" nonsense whereby claimants are encouraged to harass workers who consistently implement the new law, is essential to this process.

Such a tactic only damages relations between campaigning groups and workers in the offices. To develop support in non Civil Service Unions anti-JSA groups must explain that this is an attack on the whole of the working class.

This argument is given new strength by the latest scandal - JSA claimants have been sent from England to work on the strike in Northern Ireland hospitals against support services contractors Compass, under the threat of having their benefits withdrawn completely if they refuse to do so.

We must link the demands for full employment and a minimum wage to the demand to scrap the JSA.

We should be arguing that all unions need to organise the unemployed and campaigning against the Tories in general: and extension of Workfare ("Project Work").

This means we must also put pressure on Labour's front bench to ditch their plans for similar policies.

The British leg of the Euro-March has made the demand for the scrapping the Job Seekers' Allowance one of its main slogans.

As the march will take place in the aftermath of the General Election, it will probably give us a good opportunity to demand that the Labour Government immediately repeal this vicious Tory legislation.

Anti-JSA groups are encouraged to follow the lead of London against the JSA (LARSA) and support the Euro-march.

LARSA is organising a National Conference at Camden Irish Centre on December 7. For further details contact LARSA PO Box 3148, London E17.

The Welfare State Network is also holding two anti-JSA events: and a picket outside the Department of Employment and Education at 12.00 on November 25. Details: WON 0711 679 3568.
Union leaders prepare to take on Blair

Fred Le Plat, Campaign for a Fighting and Democratic UNION

With the general election only months away and the likely outcome a Blair led Labour Government, the left in the unions desperately needs to discuss common problems and begin to develop a coherent militant response across the trade union movement.

The most immediate aspirations of union members, as embodied by their conference policies, can only be met if a majority Labour government is elected and if such a government is then forced to carry out these policies.

For Union members, for example, this would be an end to all forms of privatisation, a minimum wage at £6.50 per week for the welfare state and the repeal of anti-union laws and the Acas and Immigration law.

Campaigning for these policies during and after the election would eventually have to be backed by industrial action.

An unprecedented co-ordination between 12 trade union left organisation is being built up to meet this challenge.

These 12 unions come from a variety of industries and services as well as different political traditions.

A conference to consider this co-ordination will take place on the February 1 1997.

This initiative should be supported by everyone who wants to see our unions being built as campaigning organisations.

At the moment, too many decisions of our national leaderships are made by the subject of lawyers and weakened by the need to promote credit cards.

For far too long each union left has been, through necessity, concerned with the affairs of its own respective union, year by year, and not common problems across the unions.

The lack of united response by the left of the unions has made it easier for the "new realist" leadership of the TUC to play the whole movement against the right.

Onslaught

Over the last 17 years, unemployment, privatisation, cuts in services and the anti-union laws have battered the unions. Activists at rank and file meetings have had to face the full onslaught, while the "new realist" leadership failed to organise any concerted fightback and increasingly adapted to this situation.

Organising a union left across the whole of the movement is not a new idea. But in the past most of these organisations have been more the property of a particular political organisation rather than a genuine attempt to bring together militants with different traditions.

This may be one reason that such efforts have rapidly floundered in the past.

But now twelve genuine union lefts such as the Socialists Trade Union Alliance, the Print & Media Broad Left, the Communications Workers Broad Left, and the EELA have been meeting together and have decided to go for the full picture. This is a major step forward.

Although a full plan of action has not yet been drawn up, there is the broad outline of the following steps.

With Labour activists, students themselves must fight Tory fees and loans

March against Student Debt

THE TORIES are threatening to end student grants - and Tony Blair and his friends in the leadership of the National Union of Students agree with them. Cuts are threatened with closures, classes are full to breaking point, staff are threatened with redundancies and dilatory awards under attack.

Over the last 17 years the education system has suffered blow after blow - and now universities rather than fight for the extra funding needed - threaten to introduce tuition fees.

With the NUS leadership refusing to organise opposition and the Labour leaderashing going along with it, all of the Tory plans, the Campaign for Free Education has called a major demonstration on Wednesday November 24th at 12 noon from UOL, Manet St, Education in a Right!

Labour left steps up the fightback

Despite Blair's "Alienation" victory in the shambles referendum process on Labour's manifestos, those opposing his policies have stepped up their organisation.

Blair may be twisting in the wind on the single currency, and "a weaker back-bencher" may write in Tribune (under the pseudonym "Cassandre") of unlikely scenarios of Labour MPs exiting Blair as a leader more few after his election victory, but the real job is to build up an open political movement around key issues.

On Saturday, November 9 150 activists attended the conference called by the Network of Socialist Campaign Groups. As well as significant workshops on campaigning against the Immigration and Asylum Bill, Education, the minimum wage and trade union rights, the priorities understood by most people were underlined by the lively discussions on Party democracy, the Party Left link and European Monetary Union.

Policy and campaigning resolutions passed emphasised that the decision to oppose the Maastricht convergence criteria and support the Eurocorps for, to step up campaigning in defence of the union link, to support the National Assembly Against Racism, and to organise a series of meetings in the run up to the election stressing what Labour should deliver.

The following week a meeting attended by activists from a number of unions launched the "Keep the Link" campaign.

This recognised that the attack on the Party union link is far less likely to come in the form of a simple proposal to save the link than as a downsizing of conference to a rally and the abolition of local policy-making General Committees, which while leaving the unions attached to the Party would remove any say in policy, rendering the link meaningless.

A model resolution was drawn up for union conferences and CLPs, a broad-sheet discussed, coordinators agreed in every union, and a steering committee elected.

The "Keep the Link" petition has already been signed by several union general secretaries, many activists and half the European Parliamentary Labour Party, the task now is to turn this into real support throughout the movement and commit unions at their conferences next year to fighting Blair on the issue.

SUSAN MOORE

Tuesday November 19 sees unprecedented action in the higher education sector with members of all eight unions, covering teaching and non-teaching staff, voting over-whelmingly to strike on that day.

Students in a number of colleges have also agreed to support this historic action. The day's strike will be followed by a campaign of more limited industrial action, the form of which will be decided locally.

The action has been triggered by the decision of Pay offer made by the employers in the negotiations over a new which was due in April 1996.

With average wages for manual workers in the sector standing at £750 a year, the proposed rise of £2.4 per cent is worth only a measly 1p an hour.

For clerical and administrative staff on a average wage of £12,655 the offer of 1.5 per cent is not worth the princely sum of 1p an hour.

While long-service staff are generally considered to be too paid the reality is that their pay has fallen drastically over recent years.

With a current scale of between £9,500 and £27,400 they no often earn less or little more than secondary school teachers, with the result that their vote for action was one of the most decisive.

The action in higher education, like workers and users in other parts of the public sector have been bearing the brunt of the government cut backs.

The pitiful offer on pay have combined with trade unions' frustration with other attacks on jobs and conditions.

Workers have been building up a stronger joint union organisation at a workplace level in response to these attacks, which has made possible the co-ordinated action now agreed.

Many activists are aware that if this campaign is not successful we could well see moves to end national pay bargaining in the sector. The experience of the NUS, where this has already happened, and where so far less than one quarter of Trusts have signed the NUS contract are a timely reminder of why such a move would be a disaster for all.

POST LEADERS GIVE

Brian Gardner

AUDGE from Royal Mail and the CWU in workers' union has lifted the threat of industrial action, taking place before Christmas.

The long running dispute over teamworking and deliveries has hived off to two joint working parties.

Chairman of the joint committee ACAS and consisting of equal numbers of union and management representatives, these hope to reach agreement by April next year, effectively delaying any further action until after the next general election.

It is, unfortunately, a good result for Tony Blair who, along with the union's general secretary, Alan Johnson, tried everything he could to prevent the dispute escalating and embarrassing Labour in the run-up to the poll.

There will now be a ballot on accepting a without-strings 3 per cent pay deal that is taking place before Christmas.

Although this is likely to be won, a majority of postal workers remain angry and defiant, and will need some convincing that in the longer term the new contract can reach an agreement.

The task for union activists on the ground is to continue to campaign against the proposed changes and build opposition.

The fight is not postponed temporarily and Mr Blair's only embarrassment may eventually arise when he is in office.

WELFARE STATE NETWORK

Foundations for freedom

A women's conference putting the case for defence and rebuilding of the welfare state SATURDAY NOVEMBER 30

University of London Union, Malet Street London: Goody Street tube. Creche and food available. Registration £5/£2: WSN Women's Conference, 183 Queens Crescent, London NW5 4DS. Tel 0171 639 5068.
No reliance on Brussels
Unions must fight for a 35 hour week

IT IS NO surprise that John Major is pledged to fight the decision of the European Court on the working time directive. While his opposition is fu-
elled by the need to placate the Euro-
sceptic wing of the party, this is by no means a minor political issue.

In the last 17 years the Tories have done everything in their power to drive down workers' living standards and conditions. The success of that assault is partly shown by the fact that in 1994 22 per cent of full time line workers in Britain worked more than 45 hours a week - a higher proportion than in any other state within the European Union.

The fact that the Tories oppose the directive does not mean that trade unions should be bowing in gratitude to the European Court. The directive would anyway have only a marginal impact on working practices because it is in effect of no exceptions. Less than a million of the four million working over 48 hours in Britain today will be affected.

Discretion

Those exceptions include workers in those industries where "long hours are inherent" - such as those who work in retail, at sea and doctors in training - and hence, given discretion to exclude other groups.

Those who work on a seasonal basis and those who are asked to work more than 48 hours only on an occasional basis are included.

Crucially, those who work overtime on a regular basis are excluded. But workers are driven to work flat out for a multi-national companies.

For many, their hours of work are dictated by the very low hourly rate that is making it difficult if not impossible to make ends meet without the addition of extra hours at overtime pay.

For others who are not paid any enhancement for working long hours, the drive comes from their fear that if they do not agree to their managers' requests - and even seem enthusiastic to do so - they could end up without a job at all.

None of these workers will see their lives enhanced as a result of the European Union directive. On the contrary, through the strengthening of trade union organisation and the ability of workers to take industrial action that decent standards of living can be achieved and the tyranny of new management techniques rolled back.

This reality will not stop those in the trade union movement and Labour's Labour Party who want to call out the brussels, nor in any way to undermine the directive as yet another reason why the labour movement should be enthusiastic in its support for European integration.

Arguments not only ignore the enormous powerlessness of the directive itself, but they fail to see why it is proposed in the first place.

It is really believable that in Britain the governments and bosses in the rest of the EEC and Union are on the side of the workers?

Class struggle

Such a notion would of course be useful for those who want to convince us all that the class struggle is outdated and no longer necessary, but it doesn't give any answers to all those who have suffered attack under the Tories.

The reality is that that is the purpose of the directive and other measures like them are to create a "level playing field" across the European Union - not between bosses and workers, but between different business - so that they can compete on more equal terms than they currently do. mostly given the differences in law and working practices between different countries.

Such differences are essentially the result of battles between the classes - representing the concurrences that workers' organisations have been able to wring to the employers.

Some employers do recognise that their own self-interests (i.e. their profits) are not always best served by working the workforce into the ground.

Many surveys show that the longer people work the less productive-and therefore profitable - each extra hour is. And with the recent court case won by member workers on the basis of stress there are conditions beyond that of trade union and voluntary sector who are worried that they too will be the next in line of such actions.

These advocates of "moderate capitalism" who oppose Major's attempt to return us to the conditions of the last century, are not questioning, but reinforcing the need for profitable exploitation: they simply have a different view of what is in their interests.

Capitulation with a modest degree of historical awareness may recall that despite the frenzied warnings of nineteenth century mill-owners and factory bosses, the introduction of legislation to limit the working day and end child labour did not bring the predicted collapse of industry.

On the surface, capitalism may appear to have changed, but the essentials remain the same. In the late 20th century, as in the early 19th, collaboration and trade unionism should not be under any illusions. Rather than placing any reliance on the institutions of the European Union or in the employers whether here in Britain or across the EU as a whole, we need to rely on our own strength and organisation.

We are in favour of equalisation as long as this means levelling conditions between workers - across Europe as a springboard to fighting for the 35 hour week.

Such campaigns should be on the basis of conditions already achieved. Fighting for the 35 hour week, for the abolition of schemes like the Job Seekers Allowance and building the Eumo March need to be our first rallying calls in such a fight.

Far from killing off jobs, a shorter working week offers a way to share out the work available among larger numbers of workers.

Gordon Brown's new line: "Definitely maybe not"

Labour hedges bets on Euro

AT FIRST sight, Labour's new prom-
ise to hold a referendum before any decision on the single European currency should be welcomed as a significant step forward. Of course many will have reservations about the way this latest policy shift - like most of New
Labour's political platform has been simply proclaimed by one of Blair's inner sanctum (Gordon Brown) with no prior discussion or agreement in the official organisations of the Labour Party.

So what appears to be a concession to giant greater democracy emerges in a completely undemocratic fashion.

But why has Blair's team promoted this shift of policy, and what are its implications?

There is no doubt that it is an important step. Blair has not explicitly opposed a referendum, this was a strategic mistake that one would expect the Blairites to remove on whether or not to proceed. With the Tories in the electoral doldrums and plagued by an increasingly restive collection of "chaos, sceptics", Blair has for several years been seen by the European bourgeoisie as the party most likely to deliver a single currency and thereby British integration into the EEC. Blair has been forced by Germany's Chancellor Schröder and by others for precisely this reason.

But as the Tory sceptics have gained ground, and the potentially disastrous bandwagon.

Many activists will assume that it is impossible for Blair to win a referendum vote in favour of a single currency when the prize to be gained includes massive cuts of up to 11 billion in public spending, with serious consequences for the welfare state.

So there is probably no need for Blair to worry about the Maastricht criteria. Blair's vote on the referendum pledge, instead of no decision has yet been taken in or for against a single currency, in other words Labour has still not ruled out the possibility of joining the single currency.

But in order to keep the option open, the incoming Labour government would have to take action to comply with the Maastricht criteria: it would have to begin the spending cuts needed to reduce the spending deficit to the permitted levels of 3% of Gross Domestic Product.

It would have to hand control of domestic monetary policy to a privatised Bank of England - and carry out all the appropriate currency policies which have already triggered anger among the Europhile, Germany, France, Belgium, Italy and Spain.

Tony Blair, carried away by the scale of the 95% yes vote in his party plebiscite on the "Road to the Maastricht", really believe he could win a referendum, despite the sterlin opposition of much of the Tory press and mass media? We don't know the answer to this puzzle, and we may have to wait months to find out.

But what is clear in while that we support the call for a democratic vote on any decision to join a single currency, it is not enough take an agnostic stance on European Monetary Union.

The Maastricht process is already menacing jobs and vital public services across Europe. The full implementation of the Treaty would place an unlooked for change in the European economy, a change which would decide the future of the jobs and living standards of the working class on the basis of the choice of a small number of capitalists.

Labour should say now that there is nothing to be gained for workers from a single currency, and that a Labour government will reject the Maastricht criteria.

Instead Labour and the TUC should link up with the trade unions and mass movements throughout Europe, which are fighting back against austerity.

Our fight to establish a New Europe of working people, not a Europe for bosses, bankers and bureaucrats.
From Rwanda to Zaire – Africa martyred

The 1996 European Union aid programme for the Great Lakes area of Africa is 284 million eurus (£230 million). Only 75 per cent of this money has gone to the people of the region: NGOs take 25 per cent to finance their operations. Of the money distributed 65 per cent has gone to the two million refugees living in camps, surrounded by Hutu militias. Seven million Rwandans have received the other 35 per cent. This leaves nothing for the Rwandan government to facilitate the return to Rwanda of Hutu refugees not involved in genocide. Without massive aid any return of refugees is impossible.

Hundreds of thousands of refugees are now threatened further by the spread of fighting and famine to Zaire.

CLAUDE GABRIEL explains the reasons for the crises in Burundi, Rwanda and Zaire.

Rouge: Was the conflict one which could have been forestalled?

CG: The current situation was to be expected, not just foreseen, for several years.

The first element is the reality of the refugee camps. They throw together several hundred thousand people, for the most part totally disarmed. Immediately, the different cliques present try to pull strings. The Zairean army, unpaid and without officers, use the camps for their own ends: promoting the black market; trading on connections. This is leading to the ex-Rwandan regime, and notably the militsa, also various others, come to do business and mount their own political-military operations.

There is a combination of massive and incomparable poverty and enormous despair on the one hand, and on the other, the refugee camps, which from the start have been arenas for power struggles. The stakes are not only military but also economic, which is all-important in a situation of such poverty. The reality is that the people in the region effectively fight over the crumbs of poverty. The camps in themselves are a powder keg.

The second element that makes this situation predictable is the fact that the Zairean state is only a state in name. On the one hand the regime is totalitarian, "Braspocona" the country’s resources have been pillaged for nearly 30 years by one family, one clan, one man. On the other hand, outside the presidential guard, the Zairian army is non-existent in operational terms, and seems to act more as a gang dedicated to using its force against the people.

Rouge: What are the roots of this situation?

CG: Two things appear important. First of all the question of Zaire. Mobutu has been in power now for 31 years. It is an unstable regime-totalitarian would be a euphemism—responsible for the assassination of thousands of people.

It has not allowed the slightest opposition, and has plundered the basic resources of the country to accumulate wealth for itself. It would otherwise have been threatened with the destabilisation of its power, if there had been the slightest attempt to construct a real Zairian state in the 1960s. It is no longer today the state of Zaire today to which the governments of Europe and North America have more or less continuously lent support.

It is clear that the absence of state and economic factors weighs heavily on the current situation in Zaire, which is the east of Zaire, bordering on Rwanda and Burundi. These are elements aggravating destabilisation and deterioration of the situation. It is one thing to have camps containing hundreds of thousands of people in a real country; it is a completely different matter to have them in a country that is an abstraction, a virtual country, where no legitimate power exercises control over daily existence.

The second element relates to the aggravation of this situation by the genocide in 1994 in Rwanda, which has gone totally unchallenged. Such impunity impacts at several levels: for those who have already committed crimes and are ready to commit new ones as they form new alliances. Today they are candidates for receiving arms or for again becoming linked to this or that state, this or that diplomacy.

However this impunity also works in favour of the new rulers who know that because of a past that has gone unpunished they too can indulge in extortion or use for military responses rather than the necessary political and social solutions.

Consequently there is a risk of break down and a willingness to look for combinations.

The major problem is land, which is becoming more and more restricted because of excess population. The financial reserves are falling being fed into the black market and from there to the 'outraguer' - who equally wants to take from or keep from you. It is essential to understand that. Without this framework international intervention is therefore inevitable. We are not building for a war between Tunis and Hamas. If things continue to deteriorate there will be, as elsewhere in Africa, fifteen or twenty small groups who will fight among themselves. An array of temporary alliances will be constructed, based primarily on material interests which appear to us utterly derisory. It is for this reason that what needs to be recognised by both the Rwandan regime and the 'international community' is a regional solution. There can be no Rwandan solutions to the problems of Rwanda, just as there can be no Burundian solutions to the problems of Burundi.

There can only be regional solutions; not for reasons of immediate ethnic identity but simply because the problem results from poverty. One can develop neither Rwanda nor Burundi with just their resources. It is also necessary to separate off the east of Zaire, which is a long way from Kindu. For a geographical reasons it needs, in any case, to have an intense economic and social relationship with the other countries of the Great Lakes.

There is no question of thinking about economic and social solutions which affects the region. But in order to do that it is obviously not a question of proposing, as has the French government, a conference of these states and regimes. The problem also involves the nature of the regimes in these states. What is the Burundian regime today?

The French government supported a boycott of the Burundian regime after the last coup of 1993. Today it claims that a political solution for the region involves a conference of these states— i.e. a conference of the very states it proposes to boycott. None of this makes any sense.

Resolving the problems of Africa in the medium term requires a listing of any sort of support for regimes such as that in Zaire, as well as all the existing cliques who will inevitably engage in similar political struggles. It is to put an end to these manoeuvres which, in the name of strategies and alliances, is the problem of money-grabbing. Thirty years of these policies have not created a humanitarian disaster without precedent and which is now third or fourth such in the region.

This article was originally published in November 7th edition of Rouge, weekly paper of the Ligue Communiste Révolutionnaire, French Section of the Fourth International.
Alleys on the Lebed factor

Gerry Foley

Boris Yeltsin may have formally resigned his office in Russia after his supposedly successful operation but this will not stem the speculation either in Russia or internationally about who will succeed him. Below we publish the analysis of some of the main factors at work in the unravelling crisis from the November edition of the American paper Socialist Action

Yeltsin's dramatic firing of Aleksandr Lebed from the post of security chief highlighted the growing instability of the post-communist restorationist regime in Russia. A week on and trembling Russian President Boris Yeltsin appeared on state television on October 17 to announce that he was dismissing Lebed, who was, as the Russian press repeatedly reported, the most prominent opposition politician. Yeltsin accused Lebed of creating a sort of "pre-electoral atmosphere," when the next presidential elections are not until the year 2000. Lebed himself seemed to regard Yeltsin's repudiation as a launch rather than a setback. Andrei Lavryev, Moscow correspondent of the Polish daily Zycie Warszawy, wrote in the October 18 issue of his paper: "At the press conference called early yesterday, Lebed appeared broadly and seemed relaxed. He said, "My separation from the government is reminiscent of the way that Boris Yeltsin was driven out of the [Communist] Party elite of the time." It was Yeltsin's removal from his party of the Communist Party in 1988, in fact, that enabled the former Communist Party leader to launch a wave of opposition to the bureaucratic system to the summit of political power.

Lebed's ambitions are apparently no modester than Yeltsin's. The former general has a history of being an adventurer and not a bureaucratic climber. He is clearly aiming for the top or nothing. He knows that the country is in the verge of an explosion and he wants to be able to stop it. "We are on the verge of a very hot fall," Lebed said at his news conference. "There is no doubt about that." 

The approaching catastrophe

Zycie Warszawy put the sub heading "Casanova" - the ability to predict the future - over the story where it reported Lebed's version of the coming explosion. But a collaborator of Yevgeniya Gagarina, Guzha, who supports the attempt to restore capitalism in Russia, took no less dramatic a view. "In its October 24 issue, Russian daily, one of the best informed and most critical of the official Russian newspapers, ran a long article by Tatyana Koskhaeva titled, "The Approaching Catastrophe and How to Combat It." The author acknowledging taking her title from an article by Lenin personally appealing to voters, dependent in the last analysis on the size of investments in politics. "This financial monopoly means," the journalist wrote, "the means of changing the government is military force. However, military is also dependent on money, and the army is falling apart for lack of Lebed's Lebed's threat to the economy. According to the Russian press, by opposing open talks in the armed forces.

Spectre of a popular uprising

In fact, the internationalist of the Russian masses by the attempt to restore capitalism has had a powerful effect in demobilising them. On the other hand, if they are pushed too far and see up in desperation they have the power to seize whatever resources are available in the country. That is the possibility the Russian press is now repeatedly discussing. It is not, of course, that the former general has any intentions of organising the masses. There is nothing in his history that indicates that he has any desire or ability to do that. But he has gotten into a position where, in the absence of a revolutionary leadership, he can hope to take advantage of the military explosion to gain power.

In that event, money would be no problem. Lebed has been using his world-wide connections to get his name out and to be seen by anyone who might save him from a social revolution. The shadow of a popular uprising is now falling over all the corrupt bureaucrats. They are all manoeuvring in their various ways to try to deflect it. One of the accusations against Lebed, for example, was that he supported a separate initiative to finance of the most brutalised elements of the Russian armed forces - embittered former volunteers on the Serbian chauvinistic side of the Bosnian war, and so on.

No one in the government has denied that such a plan existed. It was, in fact, a scheme for creating a separate Russian mercenary force, the internationalist armed forces that were used against the workers and farmers in the Chechnyan revolutionary period in Germany in the early 1920s. That is, it would be a special creation for civil war, since the army as a whole can no longer be relied on.

But it also clear that Lebed had no copyright on this plan. It was a scheme of the military command and the government in general. And the fact that such a scheme was conceived is an indication of how explosive the situation in Russia has become.

SPECIAL OFFER

Ireland: the promise of socialism

We are offering a special price of just 55p. Send a postal order or cheque payable to Socialist Outlook Fund at PO Box 1109, London N4 2UU.

Two years in the writing, Socialist Democracy's founding document Ireland: the promise of socialism is the most extensive Marxist analysis of Ireland since the 1940s.

Lebed ran for president today he would be elected by 90 per cent of the vote. But a 3 per cent 40 per cent approval rating, in the present circumstances, does not represent overwhelming support, even if the other political personalities are discredited.

Other commentators argued that Lebed was foolish to play to the gallery because the next elections are too far away. As the desperate masses are going to wait quietly until the presidential elections in the year 2000 to work a solution to the crisis that is destroying their means of existence!

Koskhaeva and Nazarchuk made a more serious argument for the government's ability to freeze out rivals like Lebed and retain power - that is, that it controls all the money available for political show business through the support it gets from foreign capitalists, as well as by its domination of the banks and the major exporters. The latter are mainly producers of raw materials, such as the oil and gas combine formed headed by the premier, Victor Chernomyrdin. In the October 22 issue of Nevzumnaya Gazeta, Koskhaeva and Nazarchuk wrote: "The political events of the year have definitively confirmed money as the main factor in the fight for power. Propaganda, political advertising shows, and other forms of ideological "mass" work [sic] and even
Of Heroes, Myths and History

Brian Gardner reviews Neil Jordan’s film, Michael Collins

For many bourgeois commentators, the release of a film about a hero of the Irish national revolution is an act beyond the pale. Their fear is that particularly in America the film will encourage support for the present IRA and cause damage to the peace process in which that organisation is not currently involved.

Some of these same commentators have criticised the film for its lack of historical accuracy, implying that this in itself leads to the glorification of the eponymous hero. It is certainly true that in its dramatic reconstruction of some six years of Irish history, the film alters the sequence of some crucial events and skims over others.

For example, Collins has successfully sprung Eamon de Valera from Lincoln prison, virtually the last thing we see is the crowd’s adulation of the Sinn Fein leader in a parade through Dublin. An audience with little knowledge of the political events of the time might well be confused as to why this enemy of the British state is not immediately executed.

It is not explained that in the month following de Valera’s escape, the government released all Irish political prisoners. It was at this moment that de Valera became President of Sinn Fein’s so-called Irish Republic; in the film he already holds this position in 1918, before the party’s spectacular success in the British general election of that year.

Dramatic motif

However, this change in the historical sequence does provide for one of the film’s central dramatic motifs - the beautifully understated images of the Liver-Nosed Collins and Alan Rickman’s de Valera.

From the outset the President of the Republic is portrayed as a cold, calculating, and is more useful to go off to America and gain support than to participate fully in the armed insurrection at home. As the commander-in-chief of this insurrection, Collins is so helpful to his friend Dev but he is also a threat. Where the film scores with complete historical accuracy is in de Valera’s use of Collins to negotiate peace with the British government and the formation of the Irish Free State.

The shrewd leader distances himself from a new state which does not include the six counties of Ulster and which requires members of its parliament to swear an oath of allegiance to a British king.

Some critics have portrayed Collins as lacking depth, and while to a certain extent I think this is true, the fault is not so much with Neeson the actor as with Jordan the scriptwriter and director. Collins, the working class lad from Cork and man of action, is pitted against the cold intellectualism of de Valera - a man with few ideas other than his central obsession, the struggle for liberation. In the absence of knowing anything else about his intellectual life, we could be forgiven for imagining that perhaps he was something of a socialist. To really be believed in the establishment of a Napoleonic dictatorship to prevent communism gaining a foothold.

No characters in the film ever mention the Dáil,Species or Sinn Fein and the national struggle is a romantic one, for the liberation of a land and people. The tragic outcome of the struggle is the civil war between the two republicans factions and the assassination of Collins by de Valera’s henchmen.

Despite all of these miscalculations, this is an exceptional film - while it serves to stir up many of the myths surrounding the Irish national struggle, it also succeeds in debunking others. It shows clearly that the Irish state was not born without bloody internal strife. And when it comes to depicting the repressive, murderous and often gratuitous actions of the British state, Jordan pulls no punches. All of this is no bad thing in a film financed by Hollywood and with a wide commercial release.

Technically, it is more than proficient, and in its beginning and end, two wonderful edited sequences, in their emotional power, he youngInspectors.

As Collins travels towards his ambush, his intended spouse is purchasing her wedding apparel in a Dublin store. As she does this and as the assassin waits in their position, we hear on the soundtrack the lament “She Moves Through the Fair”.

The film begins with the Easter Rising of 1916. After de Valera has been arrested, he sits in his prison cell writing that he will probably be spared execution by virtue of his birth in America. Meanwhile all of the other leaders are brought not by one to face the firing squad.

One of these was the Irish republican socialist James Connolly. Severely wounded during the assault on the Dublin GPO, Connolly was stretchered out to the firing squad, tied to a chair, and shot. The manner of his execution caused widespread revulsion.

More than any other republican, it was Connolly who, through his writings and his actions, combined the struggle for national self-determination with the struggle for socialism, and who, like another great republican, Wolfe Tone, fought not merely for the idea of the land but for “the people of no property”.

The prospect of Hollywood biopics covering the lives of such figures is at present difficult to imagine.

A novel look at a strike

The Price of a Cigar, by Peter Wood, Anchor Books £9.95, Reviewed by Keith Sinclair

The Price of a Cigar is a novel that tells the story of the Great Dock Strike of 1889. This strike won the “Dockers’ Tenner” for London’s dockers and was the first British dockers dispute of any significance. There had been local strikes before but none had the impact of this successful dispute in the capital city.

Peter Wood has taken real characters and settings and blended them in with a few of his own. Whilst this might not appeal to the more purist-minded historians, it results in a book that will be read by many who would not think of picking up a detailed factual account of the strike. Wood introduces the main characters of the strike: the dockers’ leader Ben Tillett, John Burns, Will Thorne, Thresher of whom now the GMB, Eleanor Marx and Cardinal Manning. He also creates the characters of James Donnelly, an American journalist, through whose eyes we see much of the story. Donnelly is shot down by what he finds when he sets out to interview the strikers by his editor. He develops a sympathy for the strikers and uses his contacts to help boost the distress fund.

The 1889 Dockers Strike represented a landmark in British trade unionism. Unskilled workers had fought and won a great victory. The term “New Unionism” was coined to celebrate this successful organisation of the mass of unskilled workers.

Previously, British trade unions had been more successful in winning skilled workers into unions such as the Amalgamated Society of Engineers (ASE).

Attempts

There had however been attempts to organise dockworkers prior to 1889. In the 1870s there were disputes in both Liverpool and Hull. What was distinctive about the London strike was its success and the attention gained throughout Britain and internationally. Donations poured into the strike fund from countries like Australia.

Peter Wood has succeeded in writing an interesting and lively account of this major strike. The events he recounts may have taken place over a century ago, but the issues remain alive in the ports of Britain today.

In the 1890s casual labour was the norm, just as it is today. The only difference is the isolation. In the last century you fought at the call for a day’s work — today you sit at home wondering whether the phone will ring or not.

The effect is the same as unscrupulous employers can pick and choose their “blue-eyes” and ensure that the militancy are driven out. However the great fight of the Mineside dockers today shows that a fight-back can and will develop. The Price of a Cigar shows what can be won when workers unite together.

Read it, learn from it and use it to convince people to support the Liverpool dockers in 1996.
As Canada fights austerity: mass protests seize Toronto

by Barry Weisleder

It was a two-day festival of the oppressed. Toronto on October 25 and 26 was positive, peaceful, upbeat and disposed to social justice and public life. The masses were shown what is possible. They showed up en masse to a weekend of demonstrations and street theater.

Thieves in high places

The largest labour shutdown of a Canadian metropolis, followed by two days of street theater and rally in this country's history.

Exhibiting tremendous size and self-confidence, hundreds of thousands of unionists and their social movement allies said no to multimillion dollar Ontario provincial government. Planned cuts to healthcare, education, and social services, the privatization of public hospitals and wholesale privatization of public institutions, and to widespread attacks on our quality of life had aroused this massive opposition.

Apology

Support for the protests was so broad that reactionary Ontario's Conservative Premier Mike Harris was compelled to apologize for initially underestimating the huge turnout.

It's clear that the drip-feeding of misinformation was not surprising. Hundreds of thousands of workers had defined introductory tactics and joined in cross-picketing and protest rallies on the Friday, or simply stayed home at all, in cases, sacrificing a day's pay to register their opposition to the prevailing big business agenda.

On that day there was no public transport, one hundred construction crews were called into action, most government offices were closed or offered little service, cultural and recreational institutions were shut.

College shutdowns

Colleges and universities did not function, elementary and secondary schools had few teachers and fewer students. Hospitals operated on holiday staffing levels, and many factories were closed.

Thousands of workers, accompanied by family and friends, attended noisy, colourful, and often highly emotional rallies at the Ontario Teachers' Federation, the Association of Municipal Employees, and at the Ontario Teachers' Federation, the Association of Municipal Employees, and at the College Support Units.

Police stood by quietly on the sidelines as thousands of pickets and hundreds of students marched through the streets. Police used tear gas and pepper spray to disperse the crowd, but failed to stop the massive protests.

The strike was a massive demonstration of the power of working people and their determination to defend their rights.

Way forward

Speakers from labour and community organizations demanded that the government withdraw its austerity measures. They called for a massive demonstration on October 27 to demand the end of the strike.

In other news, the Toronto Star reported that the NDP government was planning to cut education spending and that teachers were to go on strike on October 27 and 28.

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Gearing up for Euromarch 97

The Labour leadership's about-face on a referendum on the single European currency, bringing them into line with Major is an indication of the depth of tension which exist in the ruling circles about this issue.

Only the Lib Dems of the main parties are now openly committed to joining the single currency on the first wave which will include Germany, the Benelux countries, and France.

The implementation of the Maastricht convergence criteria and the resultant cuts in social spending has led to some of the biggest demonstrations and strikes in every country since World War 2.

So far, the strategic advantage that the EU and Germany have enjoyed is that they are able to organize their own government at the European level while mass resistance has been confined to the national level.

The proposed social Europe could be the key to this.

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John Lister

TWENTY years ago, one of the biggest demonstrations on a working day unit 13 trade unions and mobilised over 50,000 through the streets of London in opposition to cuts in welfare services.

The campaign was involved were from the public sector, although the white collar engineering union TASS and the Print and Paperworkers had strong involvement.

The protest was unusual in that left leaning public sector leaders were prepared to join the left in building a pressure on the Tory policies of Jim Callaghan's Labour government, underlining the strains already beginning to tear apart the thinly veiled “social contract” between the union movement and the Labour government.

They stated short, of course of striking a one day strike, but the “left leaning” public employees union UNIPEL had already announced a campaign of guerrilla strikes against cuts in health, education and local government services. Localised one day stoppages had included a strike and 4,000 strong lobby Oxford Hospital.

Driving forward the angry right back in the union is the package of £3 billion cuts imposed earlier this year by the Tory government. John Major's decision to slash back public spending to meet the requirements of international bankers: the Maastricht Treaty and the drive for European Monetary Union could mean cuts of £4.25 billion.

It is a real threat to bring recent severe warnings from Denis Healey (now Lord Healey) that the single currency could trigger "no in the streets". Twenty years after he was booted off Labour's conference hall.

The letter of intent demanded by the IMF declared that: “An essential element of the government's strategy will be a continuing and substantial reduction over the next few years in the share of resources required for the public sector.

The Labour government was now faced with a collision course with the IMF, as increasing rigid wage controls began to cut living standards, while jobs and precious public services were squeezed by the order of the IMF. Here were the seeds of the now infamous “winter of discontent” of 1978-79, in which anger exploded and wage controls were swept aside by a succession of public sector strikes.

The resistance was already building. The Government struck, led by low-paid Asian women, was escalating as a focus of the fight for unionisation and the right to picket.

Even during the IMF negotiations health workers in London voted to stage a historic "work-in" occupation to prevent the closure of the Elizabeth Garrett Anderson Hospital for women: that fight was to last four years, become a central focus for the struggle to defend the NHS. The hospital was saved, and was part of a one-day strike last week in the current NHS pay dispute.

In the same month of 1976, teachers from various left currents and groups got together to launch a new organisation, the Socialist Teachers' Alliance; a much stronger STAs still fights on today on every level in the NUT.

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Who will lose out in Clarke’s Budget cuts?

It could be YOU!

AS WE approach Kenneth Clarke’s final budget before the next election, press speculation is already rife.

How big will be the tax cuts he offers as a desperate bid to win back lost Tory votes? And how will these be paid for?

Whose services, whose benefits, whose jobs will be cut to line the wallets of the rich and buy a fifth term of Tory rule?

The Mail on Sunday claims to know that a further hike in petrol prices, house and gas bills will be used to suck in extra cash, which could then be categorically “given away” – with the most generosity, as usual, going to those on the highest incomes, and thus paying the most in tax.

The promise of tax cuts (together with nationwide relief at the departure of Maggie Thatcher and the rise in VAT) sees the Mail in today’s papers with pictures of the Prime Minister riding in a golf buggy.

Bother then, however, an Labour of which they were members then the Tories have categorised their own changes and especially and massively increased taxes to such a level that no Clarke budget could now hope to reverse the process.

The gamble for Clarke is whether tax cuts would now be recognised by the electorate as a cynical gesture, and serve to undermine rather than rebuild support for the Tories.

Lined up to lose?

But there is another calculation, too. Clarke knows that, whatever he does in this budget, there is a strong chance that the Tories will lose the next election.

It is obvious that there is a body of Tory opinion that feels this might not be a bad thing. It would leave Labour to carry the can for divisive policy decisions on European Monetary Union, and to pick up the tab for the Tories’ 17-year spree of borrowing to finance tax cuts for big business and the wealthy. And it would give the divided Tories time to plug it out over Europe and regroup.

On this scenario Clarke could well be tempted to go for broke, imposing hefty cuts in taxes and in public spending, knowing that this will leave the welfare state in tears and put immediate pressure on an incoming Labour government.

This kind of “scorched earth” policy could exploit Labour’s political timidity, and leave a new government rapidly disillusioned.

Blair and Brown have gone out of their way to try to oblige the new Labour in advance, by promising they will not increase taxation.

But all the indications are that the Tory squeeze on NHS budgets, on schools and higher education and on social services will have triggered a succession of crises by next May.

Preliminary leaks from this year’s public spending round suggest that Health Secretary Stephen Dorrell lost out heavily in his bid for extra cash to aver a major crisis next year. Since then NHS Chief Executive Alan Langlands has repeated a categorical insistence that there will be no additional money to stave off closures and bed shortages as Trusts run into difficulties this winter.

Analysts also appear to agree that part of Clarke’s strategy will be to cut back on central government grants to local councils, forcing a massive hike in Council Tax payments, so in the knowledge that there are only a handful of Tory-run councils and that therefore Labour and Liberal Democrat councillors can be forced to take the blame.

Labour has also funded off rather than increasing the pressure from the pensions’ movement for a restoration of the link with earnings and for a significant increase in the basic state pension.

Retreats

New Labour has staged a succession of damaging retreats from the full-hearted defence of the welfare state, and insisted that their minimal pledges on health, education and training schemes can be funded from one-off sources (cutting bureaucracy, ending the antiquated places scheme and the “windfall tax” on privatised utilities). But despite Blair’s conservation, Labour’s electoral appeal rests on the widespread assumption that a change of government would bring real changes, and would be a way to defend the welfare state.

These – and other – demands cannot be met without mixing additional revenue from taxation – which Labour insists it will not do. But it need not involve raising income tax on individuals, if Blair and Brown grab the nettle and step up the taxation of big business, which has revealed in astonishingly low levels of taxation since 1979.

As Alan Simpson MP has pointed out, a tax of just one-sight of one percent (0.125%) on the speculative turnover of the City of London would generate a massive £50bn per year, (equivalent to 25p on income tax) enough on its own to pay the pensioners’ demands, rebuild our schools and hospitals, and put the country back work.

The Tory calculation is that Labour will lack the nerve to implement even such minimal reforms, and will swiftly antagonise and disillusion its supporters.

The fight we must wage inside the trade unions, the campaigns and the Labour Party is to make sure this plan misfires.

Clarke will take another slice out of the NHS, wages, pensions and benefits, or confront the growing anger of staff and students fighting cuts in our colleges!