Throw out Tory racists!

JOHN MAJOR’s cabinet are desperate.
Every opinion poll forecasts a Tory disaster in the coming local elections.
Even staunch Tory supporters have been rejecting Major’s policy of axing schools, old people’s homes and social services to pay for tax cuts in the next general election.
Even the promise of tax cuts has been discredited, with 20 separate tax increases since the 1992 election and living standards plunging as the latest cuts in mortgage tax relief kick in.
The old stand-by of privatisation, too, has been thoroughly undermined by the scandalous profiteering of privatised utilities, the sky-high salaries of their directors, and the unpopularity of rail and Post Office privatisation.
Law and order has been neutered as a political weapon by the extreme right wing line of Tony Blair’s Labour Party, and the mounting evidence that crime is linked to the social and economic decay of post-Thatcher Britain.
So whatever next?
Predictably, the bankrupt party of that ‘race’ Mr Major has wheeled out one of the oldest cannons in the Tory arsenal: racism.

A full seven months before the next Queen’s Speech in the autumn, ministers leaked to the media the fact that they are planning a new crackdown on ‘illegal immigrants’.
In fact the legislation would target not immigration – which previous racist Tory laws have reduced to an insignificant trickle, causing misery among divided families – but asylum seekers, who have already been victimised in the Asylum Act two years ago.
Hundreds of innocent asylum seekers, refugees from wars and dictatorships around the world, are currently incarcerated in grim prisons like Campsfield near Oxford. Bosnian refugees already face the closure of the miserable handful of reception centres, and the slashing of government funds for their support.
The Tories want to make it even harder to get into Britain – so they can make it easier for themselves to win racist votes.
This is a sick, cynical trick by a desperate and reactionary Party. The council elections offer workers a welcome chance to throw some of them out of office now: we’ll have to wait a little longer to kick out the rest.

Vote Labour: Fight for socialist policies!
Hardest stage of the battle for Clause Four

By Steve French and Alan Thornett

THE DEFEND Clause Four campaign now faces the hardest stage of the battle. Whilst it was ahead on points in the first five rounds, the phonny consultation and the NEC’s vote have been presented by a helpful media as the turning point in the campaign.

It must be remembered that in what was heralded as the biggest ever consultation within a political party resulted in a mere 1.5% of individual members indicating that they wished to make Clause IV ‘more clear and concise’. Even many of these put pre-conditions about common ownership and full employment.

The newspapers have now dropped the issue as though ‘it’s all over bar the shouting’. Yet politically there is still a lot to play for.

Public ownership is more popular than for decades. The new bulletin from Defend Clause 4 - Defend Socialism (DC4) highlights a recent survey of Labour Party members. 63% disagreed that “the production of goods and services are best left to the free market”. A Gallup poll in January asked voters if they broadly agreed with Clause 4. 37% said “yes” - a greater share than voted Labour at the last general election.

Only 28% said “no”.

On figures like that it is hard to see how the campaign to defend the Clause could possibly fail, yet Blair has begun to turn the tide. Whilst it is not inevitable that Blair will win - it is the most likely outcome. Why?

Vote loser?

A lot of people, particularly in the CLPs, will reluctantly vote for something they do not believe in. They think that this will help deliver a Labour government - a defeat for Blair might be seen as a divisive vote loser. This would be a big mistake. The Tony agenda really is a no vote winner presently. For Labour to constitutionally enshrine support for capitalism would draw the political agenda rightwards. This would open the door to further shifts to the right - particularly a challenge to the Union link. The campaign must be waged right up to the wire. There is still a big fight to be had. In the CLPs, many of which are conducting OMOW ballots, we must ensure that DC4’s material is distributed. The membership must see both sides of the argument.

Unions

In the Trade Unions the situation is not so unfavourable. The TGWU, RMT, ASLEF, UCATT, GPMU, FBU, NUM and the Rakers are all likely to vote for re-election. UNISON will now hold a special ‘Affiliated Political Union’ conference on April 13. This body includes regional delegates. Many regional APUs have voted for re-election. The UNISON executive has insisted that re-nationalisation of the utilities must be included in any new clause. MSFs conference delegates will decide their vote. Their President has pledged that in chairing the delegation meeting, he will advise that the union’s policy is to support Clause IV and this should be followed. The new communications union are holding a members ballot this month. USDAW holds its conference a week before the Special Conference. The outcome on April 29 will be heavily determined by procedures. We must oppose delegates being forced into a straight-jacket with only the option of voting for or against the Blair clause. Clause IV defenders must argue for a democratic conference procedure with the right to move amendments. Moves to refer back Blair’s proposal should be supported.

Despite the present defensive state of the movement, DC4 has forced the biggest policy debate within the Labour Party for years. This has greatly reshaped and repoliticised the left within the CLPs and especially the unions. Whilst we are beginning to see the early stages of the new wave of struggles, particularly around the NHS and education, it is very important that these gains are consolidated.

Conference

For this reason Socialist Outlook is strongly in favour of a conference, before the summer holidays, of all Clause IV defenders. This is currently being discussed within the campaign.

Such a conference should be as broad as possible. We must argue that key unions involved in the defence of the clause should call such an event to map out a fight on key issues - full employment, the defence of the welfare state, public ownership, minimum wage - to be fought for between now and the election.

This would begin to prepare the battles which are to come under a Labour government.

Of course a Blair victory at the conference would be a serious defeat. Blair wants to bring Labour into a left of centre capitalist party which would maintain some links with the union leaders, partly to ensure they deliver the working class vote. The existing structured relationship with the unions would be removed.

Losing Clause IV would be the loss of a battle - not the war. Blair wants to remove the Clause to clear the decks for a Labour government’s attacks on the working class. The left should use the political momentum which the campaign has developed, to prepare the fightback.

‘New Labour’ spies on its members

Labour officers told to become DSS spooks!

SIX NOTTINGHAM inner city Labour Party wards have been denied the right to select their own candidates – that’s 12 candidates on a Labour seats!

The East Midlands Regional Executive have not held the meeting illegally membership irregularities. Their decision was endorsed by the NEC.

The first branches knew about the decision was when an article appeared in the local press. A number of the branches had already selected their candidates and had canvassing preparations well underway.

It is no surprise that all of these wards are in areas comprising of large Afro-Caribbean and Asian communities with significant black Labour Party memberships.

It is also no surprise that these implications follow hard on the heels of the expulsion of leading black activist Hassan Ahmed. The membership secretory of Nottingham East started the whole process all when he discovered that there was a large number of reduced rates members in the inner city.

The fact that all the wards are in areas of very high unemployment seems to have escaped his notice.

All the wards in the constituency were told to check the status of their unemployed members, with branch officers being asked to behave like DSS spooks.

When asked how they should check their members unemployed status, one DLP official suggested that people be asked to explain “what they do during the day”!

The implication of membership irregularities appears to be to be a smoke screen to disguise the real purpose behind the imposition: to ensure that left candidates from the black communities and those associated with Hassan Ahmed do not get elected to the council.

On Monday 20th March two democratically selected black sitting councillors were deselected by the Regional Office and replaced by two white members. Their crime? To be black, have political aspirations and to know Hassan Ahmed!

These latest attacks will do nothing to encourage black membership and can only serve to fan the flames of racism both inside and outside the Party.
Labour Women's Conference
A defeat that settles nothing

By our correspondent

TO READ the Guardian might make you believe that all is over on the Clause Four front by the shooting; but the truth, as so often with the Guardian, was different.

According to their report, the first set-piece conference since the publication of the lengthy new Aims & Values clause apparently saw the union vote 82% for Blair.

In fact most trade unions did not vote at all, but abstained. The 82% relates only to the 3,300 delegates who did cast a vote. On the sidelines were such major players as the TUC, UNISON, GMB, and the only real opposition was none of which have yet decided a policy on the new clause.

And although Blair's vote predictably included the hard-right AECU, it also included the divided Communications Workers Union, whose delegation spent much of the conference in acrimonious debate after being instructed by their top brass to vote against the vote for the new Clause. In fact both unions now maintain that the CWU had previous policy of defending Clause Four.

In fact there was strong support for Clause Four from a determined element at Women's Conference. Out of 500-600 delegates, 50-60 attended a Defend Clause Four fringe meeting, while others equally committed to the Clause made up a good number at the rival fringe meeting called simultaneously on the new Aims and Values statement.

Throughout the conference delegates also voted for resolutions which fly in the face of Tony Blair's re-assertion of market values. Resolutions calling for the renationalisation of the railways and the scrapping of Compassive Competitive Tendering were combined with opposition to the opting out of schools like the one to which Blair so ostensibly closely chose to send his son.

Even at this late stage Blair's supporters continue to misrepresent the new statement. Clare Short actually claimed that it means full employment: perhaps she should try to catch Tony Blair of that!

In fact what Women's Conference shows is that far from being done and dusted, there is still a lot to play for in the Clause Four fight. Key unions have yet to decide: they could yet tip the balance at the Special Conference on April 29.

What we think

Portillo's vision of sweatshop Europe

IT'S NOT TRUE that Tony Blair's Euro-sceptics are opposed to any European link-up.

They have their dream of a single European market which capital is free to roam in search of cheap labour, where everything is forced down to the barest minimum, and where wages are forced down to the lowest possible level.

They have their best at home to reduce British workers to the payers of Europe, and new oppose any proposals that might support or improve their position in Europe.

In pursuit of this vision of a 'Europe without benefits', hard-line Employment Secretary Michael Portillo has now formed a bizarre alliance for low pay with Irish and Portuguese opposite numbers.

Their common objective is to block an EU directive that would prevent foreign building workers undercutting local pay and conditions in member states.

The directive is strongly supported by France, Belgium and the Netherlands where national laws lay down that local pay rates should apply to outside labour from day one, and by Germany, Sweden and Austria, where prevailing wages are high.

At the same meeting, Portillo also rejected proposals to insert a social clause in EU international agreements that would require countries trading with member states to recognise trade unions, and ban child labour.

Although the Euro-row has been shelved until June - after the French elections - Portillo's stubborn stance underlines the Tony commitment to low pay, which has found such a weak response from the trade union and Labour leaders.

All of the figures show the extent to which the relentless Portillo onslaught on pay and social benefits has thrown millions into poverty.

More than a million people in work in Britain are earning less than £2.50 an hour. A third of a million are on less than £1.50 an hour. Cheap-skate employers exploiting this sweatshop labour are being subsidized by the Tories to the tune of £2.5 billion a year in top-up benefits for the lowest.

Yet in Germany and other European countries booming capitalist enterprises pay far higher average wages than in Britain's crumbling industries.

Unlike the British unions, whose half-hearted NHS lunchtime protest on March 30 spelled out a refusal to mount a serious fight on pay, European workers are demonstrating increased confidence in their wage demands.

German engineering workers led the way, with the 4 million members of the IG Metall union making important gains from a 12-day selective stoppage backed up by the threat of national action. Other big German unions are now in the queue for pay increases of up to 6 percent.

In France, too, massive pay strikes last week halted planes, trains, and Paris bus and Metro services as well as Renault car plants.

British workers, however, are saddled with a deadly combination of a clone-conscious government, and a cowardly, ineffective union leadership.

As Portillo sets his sights on replacing the Social Chap- ter with a Cowboy's Charter and reducing pay to sweatshop levels across Europe, the British rail unions, health unions and others are debating whether or not to fight for a pay increase that matches inflation.

With the Tories so weak and isolated, a serious fight now could deal them a decisive blow - and that would be a huge win for working people throughout Europe.

Canadians spark row over net profits

By Saka Kumar

HALIBUT have been the most unlikely cause of a diplomatic war between Canada and Europe since the days of the British Empire.

But the commanding officer of a Spanish fishing trawler off its territorial waters and threats to prevent other Spanish ships from fishing in the area threaten to awaken an animosity long buried.

At the heart of this latest incident is the depletion of fish, and the increasing competition among fishing nations. Whereas in 1938 the world fish catch was 15 million tonnes and in 1978 64 million tonnes, by 2000 it is estimated to reach 100 million tonnes.

This phenomenal rise is related to the advances in fishing technologies, particularly on the giant commercial trawlers.

20,000 jobs in Newfoundland alone have already gone and the Canadian government spends C400 million annually on those made unemployed.

Part of the problem is that the nets used to catch fish are wasteful and often dangerous.

The nets are often 30 miles wide and are held between two or more ships. As they are not permeable, they catch and kill everything in their way - windswept marine life and young fish before they can mature and breed.

As the nets are not biodegradable, when cut loose they drift along trapping larger marine animals like dolphins or entanglement in vessels.

Fishing on the high seas is monopolised by big business which squeezes out small fishermen and threatens the survival of fishing communities.

The people who rely on fish for their livelihood are generally poor. As fish become scarce and as East Asian fishing companies catch for western and domestic markets, fish become unavailable and unaffordable to many in the Third World.

This is of more long-term consequence than the present episode.

No placard for us! A young halibut
Pay insult triggers wide lunch-time protests

NHS: that was the campaign, that was!

By Harry Sloan

TENS OF thousands of health workers turned out at an estimated 420 lunchtime picket rallies and picnics outside hospitals on March 31.

But the danger is that unless a big campaign is mounted in UNISON and other health unions to demand more substantial industrial action, that show of anger will be the end rather than the beginning of any real fight.

Originally called by nursing unions in protest at their insulting 1 percent pay award from the review body, the limited action was joined by almost all sections of health workers, who have now rejected similarly inadequate increases.

The Tories bid to confuse and buy off some sections with the announcement that even 2 percent more could be negotiated locally with Trusts has not convinced many health workers.

They know that if they do this they are destroying their national pay claim - and that any cash conceded this year by Trust bosses may well be taken away again next year.

By any evidence the NHS unions are struggling financially and unwilling to fork out the additional money unless job-cutting strings are attached.

With so little on offer, it would have seemed that the unions should have gone all out to build the mood for strike action.

In any event many Trusts are struggling financially and unwilling to fork out the additional money unless job-cutting strings are attached.

With so little on offer, it would have seemed that the unions should have gone all out to build the mood for strike action.

For national union leaders terrified of calling any real action, the "Out to Lunch" protest was an ideal device. If nobody turned out, they could claim that there was no mood for a fight. But if thousands did respond, then unlike a one-day strike, bureaucrats could still argue that this limited action was as far as many members were prepared to go.

In the event, the response was respectable, but patchy. The low demands and low-key action failed to win any real enthusiasm from the public, although those who did turn out on the day won the precious warm support of the general public, with horns tooting in all directions.

In some hospitals unions left the running to the no-strike Royal College of Nursing. In other union members responded strongly, holding meetings and asking what comes next.

"Consultation" UNISON the biggest NHS union, had announced that there would be a six-week "consultation" on whether to take any further action.

It is quite clear that top leaders are desperately hoping that in this period the RCN will drop in presence of opposition, allowing UNISON to follow them into surrender.

To combat this UNISON activists, and other health trade unionists must demand branch meetings to discuss the next steps and send resolutions to regional councils and to branch meetings of elected officials demanding a mobilisation for industrial action.

Momentum builds behind Chelmsford busworkers

By Roger Welch

Over a thousand people marched through Chelmsford on Saturday March 25 in solidarity with the sacked 105 busworkers.

It would have been even bigger if the TGWU leadership had not clashed the demo with the big FAC event.

Over 1000 people attended a public meeting addressed by Paul Foot organised by the strike committee in the continuing campaign for reinstatement.

Solidarity

More marches and pickets must be called by the busworkers with the aim of getting other trade unions to Chelmsford so that we have the numbers to close down the Eastern National depot.

It is now essential that the sacked workers take the running of the dispute into their own hands. There is a very real danger that the free bus service is all too weak though it is becoming an end in itself.

The key remains solidarity action throughout Badebridge and the bus industry. The TGWU must continue to speak directly to other busworkers to secure support and to pressurise the TGWU leadership into giving official backing.

Messages of support, requests for speakers and donations can be sent to Roger Welch, Chelmsford TUC, 87 Milford Road, Chelmsford, Essex CM2 0DR, Telephone: 0245 263727.

Cheques should be made payable to TGWU (Chelmsford Bus Drivers Support Fund).

NUJ march challenges Sheffield Star union busters

By an NUJ member

The successful NUJ Sheffield demonstration on April 1 is a victory for the left's campaign to turn the union outwards.

Marking the first anniversary of the derecognition at the Sheffield Star the rally was addressed by union rights campaigners, including Arthur Scargill.

The Sheffield attack was a crucial defeat for the Star to the campaign to crush collective organisation in the wake of protests over health and safety. The management has victimised Greg Chaille and Julie Armstrong for continuing to hold chapel meetings.

The demos follows hot on the heels of the protest March outside the Murray place after the sacking of today's editor Neville Howse.

The NUJ is making union rights its top priority as part of a growing willingness among activists to fight the anti-union laws.

The issue is fast becoming a key line of division in the labour movement in the run-up to Labour's general election manifesto. This will give us opportunities to gain an even bigger hearing than the fight for the right to Strike campaign.

There is an increase in race in the press and among political parties. Charles Wedlake's resignation has set the tone. Jack Straw feels free to talk about 'immoral immigrants'.

Mike Rahman of the National Union of Journalists Oragnisations predict mass deportations of refugees and so-called illegal immigrants. These moves can be stopped.

Local Labour Parties must vociferously reject Jack Straw's twisted version of reality. We must also step up campaigning and our direct material support for detention - visits, phonecards, personal necessities etc.

The Harlow Stop the Detentions Campaign has backed calls for a National Day of Action at all detention centres and prisons holding immigration detainees on Saturday April 8. Phone 0706 832206 for details.

- The Campaign To Close Campbell House can be contacted on 01865 734542, 01865 726064.
School cuts: FACE steps up the fight

A June conference – and another demonstration in the autumn – are among the next steps being planned by the Fight Against Cuts in Education (FACE) campaign after its successful March 25 demonstration. Socialist Outlook spoke to FACE National Chair SUE LISTER.

SO: You must have been very pleased with the victory in London on March 25.
SL: Yes, it was a tremendous day for the campaign, to turn out between 15,000-20,000 people on a national march just six weeks after the February 22 protest was set up.

There were coachloads from all over the country, from Newcastle to the West country – even some from cities where there are no education cuts this year.

I was thrilled to find that we got over 1,000 people from Warwickshire, where FACE was first set up, and another 1,000 from Oxfordshire, where I'm a chair of governors and where the NUT called the first major strike. It was good to have Ben Elton on the platform.

But on the day the precise numbers and personalities didn't matter quite so much as the enormous amount of media coverage that we got for the issue in the run-up to the March – we were on every national radio and television network, putting the arguments against these cuts.

SO: You seem to have got the Tories pretty much on the run.
SL: Yes, there were some good challenges on Newsnight and on the radio. It's interesting that we had summed up the campaign as 'the rise of middle England', and it seems that now the Tory party is going out to try to win them back.

We argue that the cuts being imposed by the government to finance tax cuts, and now the press is full of suggestions for cutting taxes to win the next general election.

I think the strength of our campaign in reaching wide layers of what were formerly Tory voters suggests to the Tory Major that it has got this wrong, but we have to keep up the pressure, keep the issue in the headlines, so people can't forget that their kids' schooling is being cut in spite of the few extra votes.

SO: Has there been any feedback since the March?
SL: Yes, it seems that in many areas people who came on the demonstration have gone back and begun building new FACE groups where we didn't have them, or planning new activities.

The phone keeps ringing with requests for us to send speakers. There are also signs that the campaign is dying down.

SO: It must be hard to sustain the momentum, with the new financial year starting, and the cuts beginning to take effect.
SL: The anger is still there. And councils are already warning that there will be more cuts next year. People want to fight on. So I think the cuts are a question of exposing the cuts that are being imposed. The cuts to the numbers of teachers to be lost. In others it is easier to keep up the pressure, because FACE groups can build support for schools where governors have set deficit budgets (which we now call 'needs budgets') and there is the question of whether or not councils will intervene.

SO: So what is FACE planning nationally?
SL: Firstly we are working to consolidate our links with some of the organisations that have supported us, and hopefully build better links with the teaching unions which have supported us locally but not nationally.

I will be speaking for FACE at a STA fringe meeting at NUT Conference.

We will also be producing some FACE publicity, to ensure that our name cannot be used by small parties just claiming to speak on our behalf.

But we are also building for a national conference, to be held in Coventry on June 10. We want this to be very broad, reflecting the base of the campaign.

And we want to organise another demonstration in September, as the process of preparing a new round of cuts gets under way.

But perhaps most urgent of all is to raise some money to cover the costs of the campaign. Some of these are at present being underwritten by generous NUT branches, but we have to pay some back.

A fund-raising benefit is being planned, but we do need to urge local FACE groups and anyone that supports us to send a donation.

Contact FACE c/o St Giles County Middle School, Hayes Lane, Eltham, SE9 7YS. Phone 0858-789016.

Day school fights East Midlands racism

THERE ARE worrying signs in the East Midlands that the political vacuum created by the Labour Party's increasingly right-wing agenda is being filled by racism.

The Tories won a by-election in Keith Vaz's Leicester East constituency standing on a "No Mosques or Temples here" ticket.

The BNP has not been idle either – they are standing in Derby as well as at football grounds. There are regular Blood and Honour gigs in the Notts/Nottingham area.

Chased out

In Loughborough they chased the SWP out of a town centre pub. There is a unit of Skinhead security in the area as well as a Nazi Skinline and Nazi band English Rose in nearby Coalville.

The local Asian community, concerned at the increasing level of racist attacks have been told by the police that there is no organised presence of racists and fascists in the area.

Left must fight do-nothing leadership

NUT leaders face to FACE in witch-hunt 'scandal'
Health care: what a socialist policy could do

By John Lister, London Health Emergency

THE NEWS that rail privatisation has already cost the government £1 billion came in the same week as the publication of a report on the tragic death of the Beecley man who had to be flown to Leeds for a neurosurgery bed after a road accident.

As campagnisers had warned, the report was a whitewash, aimed at blunting the attacks of individual consultants for the appalling shortage of acute and intensive care hospital beds in the capital.

Indeed the report's argument is that there were, in fact, two Intensive Care Unit beds available, at the Royal Free Hospital.

But this effectively claims that just two beds are sufficient to serve the emergency needs of a population in excess of 12 million in the South East of England: in other words, the biggest city in Europe has been reduced to a level that its hospitals could not cope with a serious car crash, let alone any larger disaster.

It is no accident. Under the Tories the NHS has been starved of cash and resources, with a rapid reduction both in the acute beds to handle emergencies and in long-stay beds for the elderly and the mentally ill.

The remaining psychiatric beds are under enormous pressure, while mental health community care schemes are hopelessly short of resources. Almost all long-term care of the frail elderly has now been privatised, with thousands consigned to pretending nursing homes and forced to pay for the privilege through means-tested charges.

And acute beds are now under increasing stress, as a sudden upsurge in emergency admissions, itself apparently a product of the market system and GP fee-holding, swamps hospitals across the country.

The £1 billion for the rail sell-off shows that there is cash to spare for private sector deals which are important, while the NHS grinds into crisis.

A key difference in a socialist policy is to put health care near the top of the agenda for action rather than regard health spending as an obstacle to greater tax cuts.

A key difference is that socialists reject the argument that demand for health care is "infinite". This always leads one to the obvious conclusion: imposing arbitrary limits on health spending, limits which reflect political priorities rather than the need for care.

A third difference is that socialists recognise the need for genuine collective provision of health care, rejecting charges for medicines or treatment.

Health promotion

Fourthly, instead of the Tories' attempt to close hospi-
tals by imposing unjust 'health promotion' schemes which have little impact on the most deprived and unhealthy sections of society, socialists recognise the need for broader social policies to improve health.

And fifth, instead of the Tory obsession with controlling health services through secretive quangos staffed by serve co-thinkers, socialists press for increased commu-
dity involvement and control, with the scrapping of the mar-
et system with its Trusts, fund-holders and 'purchasing authorities', to be replaced by elected local health boards in-
cluding health workers.

A completely new app-
proach to health and health care is required.

While Major's Britain leaves millions eking out an existence in poor housing, on low incomes and pitiful benefits, a socialist health policy would combine with policies on housing, for job creation, a minimum wage, and im-
proved education. It was this contribution in the post-war 'boom' years, rather than the establishment of the NHS, which helped increase life ex-
pectancy and eliminate the diseases of poverty.

In 1980 the Black Report made a series of recommen-
dations for elementary health promotion, including free school milk and meals. The full package was costing then at no more than £3 billion a year; but the Report was ig-
nored by the Tories. Had it

Self-activity key to fight for education

Don't leave schools policy to the state!

RICHARD HATCHER explains how a radical policy for education is the one demand making more active working class support.

WE KNOW - more or less - what we are against in education: against opting out, against cuts, against national tests and league tables.

And we have some idea of what we are for. But how do we get from one to the other? There is a danger of a split between immediate demands in education, however mili-
tantly fought for, and more general longer-term goals. We need to translate the grassroots into a political solution.

There is a danger that the fight against the Thatcher education cuts will be a battle just in class struggle action, rather than the state, as the guarantor of educational progress.

As an example of local de-
mocracy and choice, a local partnership of schools could offer a range of options for children, including the chance to study local history. More important, the school should be locally owned and controlled.

Options

These would be available as options, for a proportion of the school week or term, to any students in the area. Each student would attend his "base" school for part of the time for the common core of the curriculum and the special subjects for the rest.

If demand for one special-

ism outstripped supply, it would signal the need to ex-

WELFARE STATE

pand a particular area of pro-

vision. If selection were nec-

essary, it would be on a basis that did not increase social in-
equalities.

Three more developments would help radically to trans-
form education through self-

activity.

First, the first is the explosive potential of information tech-
nology for self-managed learning, which allows the student much greater choice and undermines the role of the teacher as the gate-keeper of knowledge.

The second is the status of the school student to in-
crease self-management by school students, appropriate to their age, covering both their own learning and their rights as 'citizens' of the school.

If this is not achieved, there is a danger of reinforcing a dis-
astrously damaging anti-

school culture among many students, who feel that at least at work they won't be 'treated like children'.

The third development is breaking down the isolation of the school from the rest of society. The more a school opens itself up to society, the more it motivates students.

A radical vision of this sort can begin to change the relationship of working class school students to their fami-

lies and communities, to knowledge, which is the core of the problem, and creating a new popular culture about education in the working class, within which more spe-
cifically socialist demands can take root.
Sensible, affordable, popular: so why won’t Labour argue for a socialist health policy?

It should also include the resourcing of community-based care for the frail elderly and people with mental illness.

A crash programme to treat all waiting lists should be prepared. Other health services around the world function without waiting lists: a socialist system should do the same in Britain.

A proper costing of these services and the resources needed to provide them should run alongside an inventory of the hospitals and other building stock currently held by the NHS, to draw up an action plan for work to bring them up to modern standards.

All of these items can be costed and of course the work of restoring the fabric and running of our NHS would create thousands of useful jobs across the whole country.

With plans established to meet waiting lists, and hospitals equipped to deal with daily pressures, the way would be opened up to give patients for the first time a right to treatment.

This type of properly-re-sourced, comprehensive health service would rapidly squeeze out the costly and inefficient private sector.

Part-time contracts for hospital consultants should be ended, promoting junior doctors to take the place of any who resign in protest. Medical training should be expanded to draw in new layers of younger doctors to work as GPs.

Of course money alone won’t solve everything that’s wrong with today’s NHS. But, without extra money no amount of structural reform will make things right.

A swift injection of cash – say £2-3 billion – would get the system rolling and wipe out the waiting list. A smaller annual increase in spending would enable a much higher level of service to be sustained.

These sums of money are not prohibitive. They would leave British health services still receiving a smaller share of national wealth than those in many other advanced countries.

Hundreds of millions could actually be recouped by scrapping the bureaucratic monstrosity of the NHS internal market.

It all makes perfect sense. It’s affordable. It’s popular.

So why won’t Labour’s front bench campaign for a socialist health policy?

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Tory pensions rip off: a socialist answer

By Terry Smith

PENSIONERS have been battling against VAT on fuel and defence of their travel concessions: but the abiding problem which must be confronted is the pitiful and declining level of the state pension, which has been slashed to the bone in sixteen years of Tory rule.

Britain spends a smaller proportion of national income on pensions than most member states of the European Union. Pension costs amounted to 9.6 per cent of GDP in Britain, about the same as Sweden, but well below France (12.7%), Belgium (12%) and Germany (11.7%).

Only Portugal and Ireland (6.9% and 7.1%) spend less on pensions than Britain.

The actual value of the basic state pension has been dwindling as the Tories have cut costs, increased spending and forcing people of working age to fork out large sums to private ‘personal pension’ schemes.

In the 1970s the single person’s pension was 20 per cent of average male industrial earnings. In the early 1990s it had dropped to just 15 per cent, and it present policies are unchanged it will reduce to just 9 per cent in 2060 and 6 per cent in 2040.

A major factor in this decline has been Thatcher’s decision in 1980 to break the link between pensions and earnings: the money saved by this is currently running at £10 billion a year, while even greater numbers of pensioners are falling into deep poverty and having to apply for income support.

Yet the irony is that while the pensions budget has been slashed, Britain is among the least vulnerable of all the European countries to the ‘demographic time bomb’, in which the population contains a declining proportion of people of working age compared with numbers of pensioners.

There is clearly plenty of cash in the economy: it’s just that the Tories have given most of it to the rich, and Labour lacks the courage to grab it from them.

The Tory attack on state pensions saved a three-fold purpose: to cut state spending, to boost private pension firms, and to shackle workers to company pension plans.

In fact, while insecurity has grown, with no section of workers apparently immune, there is little evidence that the private sector can compensate for the growing gaps in collective state pension provision.

Savings

The amount of savings required to finance a decent retirement pension through a ‘personal pension’ is extraordinary, meaning that only the best-paid workers could even hope to finance their own retirement.

But company schemes are also in rapid decline, as firms drive towards increasing casualisation of their workforce and shrink from the costs of pension schemes which are no longer seen as needed to attract staff in today’s labour market.

In 1981 employers’ contributions to pension schemes amounted to 3.2 per cent of GDP. In ten years it fell to just 1.2 per cent.

To make matters worse, the pension funds to which workers look for security in old age have been among the most aggressive investors pushing for increased profits – where necessary through rationalisation – often triggering redundancies and closures.

As the Guardian’s Will Hutton, the new guru of the middle classes, points out “The British have been stripped of their state pension for reasons of bogus economy and offered a system in its place which is hazardous, little understood and requires a level of saving that is beyond most of them.”

Tony Blair’s Labour Party is equally silent on pensions, and certainly making no effort to echo the 1992 commitment and argue for interim increases of £3 per week for single pensioners and £15 for couples as a first step in repairing the damage that has been done.

No doubt the party that now foolishly deifies the Tories for its tax increases is fearful that any serious attack on the problem of poverty-line pensions requires radical steps to reclaim the lavish tax hand-outs to the rich which the Tories financed by ripping off the elderly.

Between 1979 and the 1990s the richest 20 per cent increased their share of disposable income from 36 per cent to 43 percent, while the share of the poorest 20 per cent declined from 10% to just 6%.

Had the percentages stayed the same, the richest would be sharing £35 billion less, while the poorest would have gained an extra £2000 per household on present figures.

Even government figures show that a single pensioner in the poorest section of society is over £13 a week worse off in 1994 prices than in 1979.

The Tories keep reassuring us that the economy is on the mend; but somehow British capitalism can never quite afford to support the elderly.

The wholesale switch of priorities from private greed to social need calls for a radical, socialist policy, strongly progressive taxation on the wealthy and corporate profits, and bold steps to take control of company pension funds to avoid more Maxwell-style plunder and prevent these funds being used in speculate against the interests of the workers paying into them.
Confronting the ‘new world order’

Chiapas: Zapata rides again

FOR OVER a year the revolt of the indigenous people of the state of Chiapas has defied the repression of the Mexican armed forces, deliberately reviving the revolutionary heritage of Emilio Zapata. A renewed February offensive by 60,000 troops (half the Mexican army) has failed to locate or destroy the rebels or their charismatic masked leader Subcomandante Marcos, whose statements continue to be published by the popular press. The revolt now coincides with a rise of militancy among Mexico’s powerful working class against the austerity programme introduced as the consequence of a $50 billion US loan to prop up the sagging Mexican peso. It has captured the imagination not only of the poor and oppressed in Mexico itself, but other parts of Latin America – and Europe.

Rosario: ‘The people will be with us’

“THE DIGNITY of Mexican youth, as they form torrents in the streets, reminds us of another time – 1968. In the open space of the grand Plaza they cry ‘Peace yes! War no!’ ‘They are talking about a popular peace. The peace which has been proposed by the Zapata – peace for the peoples of Chiapas.’ The words are those of Rosario Ibarra.

If today’s Zapatistas symbolize the struggles and fortunes of Mexico’s ancient indigenous peoples, Rosario has for more than a decade symbolized the struggles of the country’s urban poor and dispossessed.

Founder of the Mexican Committee of Relatives of Prisoners, Hunted, Exiled and Missing Persons linked to the political processes of the 1980s, Rosario has been the first woman to stand as a presidential candidate, at the head of the list organized by the Fourth Internationalist Revolutionary Workers Party (PRT).

Today, she is setting another precedent. Alongside the Zapatistas’ eponymous Subcomandante Marcos, Rosario speaks as president for the National Democratic Convention (CND), the most important alliance to have bridged the gap between the struggles of the city and the countryside for many years.

Rosario explained why in El Navigante, the CND journal: “We are now together in struggle against those who want to make Mexico little more than a ‘factory in the service of the Yankees’, an impotent ‘reservation’. ‘The people will be with us.’

A deputy in the Federal Assembly from 1988-89, Rosario was re-elected in August 1994. In the tradition of revolutionary militancy she has used her position to further the aims of the mass movement.

In January of this year she launched an International Appeal (below), calling on President Ernesto Zedillo’s government to respect and meet the legitimate demands of the peoples of Chiapas – rather than turn to repression. A month later she launched another, this time to the people of the former Chechen Republic, which has been subjected to a brutal Russian occupation.

Three months on and the Appeal has met with tremendous support. Indeed, as the social and democratic struggles of the Mexican masses begin to accumulate and unify, the impact of the Appeal has broadened.

Rosario calls for vigilance from internationalists. We must respond.

International Appeal

To: Dr Ernesto Zedillo
President of the United States of Mexico

The Mexican people

We the undersigned, citizens of different countries, are following with great attention the political crisis which began in Mexico in January 1994. We are concerned that the legitimate demands of the Indian peoples of the State of Chiapas, which are supported by millions of Mexican and non-Mexican, appear not to be satisfied.

Up until now these demands have been raised without obtaining a positive response from the government.

We think that the only way of avoiding war breaking out in Mexico would be to meet the economic, cultural, political, and social demands expressed by these communities.

We will remain vigilant in our different countries. In order to ensure that the demands for democracy, justice, and freedom raised by these communities be answered positively.

AS THIS issue of Socialist Outlook goes to press, the Russian military are again claiming victory in the war against the Chechens. Calls are made to the popememt. Chechnya is a continuing reminder of the way in which the Russian people themselves have been subjected to a brutal occupation.

Yet, as the Russian people themselves have repeatedly called, the people should be allowed to determine their future in a democratic, national, and culturally peaceful manner.

For the Appeal

[Signature]

[Signature]
Cuban revolution under threat

By John Lister

A BRITISH tobacco combine, BAT, is the first foreign cigarette manufacturer to resume business in Cuba since the industry was nationalised by Fidel Castro.

The company will take over the run-down Cristolos factory in Havana, where the most modern equipment dates back to the 1940s. Other key sectors of Cuban industry and infrastructure are also being opened up to investment from multinational capital as the embattled Cuban economy struggles for survival against ruthless US economic blockade.

Although there are restrictions on external investment, and most joint ventures are restricted to a 50-50 share with the state, the Cuban share is represented by top armed forces officers or top functionaries, opening up the prospect of personal enrichment in what has been one of the most egalitarian societies.

One advantage in the eyes of external investors is that (as in China and Vietnam) free trade unions are still banned in Cuba, leaving workers vulnerable to high levels of exploitation.

The potential difficulties being stored up by this economic policy are worsened by the fact that an imperialist capital injects new technology and investment into selected enterprises, as many as 69 percent of the state-run factories are currently unprofitable, raising the spectre of massive redundancies - and much greater external influence in a restructuring economy.

Castro’s government has also been forced into other economic retreats which are creating serious tensions in Cuba, the most serious of which was legalising use of the dollar up to 20 years ago.

Now Cuban society is divided between those in economic sectors which give them access to dollars and services they can buy - including petrol - and those having only the increasingly worthless Cuban peso.

Reforms to permit free markets for small farmers have effectively demolished the state system of agriculture, and are leading to sharp social divisions as farmers coin in handsome profits, some of it for dollars.

It is estimated that just 15 percent of the Cuban population stands to beneﬁt from the economic reforms, while the vast majority face a worsening of living standards.

Unfortunately Fidel Castro is still standing firm against any relaxation of the rigid proclivity which policies, from political parties, any free- dom at the press or any independent trade union organisation.

He is hoping to manoeu

By Duncan Chapple

THE EUROPEAN sections of International Workers’ Aid are responding to the new military situation in Bosnia.

For the first time in the war, Bosnian troops have the initiative. Serb troops have been chased out of Mostar, which overlooks the Bosnian town of Travnik.

The offensive reflects a new mood of hopelessness in the Bosnian population, according to Travnik, and a new policy from the Bosnian government of greater openness from the UN and foreign press.

Cease-fire

Elsewhere in Bosnia there is renewed despair as the break-down in the erratic cease-fire which had filled the winter months.

Bosnian forces have been retrained and retrained over the winter and now on almost equal terms with the Serb forces that have partitioned the country.

Solidarity with Bosnia

The UN, which wants to contain the war in the Balkans, aims to force a partition settlement which would be massively to the advantage of Serbia in order to stop the war.

International solidarity with the fight of Bosnia for self-determination is more pressing, and more difficult, than ever.

Last week marked the 1.000th day of the Sarajevo air- lift, making it by far the biggest airlift in history. Ninety-five percent of humanitarian aid to the besieged city comes by air.

Roads

But supplies of aid and of other centres of multi-ethnic resistance such as Tuzla have to be transported by road.

Since November 1994 the major supplier of medicines and medical treatment to the three Bosnian enclaves has been refused permission to continue. Serb forces have prevented all but one (a Russian Medico San Frontiers convoy) to the enclaves of Gorazde, Sarajevo and Zepa from passing.

International Workers’ Aid, an international labour movement campaign supported by Socialist Outlook and by sections of the Fourth Interna
tional, is stepping up solidarity work in the Bosnian industrial centre around Tuzla. People in the mining town are very aware that it is war-time again.

Ship

The IWA’s ambitious Ship to Bosnia project is getting substantial support. Ten tonnes of flour and other goods were collected in Malmo, Sweden, and another 20 tonnes have been gathered by the growing Norwegian campaign.

Twelve tonnes of flour and eight tonnes of clothes have been sent to IWA’s Croatian ofﬁce by Dutch campaigners. A new car and Mercedes truck are on the way.

A resolution of last month’s meeting of the United Secretariat of the Fourth International has called for greater solidarity with the fight of the Bosnian people for the self-determination of their multi-ethnic state.

For further details of the Ship to Bosnia, write to sat. Stockholm, Sweden.

Growing international movement backs East Timor

THE STRUGGLE between the Sukarno regime and the East Timorese people deepens by the day.

Faced with a 20-year refusal to submit, the Indonesians have stepped up the terror. At the same time, the clandestine resistance gets stronger and has opened up a second front in Jakarta - expressed by some Indonesian support for the occupation of the US embassy in November 1994.

Alongside the development of solidarity with East Timor in Indonesia, and in Europe, the solidarity movement has been gathering strength. Movements in Sri Lanka, South Korea, Denmark, and the North and South of Ireland have been created in the last year.

In Britain the campaign has won a recent success at the National Union of Students conference when Fernando de Arago, imprisoned leader of the Timorese student movement, was elected to the NUS national committee by a comfortable majority.

Growing international solidarity was also evident at the conference to be NUS Honorary Vice-President for a four year term.

It is urgent that the success must now be followed up with a wide campaign in the labour movement. Both the resistance of the East Timorese and the rapid development of the Indonesian trade union movement have gone unnoticed in the Labour Party.

Labour

Perhaps the reason for this is that this arms em- bargo is a central objective of both the OAS and the Indonesian democratic movement around the world, and employment implications at home. The Labour Party policy is different in substance from that of the government.

The space for this is that following the Portuguese massacre of the East Timorese in 1991, and the twentieth anniversary of December 7 the Indonesian occupation of East Timor.

Workers and peasants in East Timor are more isolated than ever. They are a great deal more than ever. They are an important force in the struggles for independence.

* National day of action: Tuesday, December 8, 1995.
* National day of action: 12 November, 1995. Parliamen
tary debate: Details: phone Will on 0171 281 9297.
A short history of counter-revolution in Turkey

Fascists behind the democratic facade

By Cem Yıldırım

TURKEY has been hitting the headlines in the international media. First we were given the “good news” about the admission of Turkey in the European Customs Union. Then the bad news began. On March 12 mass murderers raided Gaziosmanpasa, a poor district of Istanbul, killing three. The fact that such violence could not have taken place without police collaboration – there is a police station only a few yards away from the incident – provoked a local community demonstration.

This gave the police an opportunity to start a massacre: demonstrators were fired upon from helicopters and police tanks. Nineteen were killed, hundreds injured.

The protests spread to other poor districts of Istanbul and other big cities. The police violence continued and the death toll rose.

Committees

The state authority in Gaziosmanpasa and other neighbourhoods in action collapsed and was taken over by local anti-fascist committees.

The “liberated zones” were suppressed only after army intervention. The order concluded with the funeral of 403 people killed by police fire. There were about 50 people in police custody.

The international media reported these as “sectarian violence” because the victims of the violence were predominantly Alevis. The whole incident has been falsely related to the rebellion of an Islamic sect or, even worse, as violence between different sects of Islam.

The truth is quite different. Traditionally Umranie Gaziosmanpasa and other Alevi districts have always been leftwing strongholds: no rightwing party could ever win any support among this section of the urban poor. The Gaziosmanpasa and Umranie massacres have nothing to do with “sectarian” violence – they are fascist attacks on progressive communities.

Fascism is the best organized force within the Turkish state: the two major center-right parties, DYP and ANAP, have strong far-right factions which call themselves “Ulucu” - a name associated with the youth wing of the fascist National Movement Party, MHP.

Many key positions within the state are held by fascists, so much that even 70 per cent of all the MPs in Turkey’s parliament are of Ulucu origin; two-thirds of the overpopulated Turkish police force consists of militants, members and supporters of the MHP; the rest are Islamic fanatics and the members of centre-right parties. Fascist influence in the state forces has always been a phenomenon of Turkish politics, but a large scale “fascisation” process of the state began in full stream only after the military coup in 1980. This process was accelerated with the beginning of the Kurdish guerrilla movement in 1984.

The MHP’s mission has been to create and staff a counter-revolutionary force within the Turkish government. The two major center-right parties, DYP and ANAP, have strong far-right factions which call themselves “Ulucu” - a name associated with the youth wing of the fascist National Movement Party, MHP. Fascist influence in the state forces has always been a phenomenon of Turkish politics, but a large scale “fascisation” process of the state began in full steam only after the military coup in 1980. This process was accelerated with the beginning of the Kurdish guerrilla movement in 1984. MHP ministers provided an excellent reservoir of recruitment for the “special forces” - counter-insurgency units operating mainly in Kurdistan alongside the army under the instructions of an autonomous and “unofficial” state organisation known as the “counter-guerrilla”.

These special forces are responsible for the most ruthless atrocities in Kurdistan, including the systematic torture of civilians and the assassination of over 2,000 Kurdish and pro-Kurdish intellectuals.

In order to turn Turkish Kurdistan into a large prison through their “dirty war,” the Turkish state needed to create an unprecedented machinery of violence dispersed among the police, army, and the special forces. This machinery is not merely employed for the suppression of the Kurdish revolt, but against any protest from those sectors of society which have been suffering the most from ever worsening living conditions.

‘Democratisation’

In this very specific sense Turkey has lived through a counter-revolution for the last fifteen years. The liberals of both Europe and Turkey have preferred to see instead a process of “democratisation.” This view is based on an illusion that there is a “dualism” between the coalition government and the hardline institutions of the state.

However, while it is no secret that the generals have more say on state affairs than the prime minister, the fact that a “liberal” government has done nothing to change this arrangement and has been massively influenced by these same “hardliners,” should raise serious questions about their alleged liberalism.

At issue here is not so much a “dualism” as a mutual sharing of power.

One reason for the liberal illusions is the widespread view that the forces in power in contemporary Turkey are the only alternative to a “fundamentalist” takeover.

The conspiracy theories which have become very popular in Turkish and international media are useless in understanding what happened in Istanbul. There is no mystery to be solved.

What the police tried to do in Istanbul was to repeat what they have been doing in Kurdistan for over a decade. They tried to crush the anti-fascist strongholds.

Fascism depends on its ability to attack progressive forces. In Turkey these are the Kurdish liberation movement, socialists, the working class, university students and the urban poor.

There has been a dramatic increase in violent attacks on all these sectors of society in recent years by both the civilian fascists and the police. The recent incidents in Istanbul are a particularly bloody continuation of this process.
Sinn Fein draws up a right wing ‘Framework’

By David Coven

AN PHOBLACHT/Republican News recently carried two centre-spreads on a ‘Charter for Justice and Peace’. The Charter was presented to the 1995 Sinn Fein Ard Fheis by the Ard Chomhairle (National Committee) and is intended to open a debate, to which readers were invited to put their views.

Under the headings of Self Determination, Covenant with Protestants, Strengthening of Democratic Participation, Law, Protection of Rights, Policing, Civil Society, Cultural Rights, Economic Regeneration, Social Justice and Implementation and Transitional Arrangements, the document, written by AC member Tom Hartley, clearly represents the views of the leadership on these questions.

Calling for a debate in APRN rather than discussion and voting at the Ard Fheis makes the exercise more a consultation exercise than a real debate. Tony Blair has nothing to teach the Republican leadership on party democracy.

The Charter itself is a nonedit collection of good intentions and non-controversial proposals which could easily be embraced by the Alliance Party and the SDLP in the North of Ireland and anyone to the left of the Tory Party in Britain.

It calls, for example, for the incorporation of the UN Covenant on Civil and Political Rights into “domestic law”, cultural pluralism, and equal treatment for the Irish language and declares itself in favour of pre-school nursery provision, all worthy proposals in themselves – but hardly very radical.

The most significant point about the Charter for Peace and Justice in Ireland is that it applies not to Ireland but to the Northern State.

Irish self-determination, it says, “can best take place after a defined period of national reconciliation (the transitional period)”. Twenty-five years into the current phase of the struggle, the Sinn Fein leadership defers Irish self determination to the end of an undelined transitional period.

Demands on British

In Charter for Justice and Peace in Ireland is in reality a series of demands on the British direct rulers for the reform of the Northern State, a set of demands less radical than those put forward by “official” Sinn Fein before the 1969 split. The Charter might be called Sinn Fein’s Framework Document.

The Framework Document agreed between London and Dublin is clearly based on the Unionist veto. Neither the Tories nor Labour will act as persuaders of the Unionists.

In her public statements since becoming Labour’s Northern Ireland spokesperson, Marjorie Mowlam has strongly supported the Framework Document and concentrated on reassuring Unionists of Labour’s neutrality on the question of a united Ireland.

Labour’s policy of unity by consent, insomuch as it still exists, places much greater emphasis on the “consent” rather than on “unity”.

If the British won’t try to persuade the Unionists of the value of a united Ireland, then presumably that task will be left to the “nationalist family” and possibly the US government. Neither has been successful in the past.

If, at the end of this transitional period the Unionists still say “no” as they certainly will, in the separate referenda on both sides of the border, what will Sinn Fein’s response be then?

They will have no alternative but to finally accept the Unionist veto and, following that logic, the Northern State itself. Will they take their seats in the new, devolved government at Stormont Castle?

In this situation, there is one sense in which the demands of the Charter might be radical and that is because the Stormont State has in the past shown itself to be completely incapable of reform.

Basic democratic rights such as “one person, one vote”, the fair allocation of housing and the ending of employment discrimination against Catholics were all impossible in the regime run from Stormont until the British abolished it in 1972.

Even after 23 years of direct rule from Britain, Catholics are 2.5 times more likely to be unemployed than Protestants. The chances of reforming what Charles Haughey once called a “failing political entity” are zero, even if Dublin provides some guarantees for Nationalists as envisaged in the Framework Document.

The Orange State was built on the partitionist settlement imposed by the British in 1921, a settlement which denied the Irish people the right to self determination.

In bigotry, reaction, sectarianism and discrimination come not from the prejudices of the Unionists but flowed directly from the need to maintain itself and the Union.

The Unionist veto is the denial of the right to self determination, the Northern State its physical expression and the British its guarantor. Any “settlement” within this framework is, by definition, the opposite of self-determination.

Self determination is not divisible. Holding referenda on both sides of the border to rubber-stamp whatever emerges from future talks is not self determination but the denial of self determination. It is designed to legitimate Britain’s role in Ireland.

The tragedy is that the organisation which for more than 20 years led the struggle against British rule is now resorting to a kind of partitionist thinking which forgets the lessons of Derry 1972, when the demand for Civil Rights was drowned in blood by the British army.

In the new For a Workers’ Republic

Irish Journal of the Fourth International Message of the Framework: they’re staying, Sinn Fein Ardfheis - not waving, drawing, Which way to workers’ unity?, red marx, Send cheap copies to ‘Outlook International’ to Box 1109, Llandudno WA 2U.

IRELAND UNFREE

Maire O’Shea - The revolutionary rascal

MANY OF Socialist Outlook’s readers will have worked with, or heard of Maire O’Shea. STEVE COHEN offers this obituary in memory of a friend and comrade.

Maire O’Shea
Psychoterapist
World communist
Irish republican
Motorwoman from hell
Maire O’Shea
Died aged seventy six
Forever young
Forever in her cigarettes.
Don’t have a minutes silence
In honour of Maire O’Shea
Instead have a loud polieic
Don’t give up smoking in memory of Maire O’Shea

Instead make it compulsory
Join the Maire O’Shea brigade
And follow her silvery trail of cigarette ash towards the barricades
The silvery trail of ash that followed our Maire like a fuse behind a bomb
Participate in the Maire O’Shea grand prix
Drive your car in all directions
Simultaneously
Towards the barricades
Surprise the enemy
Terrify your friends
Pull down borders for Maire O’Shea
Starting with Ireland
To the memory of our Maire
A friend who never stopped arguing
A comrades who never stopped fighting
A smoker who never stopped missing the ashtray
A political autopsy revealed thirty five petition sheets

In her handbag
For fifty three different causes
Along with numerous leaflets for numerous demos
Assorted medical reports to spring insecure patients from secure hospitals
The entire tobacco stock of the state of Virginia
Bright red lipstick
And a request to mount a picket in case of cardiac arrest
To the memory of our Maire
A Catholic who became a catalyst
An atheist who followed the teachings of St Aquedios
An opponent of all know privilege
It was a privilege to know her.
So remember the Birmingham Six
The Guildford Four
And the Maire O’Shea One.
Probably the only revolutionary who fell asleep during her own conspiracy trial
And still beat the rap.
The fantastic world of the Socialist Workers Party

Harry Sloan examines the symptoms of galloping sectarianism in Britain’s biggest far-left group

Q: WHAT GROWS all the time, yet never appears to get any bigger?
A: The Socialist Workers Party.
The SWP now claims 8,400 members, which is four times the rapid decline of Militant makes it by far the biggest organisation on the British left.

We keep being told in growing, but in reality it’s not the case that many of them allegedly joining the SWP are playing any effective role as new members.

One explanation of this phenomenon came to light during the march 25 FTAC demonstration against education cuts. SWP militants stood on the Victoria Embankment approaching people at random as they walked past to join the march, asking them if they would like to join the SWP.

Joke

Among those who “signed up” for a joke, no questions asked, was a leading member of Socialist Outlook. For all they knew, he could have been a Tory or a policeman.

There has been previous experience of this type of “mass” recruitment on the British left. In the early 1970s Gerry Healy’s Workers Revolutionary Party embarked on a frenzied “enrolment drive” aimed at rapidly reaching 10,000 members. Young WRP activists were encouraged to go out and mobilise members on doorstep sales, on High Streets and wherever they could find a captive audience.

Healy’s daily paper Workers Press carried campaign features describing in the news that two pensioners had been “recruited” going up in a lift. The accompanying WRPers had made recruits in chip shops and by canvassing car drivers stuck at traffic lights.

Of course it was a fantasy—a symptom of decline rather than a springboard to growth of the WRP. Experienced members, saddled with long lists of “recruits” wasted their timeless hours trawling around false ad

 advertised or attempting to organise dozens of indifferent or hostile “members” who had agreed to “join”, just to get rid of a troublesome recruiter.

There is little reason to believe that a formula which failed to work spectacularly in the 1970s should succeed now. And it does seem that this symptom of sectarianism is an effort to compensate for the SWP’s objective failure to make its mark on the British labour movement.

Yet Socialist Worker presents itself as a no-nonsense paper for ordinary trade unionists. So it comes as something of a shock to find that the SWP’s 8,400 members just 1,500 attended its Trade Union Conference on March 18.

If the centre-page coverage in Socialist Worker is to be believed, speakers at the socialist and militant wasp’s nest were papers.

But what is the real political impact of the organisation after almost three decades of public activity?

Marginal

With the exception of anti-racist work, where their Anti Nazi League has managed to capitalise on the political weakness and internal divisions of the Anti Racist Alliance, the SWP are little more than a marginal factor in the political life of the labour movement. The SWP of course stands outside the political battles now taking place in the Labour Party, as it has done since the mid-1960s. Their answer to any worker wanting to fight for socialism is to leave the Labour Party and “join the SWP.”

But the SWP’s isolation from these keen struggles is less surprising than its lack of serious impact in the trade unions. Its ambitions have since the early 1960s been restricted to “building a rank and file movement within the unions.” This formula has translated into recruiting individuals and avoiding any real ad


tact with the existing unions committees, which might call for alliances with other left wing forces.

A conscious policy of refusing to stand for national executive or regional positions in the unions, and a persistent failure to get along with any of the dependent left forces in the unions means that the SWP has little or no influence at anything more than branch level.

As a conscious policy of refusing to stand for national executive or regional positions in the unions, and a persistent failure to get along with any of the dependent left forces in the unions means that the SWP has little or no influence at anything more than branch level.

No fight

The SWP remains incapable of working seriously within such broad-based unions or even in working together with other bodies against the instant, often criminal, attack on the NUS by the trade union movement. Yet in the SWP it is that political failure of the SWP which compels its leaders and its members to retreat into their own fantastic world: a world in which there is no need for a united front, because they are already on their way to be won over one-by-one to join a new mass party — through a combination of denunciation and the most basic propaganda.

Given the scale of this mission, 8,000 members is not too large. Many of these appear already to be flagging, even as a new list of beggars and unstable paper members is signed up. It is a new trick. And it still won’t work.

Obituaries

Lou Guohua, Chinese Trotskyist

By Wang Fanxi

Lou Guohua (Lou Kuo-hua) alias Zhen Chen, Yi Ding, Shao Yuan, Ze Cheng, died on March 8. He joined the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) in 1927; he accepted Trotskyism in 1929 and joined China’s first Trotskyist organisation (Wemen de hua, “Our Word”) in 1929.

He was a delegate to the 1931 conference of the Left Opposition of the CCP, Arrested by Chiang Kai-shek’s political police, together with almost all the newly elected Executive Committee, he was jailed for six years.

After his release from prison in 1937 he continued his revolutionary work in the Trotskyist movement. He was forced to spend the rest of his life in Hong Kong after the arrival of the Maoist army in Shanghai in 1949.

In the late 1950s, when Trotskyism was forgotten from the colony and Trotskyist literature was suppressed, he established Xinda club (a “Sincere Press”), which subsequently published a dozen or so books.

It was mainly through his contacts and influence that those Hong Kong youth who in the 1970s were inclined to anarchism (and gathered around Qian miaodao “the Society of Seventies”) were won to Trotskyism and the renamed Revolutionary Marxist League, of which he was a leading member.

Throughout his adult life Lou was a professional revolutionary from the same time he was a revolutionary with a profession. That is not to say that he was an amateur or part-time revolu

tionary. It simply means that he was always had a job at the same time as working for the revolution.

All genuinely revolution

ary organisations in poor countries, and especially the Chinese Trotskyist organisation, have known financial hardship of a sort that comes from the difficult countries, and even young Chinese radicals in present-day Hong Kong, can hardly imagine.

No dues

There were no donations, no dues, and no contributions whatsoever.

Lou Guohua acted as a one-man fund raiser for Chinese Trotskyist. He usually worked for a salaried account. He was exceedingly frugal, and saved from his income to help other comrades.

For example, when comrades Li Catian died in the winter of 1936, it was Lou who paid for her burial. Almost every member of the earlier generations of our comrades was in one way or another his beneficiary.

Apart from being the publisher of the Chinese Trotskyist movement, Lou Guohua was also a brilliant author in his own right. He was a distinguished author on such work, about which he wrote numerous articles and a book.

In these writings he exp

ressed how China’s Maoist authorities puffed up Lu Xun in order to obscure Chen Duxiu’s founding role in China’s New Cultural Movement of 1915-1921. Although Lu Xun was modern China’s best-known essayist and writer, he actually played only a supporting role in that seminal movement, while Chen Duxiu was renowned as its “Commander-in-Chief.”

Chen, who founded the CCP in 1921, has been a nonperson since 1931, because he facilitated Chinese Trotskyism. This is why the myth of Lu Xun’s role in the movement had to be in

voked.

Lou’s book exposed the falsification, quoting extensive

ative evidence.

Slander

He also exposed the Maoi

serman’s slander of Lu Xun in 1938 as an agent of Japan (to match Stalin’s slandering of Trotsky as a Hitler agent), and advanced the hypothesis that Lu Xun’s supposed “Letter to the Trotskyists” of the 1936, in which the Trotskyist Chen Qichang and his comrades were accused of treachery—giving making money to the Japanese, was written by the Stalinist Feng Xuefeng.

Today both Lou’s theses have been confirmed by new materials published in China, such as the posthumous publication of an article by Hu Feng, Lu Xun’s main disciple and the first victim after 1949 of the Maoists’ policy on literature and art.

Lou Guohua’s death age over ten years. Before his death, he lost the power of hearing. After this his body was handed over to the University of Hong Kong, where it was studied for the next six years. Finally he lost the power of sight and lapsed into unconsciousness ten days before his death. He is survived by his wife, a daughter, and three sons.

Lou Guohua was the pub

isher and "philosopher" of China’s Trotskyist movement.

He remained a Trotskyist and supporter of the Fourth International until his death. He died loved and respected by the whole generation of Hong Kong Trotskyist.
“The most important strategist for the socialist movement”


THIS IS an ambitious work. Mandel’s is a bold case for Trotsky as “the most important strategist for the socialist movement” in the twentieth century.

But it is no hero worship. Mandel’s criticism of Trotsky’s belief that imperialism had made a further growth in production impossible. The western boom after the Second World War proved him wrong.

So too does he take issue with Trotsky’s support for the banning of factions during the Russian civil war. It undermined socialist democracy and resistance to Stalin’s bureaucratic terror.

As President of the Petrograd Soviet, leader of the Russian revolution and Red army, Trotsky was undoubtedly one of the twentieth century’s key figures. But he also left an important theoretical legacy. Mandel is at his most passionate in defending this contemporary relevance of Trotsky’s ideas. The law of combined and uneven development, the unity of the world economy, the importance of internationalism, Trotsky’s warnings on fascism, his warnings on the national question - these are all of immense importance.

As we approach the new millennium Trotsky’s theorisation of international political economy is as insightful as when first written. Imperialism continues to block the industrialisation of the dominated countries and opposes any significant democratisation of their political structures.

This is what workers are finding out in the newly South Africa - and it’s a bitter lesson: “In a very practical way the working class, as soon as it has conquered state power, will begin to address the tasks of socialist revolution. Without stages or interruptions, the revolution will combine the achievement of national democratic goals with the beginning of the achievement of socialist goals.”

This is what happened in the Russian revolution and in China and Cuba.

Trotsky also understood that the expression of internationalism sentiment and duty goes beyond statements and acts of international solidarity.

Global movement

Part of the struggle in the national arena to build a party which can reconcile and channel the fragmented consciousness of its members is the simultaneous struggle to build a global movement - one which fights for the exploited majority of all lands without subordination to any one particular section.

After the rise of Stalinism this is the task Trotsky considered to be his most important. It was affirmed in the birth of the Fourth International.

None of the revolutionary currents that have emerged in recent times has been willing to build such a pluralist democratic international. This means, according to Mandel, that “the struggle for the mass international of tomorrow is today, and probably for a long time to come, linked to the struggle to build the Fourth International.”

The International remains small. However, its coordination of socialist activities across the world, its unflinching hostility to capitalism in the face of the world’s largest; its consistent opposition to Stalinism and support for the self-activity of the working class, are achievements in themselves.

The extent to which Trotsky’s ideas can be able to change the world is still to be proved in practice. It is for history to decide. Trotsky as Alternative is an excellent contribution to this struggle.

Forrest Gump: an ode to idiocy

SIMON DOYLE reviews the Oscars

THE OSCAR ceremony is like a box of KFC face wipes - wet, sanitised, insubstantial. And very American.

If there is one thing the ritual is not about it is talent. The Oscars are a local rite in which mediocre people are held up as examples where stardom is an end in itself, celebrity a fetish for the shallow.

At no point does the question of acting skill arise as the principal criterion. Tom "ham" Hanks is proof of that. These tokens are doled out for other qualities.

It is hard to be precise about the attributes required by a successful Oscar winner. It has something to do with films that are popular - celebrations, messages and moralities taken all day to treat. So do films which make mountains of moolah.

The judges - or "academy" - do not like a dose of idealism, preferably wrapped in a sugar coating of glossy sentimentality. Forrest Gump fits the bill perfectly.

Those who said that last year’s acclaim for Schindler’s List was evidence of a new maturity in Hollywood have been proved wrong.

Forrest Gump is a celebration of shallowness; stupidity made fashion.

The academy chose the famous Forrest Gump over the brilliant Pulp Fiction because it was safe. A silly epic of small town America is going to win out every time.

But it is not the conservatism of the academy which is truly striking, but what the popularity of the film dictates about America. Since release the movie’s simplistic protagonist has become a veritable icon; a dellor role model for American males. You too can succeed - as long as you don’t think too hard about the world and your place in it.

Puerile

Zemeckis’ puerile ode to idiocy makes intellect a burden, foolishness a virtue. And a big chunk of America is lapping it up. “As Forrest says...” is becoming the catchphrase of the year - everyone is required to memorise their own selection of Gump quotes to get them through the day.

What better summons up the helpless and powerless ordinariness of Americans face than the “life is a box of chocolates” nonsense? He is the man for the moment. Tom Hanks’ kick with a flag salute to home and hearth has relevance for us too.

The themes of family, home and Christian ethics are not so far from Tony Blair’s own chosen agenda. Tony and Tom are on the same think-small anti-political crusade. They share a fantasy world without class division, without institutionalised oppression, without the possibility of real change.

It is a hopeless, helpless ideology of defeat and despair.

But, then, stupid is, as stupid does...
No national programme

In S.O. 79 Neil Murray claims that “Socialism has to be clarified”. He then proceeds to outline a version of socialism in which “...the commanding heights of the economy being taken out of private hands and run by a system of councils of workers’ and consumers’ delegates, accountable and recallable, co-ordinated into a national programme. Leaving aside the unusual idea that consumers (i.e. excluding non-consumers) will be the chief ally of the proletariat in a future revolution, this statement means that Neil is simply repeating formulas rather than analysing the world.

The demise of the workers’ states’ has belatedly proven that Trotsky was right in opposing the Stalinist notion that socialism could be built in isolated economically backward countries. Socialism has to be a mode of production with a higher productivity of labour power in the twentieth century.

All Blaikie prattle about ‘socialist values’ pales into insignificance in the light of this profound historical-materialist criterion.

Socialism cannot be established in isolation in Britain but could conceivably be established on a European scale given the advanced character and scale of the production of Western Europe in the latter’s economic unity. For instance, it is conceivable that a unification of the aerospace industry of Western Europe with that of Russia and Eastern Europe under the planned economy of a United Socialist States of Europe (and eastwards) could well outstrip today’s North American aerospace industry.

A prerequisite of socialism is therefore the seizure of state power, i.e., of political power, in a series of countries and the establishment of a planned economy at the level of a union of federations of these states.

Of course the first step will be the seizure of state power in one country but the next step is not the elimination of private property on a national scale in this one country but an international extension of the revolution, i.e., more seizures of state power. Quite clearly, world imperialism is in a state fit to quietly by whilst the proletariat seizes power in one advanced capitalist country and marks us wholesale expropriation of the bourgeoisie at a national level.

In addition, a particular problem in Britain is that the bulk of British capital cannot be expropriated by the proletariat of Britain because this capital is not in the form of means of production located in Britain but in the form of African coal mines, New York real-estate, etc.

Put briefly, our task is not to formulate a national economic programme but a national programme for the seizure of state power at national and continental level.

Roy Rudditt, NW London

‘Fluffies’ at Shoreham?

THE NORMALLY sea-front of the Sussex town of Hove has been transformed in the last two months.

It is here that protesters against the creolisation of their live in animals congregated day in day out in a bitter struggle recalling the picket lines of the miners’ strike of 1984/85.

Every seven to nine lorries carrying sheep and calves destined forveal production - hit the picket lines after zigzag across road encircled by police officers and even helicopters.

Hastily erected spiked steps line the seafront entrances to the harbour.

When demonstrators appear in force, police string rolls of razor wire along the fence tops and bring in the riot squad, complete with full face visors, riot shield and extendable barons.

The cost of this policing - borne by East Sussex council tax payers - is £200,000 a night. The police bill is £15 million so far. Yet East Sussex County Council has a deficit of £12 million pounds, and Brighton Council owes £20 million; both bringing threats of vital service cuts and disastrous land sales.

In no way do the pickets confirm to some stereotype of well be dressed fluffies oblivious to human suffering and only caring for animals. Here is a cross section of ordinary people: many women, many children, wage earners, pensioners and students, many new to political activity of any kind.

The energy and commitment of the activists is exemplified by the course. It is set to stop the animal export racket.

Dave Barnham, Hove

Bemused by Rumours

SOME rather strange comments seem to have found their way into the centre pages of your last issue (Tories have never had it so bad! SO 80).

Apparently author Toby Brewer believes that Jim Callaghan’s Labour government was "eventually brought down by industrial militancy".

Although this fits the mythology of those public sector union leaders who are most mystified of any new strike action today, it is not the case.

The Labour government fell not, during the 1978-79 Winter of Descon.

The troubles were a symptom of growing working class hostility to the government, not the direct cause of its defeat.

Callaghan’s government had only been coping up by a squeaky deal with the Liberals and then the Ulster Unionists. After surviving three years of wage cuts on the working class it was defeated in a general election.

Perhaps even more curious is Brewer’s assertion that the divided Tories are in such a state that “they are too weak to get out of their sick bed to smash the welfare state.”

In the smashing of welfare rights is one issue that unites the Tories, and they have been having serious success in this mission. If only the labour movement could have been in fighting back.

Tim Smith, Oxford

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Please return to 300 Club, PO Box 1108, London, N4 2UU.
To advertise your event in Socialist Outlook write to ‘What’s Happening’, PO Box 1109, London N4 2UU by Friday April 21.

APRIL
Sat 8 FROM the Cradle to the Grave Welfare State Network Conference on education, pensions and the NHS 11am University of London Union, Malet St WC2. CUBA: end the blockade day school 10am-5pm Conway Hall Red Lion Square, London WC1 registration £2/£3 for day school and evening talks. Fiesta only E3.50 50p from CSC Day school, 129 Seven Sisters Road, London N7 7DQ. Tel 0171 283 6542. WEEK of action on Child Support Agency presents details CARCAGA 0171 637 7009 Sun 9 LIBERATION/EDITORIAL board London. Weds 12 BREAK the blockade of Cuban Solidarity campaign meeting 7.30pm Oval House Theatre by Oval Tube 52-54 Kennington Oval with speakers George Galloway MP and Frank Chalmers. Details: 0171 737 2204.
Thurs 13 THE FAMILY institution in crisis West London Socialist Outlook Forum 7.30pm Eating Town Hall W8.
Sat 22 TRADE UNION anti-fascist day school supported by Leicester and district TUC Secular Hall Humberstone Gate. Leicester. 10am-4.00pm details: Leicestershire Anti-fascist Alliance.

TUESDAY VIEWPOINT
The mid-March issue of International Viewpoint, out last week, features two major developments, SARRIA FELLAH opens a new of women and fundamentalism in Algeria, the USS and France showing important global trends. FRANCOIS VERCAMMEN has edited a selection on the western European Communist parties. A major feature on the last five years in Eastern Europe and Russia by CATHERINE SAMARY reflects parts of a discussion at a recent meeting of the Fourth International. Single copies cost £2. For one year—£22. Send your cheque, payable to ‘Outlook International’ to PO Box 1109, London N4 2UU.

Porcupine Press, new Marxist publishers, announce ambitious schedule

Pricking the left into new ideas

By Balka Kumar

At a Time when Left bookshops are closing and radical publishing houses abandon socialist authors and revolutionary literature, the arrival of a new Marxist publisher is very welcome.

Porcupine Press was officially launched at a reception on Thursday March 30 at the Woburn Bookshop, Woburn Walk, London WC1. Its owners and live-wires are Barry Biekgart and Andrew Burgin who in defiance of obiter dicta for Marxism promise to publish stimulating books in the revolutionary Marxist tradition.

As comrade Burgin said, this modest initiative is their contribution to the renewal of Marxism and a resource for the socialist and labour movement. He urged support for the venture and for an engaged relationship between the press and its readership. The presence at the reception of members of many revolutionary groups and independent activists is a good sign for the future. True to their word, the very first title on display has an unapologetic title, "In Defence of the Russian Revolution": a collection of writings by leading Bolsheviks between 1917 and 1923 like Radek, Lenin, Kamenev, Zinoviev, Bukharin and Trotsky. The book will be reviewed in the next issue of Socialist Outlook. Most of the articles are unavailable in English and they have been edited and annotated by Al Richardson.

After Clause 4 vote: is the Party over? Socialism, Social Democracy & Revolution

Socialist Outlook is holding a special day of discussion and debate for defenders of Clause 4. To be held in North London on Saturday 13 May, the conference will examine the historical record of social democracy, the relationship between social democrats and the reformist organization and the future of the Labour Party. Discussions will cover nationalisations, why socialists call for a Labour vote, and other important issues of concern to those fighting for socialism in the 1990s. Open to Socialist Outlook supporters and those interested in our ideas. For tickets, send a cheque for £5 to E3 unawed to Socialist Outlook Fund, PO Box 1109, London N4 2UU.

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Sack Major, not teachers! SAVE OUR SCHOOLS!
UN backs invasion of Iraq ‘safe haven’

Turkey out of Kurdistan!

By Simon Doyle

So much for the ‘safe haven’ to protect Kurds against Iraq’s Saddam Hussein. Bombs are raining down upon Kurdish villages – and the west is doing nothing to stop it.

Such is the hypocrisy of the imperialist powers that the French-British-US United Nations military detachment even suspended its flights over the “safe” area so Turkey could launch its invasion. As the 35,000 troops push deeper into Iraq, 2,000 refugees have been forced from their homes. Torture is rife. Many Kurdish villages have been burned. F-16 and F-5 planes make regular bombing raids. Civilians are seized and forcibly brought to Turkey.

Far from being a solution, the UN is part of the problem. It goes along with the US, which calls it legitimate self-defence of its key NATO ally Turkey!

From behind the sham of defending the Kurds from aggression the real motivation of western involvement is becoming clear - to ensure US interests in the region and provide a militarised buffer zone to fortress Europe.

It is the ninth cross-border operation since 1992. It has no hope of achieving its declared aim of erasing the PKK. Instead the Turkish regime is using it as a way of shoring up its position at home. It is clear however that the Turkish state will never permit any form of Kurdish self-government.

They have to smash the semi-autonomy Iraq’s Kurds gained in the aftermath of the Gulf War. Kirkuk oil has always attracted their attentions. There are now some indicators to suggest a deal with the US involving a long-term invasion.

Ever since the war ended there has been intensive talk in official Turkish circles about establishing a “Turkish protectorate” in Northern Iraq. Candaemir Onhon, the Turkish ambassador in London, gave the game away by refusing to give a time limit on the occupation.

Anti-imperialist forces around the world must mobilise now to demand the immediate withdrawal of the Turkish troops from Northern Iraq.

A defeat for Turkey in this new adventure would mean a defeat for the forces of international reaction and counter-revolution everywhere.

INSIDE: Fascists behind Turkey’s democratic facade – special feature page 10