Joy Gardner, Brian Douglas

MURDERED BY RACIST COPS

A week which saw horrific court revelations of the routine brutality of police in deporting “illegal immigrants” from Britain, a black man, Brian Douglas, died as a result of police violence.

Brian died after his skull had been fractured by one of the new batons issued to police by right wing Home Secretary Michael Howard. He became another in a long line of victims of racist brutality from the Metropolitan Police (see page 4).

Joy Gardner died two years ago when three cops from Scotland Yard’s special Alien Deportation Group burst into her house, bound, strapped and gagged her. Only after they had wound two rolls of sticking plaster around her head did one of them notice she had stopped breathing.

Only now have the officers responsible been brought before the court.

Almost as horrendous as their testimony explaining what they did to her was the revelation that it was a routine operation. Most such cases are never publicised.

But deportations will become more frequent if the Tories have their way.

Tory MPs and ministers, desperate to play the racist card before the next election are planning an escalating crackdown on illegal immigrants.

Will Tony Blair’s team have the guts to come out and oppose this brutal expression of state racism?

Responding to his suspicious death in police custody, friends and family of Brian Douglas picketed London’s Kennington police station last week. reports CATHERINE WHEELER.

With banners and cries for justice, around 600 voiced their outrage under the vigilant eye of a police video camera. Cars hooted support. Brian’s grief-stricken mother laid a wreath at the station entrance. “All we want is justice” she explained to a nearby police officer.

Over 900 protesters then marched to Kennington Park. Police ordered protesters by forming a line just beyond the entrance to the park. A call for calm. Issued on behalf of the family, managed to dissipate the tension as the bulk of protesters entered the park.

Donald Douglas, Brian’s brother, said “We came here to protest against the brutality of the police and to seek justice.”
Oppose the ‘nuclear future’

By Bali Kumar

Privatisation has become massively unpopular. The proposed sale of eight nuclear power stations for an estimated £3.3 billion is scraping the bottom of a contaminated barrel.

Michael Heseltine has offered us the sweetener of an eight per cent cut in electricity bills – but an increase in the annual fuel sector. But the real winners have been the boardroom executives and the institutional investors. Privatisation maximisation will be the prime concern of the money men not safety. The question of disposal has been deferred for five years, to be used for future generations to shoulder the production of nuclear waste and its commercial exploitation is business.

Labour has refused to confront the big questions of nuclear power. It has made no commitment even to phase it out. Katy Andrews adds: Three anti-nuclear protesters were arrested at Stratford Station in East London on May 18 for blocking the path of a nuclear waste carrying train. Trains laden with the nuclear rods from Bradwell in Essex have secretly used the North London and Gospel Oak lines on their way to Selby for many years.

The cargoes continue under their cover – if a container were to break open radioactive material would be widely dispersed. Two of the demonstrators climbed onto the tracks and sat on the tracks while a third sprayed “Help! Danger!” on the flank carrying the rods. They were arrested and later freed on bail after a demonstration at Forest Gate police station. The case is due to be heard in June.

The Nuke train: driven by profit, decorated by protesters

Labour debates policy on Welsh Assembly Jobs for the boys?

By Ed George

THE WELSH Labour Party has committed itself to a Welsh Assembly to be established in the first year of the next Labour government.

Although this is a step forward for socialists need to be guarded. Tony Blair has outlined the core of the policy: “Labour” he explained “stands for a moderate, sensible reform.”

“Moderate” and “sensible” means no powers to establish primary legislation and no revenue raising capabilities. Unlike the proposals for Scotland, the Welsh version is to be elected by a first past the post system.

Essentially what is being put forward is an inept Government! The plan is to drop the last minute and referred to the executive for further discussion.

And “boys” it will be proposals to ensure the representation of women were dropped at the last minute and referred to the executive for further discussion.

On a more positive note, the Conference backed a call for an all-Wales march on the theme of “Wales demands an Assembly” against the recommendation of the executive. This would be a significant event in Wales.

As is traditional at gathering of Welsh Labour a great deal of but air was generated attacking Plaid Cymru. “Nationalists” Blair told the conference, “would tear our country apart.”

Sadly, Mr. Blair’s abhorrence toward nationalism is rather selective. It does not apply to extend to imperialism, big power, oppression British nationalism.

Indeed, the assembly proposals were explicitly motivated as the “best way to defend the union”. Now we have to step up to the pressure for an assembly that is actually worth having – one that has the right to determine its own powers, that is democratic and representative, the kind of assembly that would allow the Welsh people themselves to decide on their relationship with the British union and the EU.

Union struggle can halt rail sell-off in its tracks

By Greg Tucker

As train operating companies this month put up for sale the form of rail privatisation was again changed with the announcement that most fares will be pegged to the rise in inflation.

A Gas or Telekom style sell-off has been abandoned – except for Railtrack – and instead the main rail services are to be subcontracted.

The new owners of the train operating companies will have to pay Railtrack to run over the lines, will have to hire out the rolling stock from another company, will be told the minimum number of services they have to run and the maximum fares in most cases.

Their only assets will be the existing staff and therefore their only real room for manoeuvre attacking those staff’s pay and conditions.

Even the most draconian attacks on rail workers will not be able to provide major cost savings – instead any profits will have to be provided by the government. For years the publicly owned British Rail has been told it has to allow fares to rise in order to self-finance – now it is clear that private railways are to have massive built-in subsidies.

Even with these changes rail privatisation remains massively unpopular save for a few die-hard Tories and those managers looking to join the ranks of the super-rich privatised company directors.

Which is why the new pamphlet “Signal Failure – Rail Privatisation and the fight against it” from the RMT Thames Valley District Council is a timely publication.

The pamphlet exposes the reality of privatisation and its consequences for service users as well as those who work in the industry, how safety is already being compromised, and how services will be cut.

As one manager put it: “We are here to make a profit, not make the trains run on time”.

It examines the reality of the “glory days” of the private railways when profit was sought at a horrendous cost in lives of a superexploited workforce. It looks at the experience of nationalisation in 1948 and how railworkers demands for “workers control” were denied.

Arguing for a railway run by those who work in the industry, the need is posed for a clear commitment from the Labour Party to renationalise the whole network. What is required is an expansion of the network as part of a socialist plan which places social needs above the drive for profit.

The struggle over Clause 4 shows how the defence of Clause 4 is linked to the renationalisation of the railways.

The pamphlet is a must for rail workers, but it will also be of value to all socialists.
IT SEEMS John Major has no escape from the pro-
found crisis which is rocking the Tory Party.

 Barely a moment’s reprieve as the catastrophic lo-
cal election results showed from a new sleaze row; then came the death of the shadow health minis-
ter, a battle with greedy Tory backbenchers and the Nodding Donkey, report, new evidence that growth of the economy is already slowing down, a new re-
ned offensive against Michael Portillo, yet another rumour about the heavy guns being fired at 
government by Mark.

 To cap it all, having dra-
goned enough Tory MPs into making their seats by vot-
ing to preserve Virginia Rotti-
tomy’s hospital cut, her duceres attempts to impose local pay bargaining (com-
posed of the ham-fisted Gerry Malins) has succeeded in 
turning the scales of the Rotherham. Now, moving into the business of radicalizing,
creating a real possi-
ble of industry action by 85000 NHS workers this 
summer.

 Links

 These problems all appear to come from different directions, but they are linked: the gravy train has run out of steam.

 At the centre of the prob-
lem is the weakness of an economy virtually stripped of manufacturing industry and struggling with a burden of debt exacerbated by years of prefractage tax cuts to the rich.

 To balance the books fi-
annicially, (not least in order to limit public borrowing to the three percent maximum al-
lowed under the Maastricht Treaty) Kenneth Clarke now has to make draconian cuts in spending – hence the on-
slaught on public sector pay, on social security, and on lo-
cal government services in-
cluding education.

 So the new, much-
hyped Thatcherite ‘economic revolution’ Clarke’s sole boast to tamed pragmatist capitalism is that in-
fication has been blotted down.

 Retail sales are falling, house sales are at the lowest level ever recorded, and 2.5 million are claiming unem-
ployment benefit, indicating a million and a half jobs are never again available. Middle class families faced with a vague promise of tax cuts in exchange for the reality of cuts in education for their 
children today know that they cannot possibly afford to go private: they have joined the revol

 The two-thirds to one-third split now operates in reverse. The Tory economic policies and their implications for 

 transformed.

 Even the promise of tax cuts 
doesn’t work as it used to. 
 Middle class families faced with a vague promise of tax cuts in exchange for the reality of cuts in education for their children today know that they cannot possibly afford to go private: they have joined the revolt.

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Stamping out roots of fascism

SIMON DEVILLE reviews the Newham Monitoring Project's new pamphlet 'The Enemy in Our Midst: Exposing Racism and Fascism in Newham'

EAST LONDON has always been a haven for fascists. From Mosley's British Union of Fascists in the 1930s to the dockers strike in support of Enoch Powell in 1968, on to the anti-Semitism and today's BNP the east of the capital has always had high levels of fascist organisation.

Though Millwall has received a great deal of attention nationally since the election of the BNP's Derek Beckham in October 1993, NMP remains convinced that the threat of the BNP has not disappeared. Nor is it isolated to Tower Hamlets.

In local elections in May 1993 the BNP in the Barking ward of Newham polled 33 percent of the vote - their highest percentage in the country. At the same time the Tories stood on a clear racist platform, issuing a leaflet talking about Labour's 'ethnic cleansing' policies, and standing as 'Conservatives against Labour's unfair ethnic policies'.

The Enemy in Our Midst traces the current rise in BNP support locally to the decline of the British Empire, the collapse of local industry based around the docks, the poor housing built after the war and the high levels of unemployment and poverty.

Failure

More significantly, it emphasises the failure of mainstream political parties to address the needs of the white working class community.

The pamphlet traces NMP's fight against racist violence since its formation in 1980, its battles against the National Front in the 1970s and its current campaign against the BNP. It addresses how NMP has fought to isolate the BNP core from its base of support in sections of the white working class.

Though fascists have primarily focused on local racist sentiment to build support, they have from time to time managed to tap into genuine grievances of the local community. This pamphlet stresses the importance of relating to the genuine needs of the local community - especially in areas such as the south of Newham where the left has largely abandoned these communities for decades.

"Ultimately, anti-fascism means persuading people that the BNP is not the only alternative and that local opinion is worth something and will be listened to."

It is for this reason that NMP has never seen the fight against racism in isolation from wider demands for political change.

"Such action does not, however, necessarily involve violent confrontation, and the number of anti-racists who get involved means a lesser likelihood that this will happen."

This does not mean, however, abandoning the fundamental right of self-defence, a right which NMP has consistently argued in support of. We see no reason why it should be abandoned in response to fascist violence.

Newham Monitoring Project's starting point is that of a grass roots campaign fighting for the interests of the local community. This pamphlet is based upon that experience and is aimed as a guide to activists in their local communities.

That pamphlet does not put forward a strategy for taking these issues to a national and international level but is a reflection of the weakness of the wider anti-racist movement and the local community.

Many kinds of strategies are a question for the wider Labour movement and anti-racist movement, though the experience of grass roots organisations such as NMP will prove invaluable in developing such strategies.
Battle-lines formed by TGWU leadership clash

Blair backs Dromey to crush left

By Harry Sloan

"WITH A HEAVY heart and a clear head", the formula used by Bill Morris to sum up his reluctant defence of Clause Four, is the way many TGWU activists will vote for him as General Secretary.

The contest will prove crucial to the politics of the labour movement for several years to come, and will dominate the forthcoming TGWU conference.

Morris is running for re-election against hard-line right winger Jack Dromey, darling of the media.

Though Dromey is famously married to Shadow Cabinet back Harriet Harman, he is politically in bed with Tony Blair.

Blair likes Dromey's willingness to accept rock-bottom pay deals for his members, his new realistic politics and his vicious hostility to the left.

Dromey shares Blair's religious bigotry and also sends his son to the opted-out, anti-union church London Oratory school.

In contrast Blair sees Bill Morris as a weak leader, unable to deliver the kind of policies that would keep the TGWU in line behind a right wing Labour government.

While Dromey, like NUT leader McAvoy, could be expected to work ruthlessly to sabotage any decisions he finds politically unacceptable, Morris faithful casts the block vote the way the delegation decided.

Blair's office began "confidentially" briefing Dromey and denigrating Morris with journalists even before the TGWU delegation brushed aside Morris's own objections, and finally voted to cast their vote in defence of the old Clause Four.

Dromey has exploited this issue to the hilt, complaining that Morris did not, as he would have done, ride roughshod over the union's system of democratic policy-making and put the Clause Four issue to a membership ballot.

Dromey, who cut his teeth as a front man for the union bureaucracy in 1970s unionisation battles at Greenwick and Garners Steak Houses, has risen to the top of the TGWU hierarchy of non-elected posts. Unlike Morris, he would retain his job even if he loses the election. Going further, and getting nastier, he has branded Bill Morris a liability to the Labour Party.

But the split is not a straightforward stand-off between right and left. Morris has donned the mantle of the left and the right.

He has again committed himself to fight for the union's policy of a minimum wage of £4 per hour, despite Tony Blair's refusal to specify a figure in advance.

Although Bill Morris has the support of all the major groupings on the left, including Tribune and the Morning Star, while Dromey's support comes from the right wing media and Blairite media, Morris also leans on right wing support inside the union.

Six of the TGWU's eight powerful, unelected Regional Secretaries, some of them extreme right wingers, and a dozen of Dromey's fellow unelected national trade group secretaries have supported Morris, who has at the same time ousted the CF-influenced Broad Left.

Bill Morris: hated for Clause 4 defence

Despite this bizarre line-up, Morris has come close to witch-hunting, attacking Dromey's campaign as "an alliance of extremes", allegedly combining the far left and Labour modernisers.

In office, Morris himself has related more to the right wing than in the left in the union. He has made no effort to spread the bitter battle of Badgerline busworkers, confining the union to a prolonged and expensive experiment in running a free bus service.

Nevertheless his period of office has also seen the TGWU challenge the reactionary proposals put forward by the Biscuits Commission for Social Justice, and set out a positive alternative.

Morris is also the only national union leader to have supported struggles against immigration laws, and was clearly influential in the calling of the first-ever TUC demonstration against racism.

If he wins re-election, the left will find itself frequently in conflict with Morris, fighting for real policies to build the union, reach out to layers of low-paid unorganised workers, and fight back for union rights.

But should Dromey win, a bleak vista of witch-hunting and right wing policies looms. Vote against Blair's man, vote for Bill Morris. It's the best we can do in the circumstances.
CPSA swings to left, seeks merger

By Shaun Cohen, CPSA BA HQ
Branch, personal capacity

TORY attacks on jobs and conditions in the civil service have driven the traditionally non-political CPSA to vote at this year’s conference for affiliation to the Labour Party. The conference also voted for merger with the new civil service union to be created by the merger of NUPE and the Public and Commercial Services Union.

The conference again took place against a background of continued attacks on the public sector. Despite the government’s apparent retreat last year from privatisation and market testing, what really changed was the tactics employed.

The tactics of the so-called ‘moderate’ leadership of the CPSA have changed at all. They remain opposed to even the most inescapable elements of the fight back – such as a motion opposing the use of management consultants to implement market testing.

Smears

The NEC ‘moderates’ have consistently attacked ”the True”, and any rational debate has increasingly given way to mud-slinging and innuendo. But they have not been getting things all their own way.

Their attempt – allegedly on cost grounds – to reduce NEC election contests to two in every two years was roundly defeated, as was every attempt by the NEC to further escalate the union.

Unfortunately the success of the left at conference has not been matched in national elections. While the left can control sections within the union, this is not true nationally: the left only increased its presence on the NEC from three seats to five out of 26.

The improvement in the form of the left needs to be consolidated by a conference of the whole left in the CPSA that will democratically decide tactics to advance the struggle against the right wing.

FACE conference: Fighting back for education

COVENTRY Saturday June 10

11am to 4pm

Contact: FACE c/o St. Giles County Middle School, Haven Lane, Edgbaston, Coventry, CV7 9NS. Telephone: (0540) 761104

McAvoy throws full weight against NUT’s strike ballon

By Roy Leach, NUT Executive, personal capacity

NUT General Secretary Doug McAvoy has declared war on the union’s annual conference and its activist base.

McAvoy (annual salary £60,000 plus £18,000 expenses) accuses conference delegates and local activists of being out of touch and unrepresentative.

Every member has now received two outrageous letters from him – one accompanying the ballot paper for the proposed one-day strike this term on class sizes, and the other mailed separately to home addresses.

Both are financed from members’ subscriptions. Both seek to portray the majority of conference delegates as members of “extreme political factions” who allegedly “put their own political agenda before the views of those members who represent them.”

Accusations fed to and avidly retailed by the witch-hunters (McAvoy Time) that these ‘extremists’ are “taking over organisations” run alongside the lying claim that they have committed the union “to support for violent demonstration”. In fact all the conference did was reject an Executive amendment which referred to non-violent activities of anti-racist organisations.

Hysteria

But McAvoy’s main intention is to whip up enough hysterical scare stories to sabotage the strike ballot and prevent any fight back against education cuts.

He has made quite plain his determination to by-pass conference and local officers by appealing directly to members through glossy leaflets and surveys of members’ views along the lines of the no-quite-a-ballot that led to the end of the SATS boycotts.

He believes that this approach “now provides the only way of accurately determining members’ opinions.” Clearly McAvoy’s model for the NUT is a mixture of the First Direct Bank and the RAC.

Yet his strategy could backfire, and has already elicited a vigorous response from many “ordinary members” who are particularly averse to being ‘doped’ by militants.

Bloated bureaucracy

McAvoy’s £16,000 expenses is more than most teachers earn.

Blairite squeeze on NUT

By Ann Hudson

PARTY political broadcasts in the May council elections reminded everyone that is still a key issue.

But the political leader who emphasised the need for mass public campaigns against government cuts in schools with the words “Remember the poll tax. It can be done” was not even pretending to represent the working class.

It was just another example of the Liberal Democrats appeasing more willing than Blair’s New Labour to galvanise opposition to Tory policies.

It is becoming increasingly hard to find real differences between the Blunket/Blair education agenda and the Tories’ current drive towards further stratification of the system and shifting resources from the deprived to the most privileged sectors.

The development of Fight Against Cuts in Education, the new alliance of parents, governors and teachers which brought thousands to a national demonstration on March 25 shows that there is a growing public awareness of the need to save what remains of state comprehensive education.

This view is not shared by the Labour leaders, or by the right wing leadership of the NUT. General Secretary Doug McAvoy was left adrift by a majority of his union conference voting to ballot on strike action to limit class sizes, and he is now looking for means to override the democracy of the union.

The SWP activists who heckled David Blunkett at the Blackpool conference gave extra ammunition to the McAvoy faction and the right wing media, but the “Blunkett incident” was not the underlying cause of the current NUT witch-hunt.

McAvoy’s campaign of glossy posters, leaflets and letters urging them to vote “no” to strike action arises from his decision to seek a deal with Tony Blair and fly in the face of the conference majority, which was demanding action to protect jobs and services from cuts.

Against the barrage of expensive and insipid NUT propaganda and cleverly-worded distortions of events at conference, it seems unlikely that the ballot for one-day strike action will be won.

If any significant numbers defy this pressure and vote for action it will reflect a strong groundswell of opposition to McAvoy.

Whatever the outcome of the ballot, there are three main tasks for NUT members:

Firstly, we must campaign for union democracy, and defend the policy-making powers of conference.

Secondly we must strengthen our links with parents, students and governors in the battle to defend education.

This is more than a fight for more cash: it also entails a struggle against increasing levels of inspection – through tests, league tables and opted-out schools – and deepening divisions in the system.

Thirdly we must work more closely with other bodies to defend the welfare state and all of our rights as workers.
Fight for the right to strike
Strike first – ask later!

By Roger Welch

SINCE the Tories came back to power in 1979 they have passed seven Acts designed to attack trade union rights – in particular rights to strike.

Today industrial action is only within the law if it is on the basis of a so-called trade dispute with the workers’ own employer, is voted for in a fully postal ballot and notices are given to the employer before the ballot takes place and before the action starts.

A so-called secondary action, i.e. sympathy action is unlawful, and this is the case even if the workers involved have the same employer but the latter has divided up its operations into separate companies.

(This device was part of the strategy deployed by Rupert Murdoch in his offensive against the print unions at Wapping.)

Picketing within the law has been reduced to a symbolic act which can only take place at the strikers’ own workplace.

The determination of the state to continue its anti-union offensive was stressed in March by the decision of the Law Lords that employers, having derecognised a union, can withhold pay rises from any workers who try to maintain their rights secured by collective bargaining.

The implications of all these legal shackles on trade unions is that if a strike takes place within the law the workers involved are generally fighting with both hands tied behind their backs.

There are exceptions where partial or informal strikes can be won as was the case with the signal workers last summer and the boycott of SABS mounted by the teachers’ unions.

Sacking threat

However, the norm is that when a struggle is isolated and either lose the strike or as has happened in a number of cases, such as the Dover seafarers, the Wapping printer, the workers at Barnard and Tindall’s when the workers are sacked during the strike.

The most recent example of this, and one that exposes fully the working of the new anti-bullying and strike notices, was the sacking last November of bus workers employed by Eastern National in Chelmsford for participating in a one-shift strike in defence of safe driving hours.

The bus workers and their union, the TGWU, obeyed the letter of the law to the full, and as a result Graham, the managing director, of Eastern National, was able to fire his plans well in advance of the strike taking place.

As part of the Badgerline group, Eastern National was able to bring in scab drivers from all over the country within 24 hours of the sackings taking place.

This scab labour force was able to keep the buses in Chelmsford going until drivers could be recruited locally and given a crash training course to take the jobs of the sacked workers.

Defiance

As recent unofficial stoppages by postal workers and by 900 bus workers in Liverpool have shown, if workers take action spontaneously, i.e. without any prior notice, the employer will have no way to do what Orboll did and other employers such as P&O have done in the past.

Workers taking strike action can be sacked if they act within the law or in defiance of it. However, somewhat ironically perhaps, if they strike without going through all the bullying and strike notice legal paraphernalia their strike is likely to be more effective – and the risk of getting sacked is a lot lower.

Defiance of the law is a central part of trade union tradition. It is only just over 20 years since mass defiance of the Industrial Relations Act both defeated the law and helped to bring down the Heath government.

It is well over time for these traditions to be revived and the lessons learnt. Industrial action within the law – at least when the full weight of the law and institutions of the state such as the police are there to ensure effective industrial action cannot take place – is often doomed to failure and exposes workers involved to the risk of dismissal.

There must be a real fight within and across all unions for official backing for sympathetic action and picketing in defiance of the law once a group of workers go on strike.

Part and parcel of this fight, as the Chelmsford struggle has shown albeit negatively, is often for workers to strike first and then demand union support.

Indeed if such sympathetic action and picketing can be secured the Chelmsford bus workers themselves can still win their just fight for reinstatement.

Moreover, defiance of the Tory laws now will make it far more difficult for a Blair led Labour government to keep those laws in place.

Organise the union left

By Pete Hooper

THE key task for socialists in the unions is to build alliances of the class struggle left that are politically and organisationally independent of the bosses’ bosses.

Such lefts are needed at every level in the unions to lead the fight against the employers on key industrial issues, and to ensure that the unions and the Labour Party are committed to socialist policies and democratic structures.

To be successful, such left formations must be open, broad and democratic, and not the property or "front" of any one political party or organisation.

Most left groupings have fallen far short of these criteria. The prime objective of the old Communist party-led Broad Left of the 1960s and 1970s was to get CP-backed bureaucrats elected to national offices.

They only mobilised the membership in campaigns for industrial action when the right was in control.

The TGWU Broad Left, a ramshackle of this Morning Star tradition, is a bureaucratic, invitation-only electoral machine, incapable of breaking with the policies of the bureaucrats it supports.

Meanwhile the "new" Broad Left of the 1980s, such as the grass-roots workers’ device CPWA were led by Militant, with varying fortunes. Even workers break from the primarily electoralist methods of the old CP-led Broad Left.

But never became more than front organisations of the Militant movement.

Today’s CWU Broad Left originated in the old NCU and had a relatively open and democratic structure. It is now on the runways. It could either become an electoral machine for a right-wing NCU merge, or become a genuine class struggle formation capable of leading the fight against the Post Office.

The most advanced left formation at present is undoubtedly the Socialist Teachers Alliance (STA) to the NUT. Through 20 years of systematic work, teachers’ meetings and regular publications and a democratic internal regime, the STA has built itself a dominant position in union conferences, challenging the leadership of the (right wing) Broad Left.

The SWP, Britain’s biggest far-left organisation, characteristically walked out of the STA at the peak of its recent success. What the SWP cannot stomach is participation in an organisation which doesn’t control and that resists to accept its sectarian and over-optimistic schemes for the class struggle.

Its sectarian insistence on building only at rank and file level, and its refusal to fight through the official union structures means that the SWP, for all its numbers, has never wielded real influence in the unions.

The way forward is not sectarian self-proclamation or creating permanent front groups to unify: the left in the unions must break through the union leaders and strike together to deal effective blows against the right wing.

Organise the union left.
Why the left needs Trades Councils

by Keith Sinclair
Secretary, Hull and District TUC

TRADES councils aim to bring together the local branches of all TUC-affiliated unions. They are the regional structures of the TUC. To get the full picture of the TUC nationally, you need to speak at their meetings. Hull and District's Trades Council is a successful example of a union-like organisation.

One good reason for uniting anti-racist groups in common action against racism, fascism and related racism is the powerful trade union sisterhood. Oxford Trades Council has been central to this work for many years, with the 105 sacked workers being a prime example. In the past year, Paddy Fearon has been the first female chair of a Trades Council in the UK. She represents the interests of workers in the area. There are some areas where people have run the risk of being too isolated and have become stuck in the vicious circle of low-level activity. In some areas, local bulletins are used to spread information about the wider range of trade union activity that happens in the area. Workers can work for representation bodies, trade union branch committees, or trade unionists for representation bodies. They can work with the local council, the regional council, or the national council.

Of course, serious militants are needed to organise periodic meetings, but they will support an organisation.

Blair declares war on unions

By Pete Hooper

THE OUTCOME of the Clause Four debate has clarified the political lines of divide in the trade unions, just as it has in the Labour Party.

Blaire has followed through his promise to move to distance himself and the party even further from the unions, in readiness for the inevitable clash on policy that will erupt should he win the election. This is the lesson Labour's far-right has learned from the electoral defeats of 1970 and 1979.

Although Blair won a conference majority for his new statement of free market values, the vote of the unions was much closer than in the constituencies.

The TGWU, UNISON and a number of smaller unions including the NUM, RMT, CPIM and the CWU all opposed his changes. There was also significant opposition within MSF and the CWU which eventually backed him.

Little on offer

Blair has little to offer workers and union members other than the prospect of a Labour government itself.

The effects of both leaders like GMB chief John Edmonds to do deals over full employment and to lower the minimum wage had been humiliatingly brushed aside. Gordon Brown's last pronouncements on pub spending are to the right of Tony Blair's Chancellor Kenneth Clarke.

To hold this line, Blair's strategy hinges on marginalising the unions within the Labour Party, reducing their voice in the party's conference and cutting their representation on the NEC.

But he also wants to see union bureaucrats tighten their grip over their members and in particular over left activists.

That's why Blair and his spin doctors have lashed out this special communication on the Guv'nor's Workers Union for having procured the 'right' result through a ballot going against the wishes of the workers.

They are keen to see similar methods used in other unions to TUC and amass the left. National Union of Teachers' chief Doug McWay has eagerly embraced the idea, firing off a volley of vicious and personal unprofessional denouncing the democratic election of his union's annual conference, and opposing any vote for industrial action to limit school class sizes.

At the TGWU, Blairite challenger Jack Dromey has attacked General Secretary Bill Morris for failing to hold a ballot on Clause Four. The left most oppose this type of 'dictatorship' democracy. For trade union members to vote on sometimes complex key issues without any prior involvement in a discussion at meetings is neither sensible nor democratic.

Media role

It is a method designed to maximise the influence of the right wing and of the mass media over isolated individual members, running counter to the collective spirit of trade unionism.

The barely concealed intervention of Blair's office into the TGWU election, briefing journalists against Morris and backing Dromey is a warning of further right wing political intervention yet to come in the unions. Only the lack of a plausibly right wing candidate to run against roller blading figures in Unison has forestalled a similar Blairite intervention. Instead the UNISON right wing, having been routed on Clause Four, are seeking to hijack the Bickersall campaign and pull him away from the left.

Indeed the right are not having things all their own way.

Even as they announced the formation of the ironically-named pro-Blair "LINC" (Labour Initiative for Co-operation), backed by Roger Poole of UNISON, and designed to disengage Labour from the unions while pressing for electoral deals with the Liberals, UNISON followed up its campaign to endorse Clause Four by endorsing a package of hard-line left wing policies.

Similar resolutions raising demands for inclusion in Labour's next manifesto may well be carried at other union conferences this summer: but everyone knows that Blair will ignore them all.

The debate on Clause Four has meant that currents on the left have been hard-ened up, and in some cases found new allies on issues of public ownership and the conception of socialist policies.

Some of the far-left abstained from the SWP and a lesser extent Militant effectively encouraged abstention by calling for Clause Four in words while in practice counterposing their own sectarian party-building projects.

But the exclusive focus of the Clause Four debate on a future Labour government has served to detract from discussion on what to do now against the bosses and the Tory government.

Throughout industry, especially in the privatised sectors, a slowdown in the domestic economy and sharpening competition is leading to a new attack on pay, jobs, conditions and hours of work.

BT is attempting to impose flexible working hours while the Royal Mail is trying to force new working practices.

In the public sector, too, the onslaught continues unabated. In the NHS, up to 85,000 workers are currently in dispute over pay, teachers from three unions are set to ballot over action to comb out in schools, rail workers face a fight on pay and privatisation, competitive tendering in local government, the NHS and the civil service threaten tens of thousands more jobs.

Victories have been won, notably postal workers in Newcastle and BT workers in the north west. But over-shadowing the whole situation are the anti-union laws which make most proposed industrial action unlawful.

Union leaders "left" and right are united in their determination not to break the law. Thus the "left" TGWU refuses to call class solidarity action to win the Eastern National bus dispute in Chelmsford, while the CWU's general secretary Alan Johnson, under threat of injunctions, attempts to repudiate his members' local branch action.

The reality is that the anti-union laws have been effective in what they were designed to do: crush disputes by making the union bureaucracy police their own members. This is also why Tony Blair has no intention of repealing these laws.

But if a section of workers like the nurses didn't manage to overcome the hurdle of their leaders' inertia, there is no doubt that their struggle would be enormously popular, cashing in on the government's unpopularity and disarray.

As with last year's BR signal workers' dispute, it would prove politically impossible to use the anti-union laws against them.

Public sector

United public sector action in defence of pay and services is crucial in the face of the government's on-going attack.

The RMT NEC has made the most important initiative so far to break the logjam by calling for a demonstration on June 10 against low pay, and for a shorter working week. This must be supported and built for by the whole movement.

Initiatives such as the recent conference sponsored by Newcastle UNISON in defence of the public sector should also be supported as a means of pressuring the official unions to take united action.

And campaigns based on user groups such as the parents and governors who make up the Primary Care Trusts, Cuts in Education (FACE) can give confidence to trade unionists deciding whether or not to fight.

Speaker from FACE and from NHS campaigns should be invited to every union conference this summer.
UNISON: nice policies – shame about the inaction!

By Fred Leplast, Ilkington UNISON

UNISON’s vote to uphold the ‘old’ Clause 4 was welcome in a situation when most union leaders are falling in behind Blair’s New Labour. Rodney Bickerstaffe, UNISON’s current associate general secretary and front-runner for the top job when Alan Johnson retires, made a passionate speech at Labour’s special conference against the action of ‘rigour’s of competition’ extolled in Blair’s new Clause 4.

Since then he has defended representative democracy against the attacks made on the union for not ballots its members on the new Clause, and declared his support for the far-reaching left policies endorsed by the union’s Affiliated Political Fund conference in May.

On the level of policies, UNISON is now as well to the left of Blair, through its commitment to the welfare state, public services and re-nationalisation, opposition to all forms of competitive tendering, support for a minimum wage of £4.15 rising to two thirds of average male earnings, and a repeal of the anti-union laws.

Bickerstaffe supports these policies, and deserves our support in the political fight to commit a Labour government to implement such policies immediately it is elected. He also backs UNISON’s opposition to any weakening of the unions’ link to or voice in the Labour Party.

However, this is only part of the picture. The union has sound policies and a track record in action. UNISON members who work in health, local government, education and the utilities, have been devastated by the ‘rigours of competition’, competition. If they still have a job, many of them will be on their pay and conditions have suffered. At best branches have been left to fight on their own. But as every new piece of anti-union legislation is applied by UNISON, national action to defend members and defeat Government attacks has been avoided.

Bickerstaffe, has failed to organise any national campaign to launch the attack.

At best branches have been left to fight on their own. But as every new piece of anti-union legislation is applied by UNISON, national action to defend members and defeat Government attacks has been avoided.

UNISON’s ‘new realist’ strategy of publicity campaigns and lobbying, mild support to individual branches, avoiding industrial action and compliance with the anti-union legislation has a total failure.

The crisis of the unions strategy is compounded by its financial crisis, the totally inefficient national membership register computer and the lack of any progress at a local level towards a full merger of branches.

The failure of the union’s strategy is most obviously in the health sector.

Thousands of jobs have been axed and hospitals have closed, in vain cases without active union opposition. Movements to impose the insulting 1% national pay offer, topped up to 3% through local pay bargaining with vicious Trust bosses now threatens a fresh onslaught on members’ pay and conditions.

But as anger has grown, the union has now been taken down by milindian and public profile by the traditionally right wing Royal Colleges of Nursing and Midwives. With morale at rock bottom in health branches, unless UNISON gets its act together quickly it could begin losing members to these rival organisations.

Yet the only response so far has been a successful lunch-time protest in March, which is now being followed up by a ballot to consult members – on whether they want to be balloted on industrial action on the summer.

Even the BMA and Health Unions are closer to strike action than UNISON. Yet the defence of the NHS is one of the most popular issues around.

With the Tories in terminal crisis, UNISON could organise national strike action of its 400,000 members in health against the pay offer and the break-up of national bargaining.

The Tories would not dare use the anti-union laws against health workers for fear of an escalation that would sweep them out of office just as industrial action defeated Heath’s anti-union laws when they imprisoned the Pentonville dockers over 20 years ago.

Alternative

The left in UNISON must continue to promote an alternative strategy: national industrial action now – unlawful if necessary – against the national attacks of the Tories and the bosses, and fighting to commit a Labour government to implement UNISON’s policies.

The forthcoming election campaign for general secretary will be an opportunity to argue that UNISON should adopt such a fighting strategy.

And at the moment, it appears that the right that support Blair’s New Labour do not even have a credible candidate equivalent to Jack Dromey in the TGWU to put up against Bickerstaffe.

Militant Labour are trying to persuade sections of the left to support their chosen candidate, ex-NALGO NEC member Roger Rumment.

In order to pose an effective challenge to the current leadership of UNISON the left should be moving to too, united opposition.

The SWP-led Fightback still refuses to form a united left with the Campaign for Fighting and Democratic Union.

The division of the left makes it easier for UNISON’s leadership to avoid building any fightback now. But there is a core fundamental problem. Both of these two left formations are essentially based on the ex-NALGO branches.

They need to find ways to link up with the ex-Nupe and ex-CoHSE activists, some of whom (especially from Southend) will come from outside the traditional hard left left of the Clause Four fight, discovering that they no longer need vote the way they used to be told by Tom Sawyer, and who have been instrumental in winning UNISON in left wing policies.

The importance of this development must be recognised, and further fighting unity established in the struggle to commit the union to take action now against the ‘rigours’ of the market.

CWU postal ballot stamps on democracy

TONY BLAIR got a helping hand in his offensive against union democracy when the Communication Workers Union balloted its membership over the new Clause Four.

The CWU has played a central role in winning other trade unions to its all-new Labour Party. The leadership will now be in the forefront of those trying to limit the gains of the next Labour government.

But there are already signs that the Blairites will not have everything their own way. In the run-up a number of regions passed motions supporting Clause Four.

In March the CWU voted massively in favour of a retention of the political fund. 40 per cent of the membership voted by nine to one to retain links with the Labour Party.

The union Broad Left has recently scored some important victories. In this year’s NEC election Bill Fry, a long term CWU BL supporter, and Dave Joyce were elected. Members have been encouraged by successful strike action in the north west. The prospects for the autumn re-launch of the BL are good.

The CWU has a chance to put itself back on the telecom side was probably due to disillusion at the hours of attendance agreement made last year. And the failure of the three hard left candidates had a lot do with a vicious smear sheet that was distributed in the union.

Blairite project

The CWU leadership clearly already has in place a Blairite project for the Post Office and British Telecom. This will come up against a membership that will challenge the leadership over Clause Four and the rights of delegates to make their own decisions within union policy.

The key issues at telecoms conference will be sub-contracting, hours of attendance and performance related pay. In the Post Office, ‘commercial freedom’ has become the keyword of the leadership. It envisages a partnership between the private sector and the Post Office competing for the postal services throughout Europe.

This could mean big losses for postal workers in other European countries, for the benefit of the British Post Office in.

In British Telecom the situation is even worse. There is no commitment to rationalisation, but a guarantee to increase the shareholders’ profits.

Sequestration

Of immediate impact will be the leadership’s position on the anti-union laws. The Post Office have threatened both sequestration and removal of check-off to encourage the Government to start repudiating unofficial industrial disputes. The threat of the anti-union laws has clearly limited unofficial industrial disputes in the last two months. This gives the leadership more control. But with management attacks in increasing, unofficial disputes are likely to re-emerge in the summer.

The leadership will be encouraged to challenge in other policy areas to limit the influence of the left in the new-wary management.

This will mean bringing the union’s industrial policy much more into line with the control of the leadership to limit rank and file militancy.

The campaign against the modernisers in the CWU, challenging the commitment to the right to organise against the freedom and unconditionally defending CWU members in struggle.
French unions under the cosh

By Dominique Mazzu

The French workforce is undergoing a massive change. A fundamental recomposition in trade unionism is taking place.

Particularly important is the new situation where women take up almost half of the workforce. Big differences of experience within the sector exist. Private industry has been the testing ground for the most extreme anti-social working standards.

On the other hand, massive struggles over wages and over recognition of qualifications and working conditions have taken place in the health sector and other public services where non-commissioned women are in the majority.

Trade union officials caught up in their usual extortions have been caught off guard by the size of this new radical force. Nowadays, no one goes from school to the factory and automatically joins the same union as their forebears.

Today's school leavers are likely to spend years in unemployment or temporary jobs before getting the opportunity for more stable employment. Trade union activists in industry still have to find ways of linking up with younger workers who inhabit a different cultural universe.

Some of the changes can be seen in the emerging debates in the major trades union federations.

There has been a big discussion in the CFDT since the 1970s about "repositioning" the unions in the centre of political life. This took the form of a proposed non-communist front involving the Force Ouvriere - the weakest of the big three federations - and the anti-left National Education Federation (FEN).

It stressed the provision of "services" to members, the inclusion of the Commissioned COLT and a social compromise breaking with militant traditions.

The move was not that the FEN's turn resulted in a split to form the new Unity Trade Union Federation (FSU) in 1993. A parallel process occurred in the CFDT itself. The ultra-modern, authoritarian regime and resistance to mass mobilization resulted in the federation becoming one of the most vibrant centres of mass unionism in Europe.

French hospital strikers picketing in 1988

Out of these movements may come a project for the reconstruction of French trade unionism. It could draw on the strengths of today's struggles, exploiting the success of the new non-commissioned unions, amplifying the debate among progressives on an offensive trade union strategy and searching for a way to map out a political project.

Such a perspective could open the possibility for the unification of trades unionism and those who fight for the renewal of the labour movement.
Rail workers up against old buffers

By Greg Tucker

A DERISORY pay offer, massive job cuts and the onslaught of privatisation: rail workers face a catalogue of problems.

To make matters worse the main rail union, RMT, has been severely weakened by management attacks on the right to organise, while the other two unions ASLEF and TSSA have been given 'sweetheart' deals— as long as they promise to keep their members in check.

Signals

In the signal workers' dispute last year and the fight for Clause Four the RMT Executive has shown that it is prepared to act firmly in the defence of railworkers.

But the signal dispute also showed the power of union officials to obstruct and delay action which impedes the ability of railworkers to fight back.

Time and again through that dispute serious questions, such as the need to extend the dispute to other workers, were dodged.

Now in an in a manner that it can only be an effect every day that the Executive has to show that it can take control of events and gain a lead. Ultimately, if it is to be taken seriously, it has to involve the membership and fight to control the union out of the hands of a small clique of officials.

BR's derisory 2.5% pay offer has been rightly rejected by the RMT Executive. Their counter claim of 6% is sufficient to answer railworkers' immediate demands. And the decision to open up the struggle to involve other unions by calling a national demonstration on June 10 is to be welcomed.

But doubts remain. Over a month after the decision to call the demonstration, no work had been done to organise it. No official publicity for it has yet been issued by RMT HQ. Apart from one letter and a handful of leaflets, no work had been done to convince railworkers that a fight over pay is possible.

only when Individual Executive members went out and produced their own leaflets was something done.

Privatisation has reached its final stages. Already large parts of the former BR have been opened up to competitive tendering. Whilst most contracts have been won in-house, as with local government, the cost of winning has meant turning the screw on conditions and a serious loss of jobs.

Imposed

Elsewhere new semi-independent Train Operating Companies are looking to flex their muscles, with major attacks in the pipeline.

Nationally negotiated agreements are largely being replaced by locally-imposed and imposed conditions.

Again very little has been done. Bob Crow, Assistant General Secretary, elected last year on a left ticket, has been touring the country talking to RMT members, raising the need for a fightback, but it is clear that the other officers have no stomach for a fightback.

Unlike twenty years ago, when there was one national employer, unwilling to force issues through, and it was possible to survive as a union with a structure which meant that no change was implemented at any level unless it was agreed nationally, today dozens of new employers are vying with each other to attack our conditions, imposing their decisions at will.

Techniques

New management techniques are now rooted in every day procedure. As well as direct mail shots to staff, the hotel industry is making a killing from week-long 'team briefings' on which staff are continually being sent by management.

The union has done nothing to respond to these changes. Its structures are hopelessly out of date.

But it is clear that for Jimmy Knapp and his immediate circle the way to survive is to retreat into the bunker, cutting back on those union structures which give democratic rights to the membership, while bolstering those which consolidate their own positions.

The left has to respond.

Partly the Executive has to show that it can get its decisions implemented. After the debacle of the 1994 ballot defeat— where it was clear that there had been deliberate sabotage of the campaign by officers—a special subcom-

mittee was set up to monitor and control propaganda. This has not proved sufficient: the left has to lift up its act to ensure its instructions leave no escape for Knapp and co.

Secondly we have to rethink the union's structure, devolving power to the levels where decisions are being implemented. On the one hand this will mean new Regional Councils with enhanced powers to control regional officials. On the other we need to set up Combine Committees of the grades based district reps which can plan a strategy to defend members from new attacks.

Thirdly the union has to open up to the rank and file. For most members the first thing they know about issues is when the management tells them. They are lucky if they get a union response atall.

Our whole approach to communication and involvement has to be revamped. We need to turn RMT News into a paper that gives a lead on the union's priority campaigns, arming the membership. And we need a stream of leaflets and newsletters contrasting management disinformation, with a system for helping branches produce local propaganda.

Left

The left also has to look at its own organisation. Over the years a variety of groups have operated—from secret CP-run Broad Left to a rigidly structured Broad Left dominated by Militant.

Currently the CPFU operates as a limited caucus, which was able to organise a successful fringe meeting at this year's Grades Conference but finds it difficult to go beyond being a loose grouping of leading activists.

We have to make a turn outward to the ranks. This means being more organised. We need a more regular CPFU bulletin which opens up debate on how we deal with the broad problems facing the industry, and offering an alternative source of information on what is going on.

Watching from the RMT it is not always possible to see exactly what is happening in other rail unions. It is hard to judge how serious a development the ASLEF Campaign Group might be. However their decision to attack the ASLEF sell-out deal— which ended transfers from Train Operating Companies for sale—in a positive sign. The CPFU needs to build links with them and any forces inside the TSSA willing to fight.

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Can South Africa’s black unions meet the challenge?

By Comrade Darcy

According to Labour Minister Tito Mboweni, South Africa has to choose “either to orient upwards and base its economy on quality, reliability and competitiveness, or to orient downwards and take on the Chinas and Indonesias of the world. We do not hesitate to recommend the road of high productivity.”

(Business Day, Sept. 9, 1994)

This is the kernel of the transformation of labour relations in the new South Africa. The ambitious economic Reconstruction and Development Programme can only be carried out if the black trade union movement is enlisted as a social partner of the government and employers.

To attain this goal, Minister Mboweni set up a working group last July. In February it published proposals for a new Labour Relations Act. Our advice recommendations is to supplement contract negotiations with a “second channel” at the workplace level. The draft bill proposes a model of “workplace forums” similar to German and Dutch works councils. It foresees the creation of an extensive apparatus for mediation and arbitration in labour conflicts. Employers’ existing obligation to negotiate with unions over working conditions is to be abolished.

Right to Strike

Furthermore, the existing freedom to strike over any dispute is to be restricted through a prohibition on strikes over issues that should go to arbitration or the courts.

The intention is to “lead to increased productivity and profitability” (Government Gazette, February 1995).

Employers are enthusiastic. They are wary of taking on extra expenses at precisely the moment when they have to be pushed down in order to compete on the world market. They also limit management’s ability to run their companies as they see fit.

There is justifiable fear in the trade union movement that when the workplace forums will be able to compete with trade unions, at a time when many trade unions are having a hard time even maintaining their bargaining position. The bill requires consultation over production-related issues, but renews COSATU’s demand that employers be required to negotiate over these issues as well. From this standpoint, the proposals look like a way to restrict collective bargaining. COSATU is concerned about problems in the new South Africa. Almost three million members are union members, of whom 3.3 million are in unions affiliated with COSATU. But after rapid growth in the 1980s membership has barely increased since 1990.

Since the elections the unions’ leading bodies have been substantially weakened by the diversion of many union leaders into the government and politics at national, provincial and local levels.

This has resulted in a substantial decline in the leadership’s ability to lead. A certain level of doubt has also arisen in the rank and file at the sight of former leaders and activists who now occupy a position of power alongside the old white oppressors. The employers, and daily life in the companies, have scarcely changed since April 1994. Even the Management Brief admits that an “archaic mentality” exists among South African employers. Management’s attitudes often remain “colonial” (The Sam, 10 March 1995).

These are the circumstances in which the unions are being asked to give up the strike weapon. Activists are unconvincing. There is not much evidence of a new spirit of co-operation within the trade union movement as well as an increase in the number of new associations. Black workers expect more from a democratically elected government than from the old white regime.

The first three months of this year were relatively peaceful. 600,000 strike days compared with 259,000 in the same period last year. But these actions were exceptional, an agitated social unrest, power and democracy, cannot be achieved under capitalism.

Nor, as we argued long before the collapse of Stalinism, could these demands ever be achieved under the bureaucratic and uncoordinated system of workers strike and the national and international support for their demands, which is the source of the challenge for socialism.

But propaganda alone, however good, will not bring socialism. The fight for socialism can only be won by politically educate workers in struggle, must build new forms, the Labour Party and every campaign and struggle in the interest of workers and the oppressed fight for their rights.

To strengthen this fight we press for united front campaigns on key issues - particularly those of an international - in which many left movements can work together for common objectives while maintaining internal free to debate differences.

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What we fight for

UP AGAINST mass unemployment, rampant employers with savage anti-union laws, and a war on hard grandparents. The working class in Britain faces a real crisis - an avoidable conflict created by the historic failure of its official leadership.

Socialist Outlook exists to build a new type of working class leadership, based on class struggle and revolutionary socialism.

The capitalist class, driven by its own crisis, and politically unified by its need to maximise profits at the expense of peace and war, has had to accept, and then to tolerate, a fully capitalist leadership. The Tory strategy has been to tackle the unions, and to fragment and weaken the resistance, allowing them to pick off isolated sections one at a time. In response, most TUC and Labour leaders have embraced the defeatist policy of a “new realism”, effectively total surrender, while distorting any pretence of being a socialist alternative. Every retreat encouraged the divisive against jobs, wages, conditions and union rights.

Now realism is the latest form of reformism, seeking only conditions workers’ capitalism.

We reject reformism, not because we are against reforms, but because we know that full employment, decent living standards, a clean environment, peace and democracy, can never be achieved under capitalism.

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Nigeria on the brink

By Simon Day

In 34 years since independence Nigeria has had 24 years of military rule. And it looks like the present incumbent’s days are numbered.

The election in June 1993 was generally believed to have been won by chief Moshood Abacha. After it was bureaucratically annulled General Sani Abacha was able to take advantage of the ensuing political crisis and impose himself on the country.

As well as sanctioning the killing of hundreds of civilians by the police and army he has banned newspapers and taken over the running of the courts. Despite a desperate search for a consistent policy and political base Abacha has succeeded only in making matters worse.

The economic crisis now threatens to engulf the regime. Huge debts to the “Paris Club” of creditors, pressure from the IMF and the US ban on official finance stoke the flames of the growing social crisis.

After taking power Abacha sought popular support by moving against market reforms, snubbing the west and promoting state control. The 1986 structural adjustment programme of General Ibrahim Babangida was discredited by growing discrepancies in income, rising inflation and the current account deficit.

Fourteen months later, at the beginning of 1995, Abacha’s policy was forced into reverse. January’s budget announced big reductions in the deficit, lifting restrictions on foreign investment and liberalising exchange rates – things very close to the very same policy that had failed under previous administrations.

Despite the declaration of a war of austerity on Nigeria’s people big business still wants more.

The Financial Times spoke in the patrician tone of multi-national capitalism: “Like a parole board examining a hardened offender, those who know the record of past Nigerian government over the past decade are asking whether its too late for the administration’s character to change even if it has the will.”

There is a growing tendency to disinvest. Welcome, ICI and the pharmaceutical group Hoechst are all withdrawing. In January Volkswagen closed its plant outside Lagos. Triggo’s 60 per cent stake in Nigeria has been up for sale since 1993 (joint ventures are the main form of ownership in the crucial gas and oil industries).

The government has been increasingly unable to pay its share of the operating costs to its oil company partners – in large part because it has the substantial problem of a $30 billion external debt over it.

The banks are starting to demand risk premiums on debt repayments. This means that the government is having to borrow more money for the sole purpose of borrowing money.

Shell, Mobil and Chevron are taking the opportunity to pile on the pressure for takeover under the threat of further investment withdrawals and a reduction in productive capacity. They are also demanding a lessening of the role of the Central bank of Nigeria in regulating foreign exchange.

Corruption and mismanagement threaten to make the civil service and judicial process inoperative. Millions of dollars of oil revenue are routinely diverted into the pockets of officials. The institutions of civil society are deinstitutionalised.

The infrastructure is falling into disrepair. Roads are crumbling. Trains rarely run. Electricity and water are in short supply. Fuel is scarce.

On top of Abacha’s social and economic policy crisis the demand for a return to civilian rule continues to grow. His recent promotion of 32 generals would indicate that he has a different idea about Nigeria’s future.

The army is 60,000 strong but without sufficient military tasks. The admirals control two frigates that never sail and the vice-marshal plans which cannot leave the ground.

This turn to the armed forces for political support is therefore a mark of Abacha’s desperation. With the international creditors closing in and social breakdown at home the IMF and World Bank look like vetting the 135bn debt rescheduling.

Friendless at home and friendless abroad, Abacha’s grip on power is becoming more tenuous by the week.

Nigeria’s military bolstered by British arms

By Paul Walker

Despite the fact that Nigeria has endured 24 of its 34 post-independence years under military government, the UK has consistently armed its military dictators in a bid to strengthen its political position in the oil rich nation.

In 1985 42 Aliva Scorpion tanks were supplied to the Bahrani regime, despite an appalling human rights record.

In the same year, the sale of British Jaguar lighter aircraft was instrumental in precipitating a coup by the military dictator, General Ibrahim Babangida, after a scandal over commission payments.

After Babangida took power British continued in supply of military equipment, culminating in the huge Vickers deal for 150 tanks in 1990.

This sale co-incided with a massive increase in British aid to Nigeria – it increased from £5.3m in 1984-85 to £97.7m in 1989-90 – leading to allegations that the aid was linked with arms sales.

In June 1993 a Presidential election was fairly won by multi-millionaire populist chief Moshood Abacha.

Babangida promptly annulled the election result and appointed his own interim government. In the ensuing chaos, yet another military regime, headed by General Sani Abacha, came to power through a coup in November 1993.

Britain continued to deliver the Vickers tanks, after the annulment of the democratic election, and after the military strongman Abacha had seized power.

Abacha’s regime has attempted to crush pro-democracy opposition by replacing union leaders, taking control of the courts and banning newspapers. Hundreds of civilians have been killed by security forces in the unrest. Amnesty International has strongly condemned atrocities carried out by security forces against the people of Ogoliland.

Despite these moves, more than a dozen contracts have been signed between Nigeria and British companies since January 1994.

Pressed on the nature of these contracts the Foreign Office claim that they are “non-lethal”, a term commonly known to be meaningless in arms trade circles.

Given the fact that many of Nigeria’s arms purchases have been funded by secret military slush funds in the control of the Nigerian generals the arms to Nigeria affair is a ticking bomb in the basement of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office.

Campaign launched for Nigerian embargo

Over 150 people participated in a meeting calling for a people’s embargo for democracy in Nigeria in London on May 9th. Organised by African Liberation Solidarity Campaign and Campaign Against All Trade the meeting, which was 90% black, launched PEDEN, the “People’s Embargo for Nigeria”.

That the Nigerian authorities have prevented the main speaker, Chukwu Ubani of the Civil Liberties Organization, from flying out at Lagos to attend the meeting underscored the urgency of the campaign to stop Britain arming the military dictatorship.

PEDEN aims to link up with campaigners who are calling for an embargo on this country because of the companies’ role in exploiting the oil fields in the Ogoliland with the help of the military against the overwhelming opposition of the Ogoni people whose main spokesperson, the writer Ken Saro-Wiwa, is under arrest and being detained in the Port Harcourt military barracks.

In a letter to the Guardian last week Saro-Wiwa wrote of the murderous actions of the Nigerian military and Shell in the Ogoliland. Ultimately the trial lies at the door of the British Government, it is the British Government which supplies arms and credit to the military, the British Government which knows that such arms will only be used against innocent unarmed civilians. It is the British government which makes money through military economy in Nigeria and Africa and supports military dictators to the hilt.

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“I just didn’t know that I was that dangerous!”

HASSAN AHMED - a nationally-known leftwing Labour councillor in Nottingham - was recently expelled from the Labour Party. Socialist Outlook spoke to him.

SO: You came to England in the late 1970s. What had been your political experience in Pakistan?

I started out as General Secretary of the militant Punjab Workers Federation. After an IMF and World Bank intervention the government started a crackdown. I can’t remember a time between 1971 and 1978 when there wasn’t quite a few of our comrades in prison. I spent just over three years in prison at different times. I was never tried, never convicted – it was always detention, detention. The real crackdown came when General Zia came to power in 1977.

He brought in new draconian anti-labour laws. Mass protests took place and I was arrested. When I left Pakistan in 1978 I had nine charges against me. I went to a World Trade Union Congress in Geneva and never went back because I’d have been arrested.

SO: What were your hopes when you joined the Labour Party in Britain?

I joined the Labour Party in the early 1980s – very interesting times with the left organising around Tony Benn. Although I didn’t know much about British politics, I saw the Party as a vehicle to fight against injustices and racism and to support the right kind of people to bring about change.

It was actually after talking to Alan Simpson, a local left activist and County Councillor, that I decided to join.

SO: You were instrumental in setting up the black sections in Nottingham. How successful do you think the black sections initiative was in encouraging black people to become active in the party and in shifting views of the leadership on their involvement?

I was the national vice chair of the black sections for two years. I think the black sections were very successful in putting the black agenda at the forefront of British politics for the first time.

I forced the media and the leadership of both Labour and the Tories to take the issues of racism seriously – black people were not prepared to accept the status quo, they wanted things to change. The Labour Party had always received the support of all black people, Afro-caribbean and Asian because it was perceived to be a Party that fought against injustices, a Party of the poor and the oppressed.

And then we saw radical London Boroughs like Lambeth being led by a black woman Linda Bellin, and the setting up of Equal Opportunity and Race units, and the scrutiny of employment practices and service delivery.

All because of the black sections. First black people took to the streets and then the black sections gave the movement a voice.

SO: You have been a City Councillor in Nottingham. What is your assessment of your time on the Council?

As Chair of Personnel I was involved in consultation with the trades unions. This was an interesting time because the Council was implementing CCT.

I made sure that not a single redundancy took place in the City Council. Even when people were transferred from one section to the other, I developed the new training policy – it was the first time the City Council introduced a job sharing policy, the first time ever the introduction of the child care allowance and a work place nursery.

The Equal Opportunities Department which was resurrected followed by an Equal Opportunities post in every department of the City Council with a budget of £200,000.

We gave a very high profile to issues around race, disability, gender and restructured the contribution process with all of these groups.

We achieved a lot in those days. When the Labour group decided to go hard on poll tax non-payers, I was the only member of the Labour Group voting against it. The person who led that attack was Graham Chapman, current leader of the Labour Group.

I could have voted against in the Full Council Chamber and probably got kicked out – but I’m not a super fighter. And if there is a fight there I got to be a campaign, an organised fight, it can’t be just a personal fight.

SO: You were suspended from membership of the Party for three years and then expelled as soon as that time was up. Why has there been such a reaction against your involvement in the Party?

In the old Labour Group we had something like six Asian councillors and ten black councillors overall in the City Council. In the County we had seven or eight.

If you look at the record of those black members and you look at my record as a councillor then I think the white establishment and the power brokers will know that I am a dangerous person to live with.

They know that if I was allowed to get back into the Council this time after my three years suspension, they know the kind of issues and alliances that could potentially be created with the left wing and the black communities.

I think that both MPs in Nottingham, John Heppell especially, felt threatened. I think it was a challenge to their power. The whole establishment joined hands including City Council, MPs, and Party officials.

It’s a myth that the Labour Party had somehow got over its racism and that it accepts black people as equal.

It only wants black people when they’re not capable, when they’re not articulate, when they don’t pose a challenge, and when they haven’t got their own agenda.

The moment they start talking their own language, start claiming to be equal then they’re not acceptable at all. And I think that’s the main reason I’ve been punished and expelled from the Party.

I mean, the extent of the witch-hunt, this hate campaign against me – even I’m shocked. I just didn’t know that I was that dangerous!

Where do you think the struggle goes from here?

There is a much wider witch-hunt going on against black people in general and people from Pakistan, Muslim backgrounds in particular. They are the people who are facing the bleakest prospects today.

People in our communities are desperate to stand up and raise issues, get representation, get into the corridors of power and do something about it. The social and cultural issues are very vast.

These communities are very close knit, therefore their reliance on self-organisation. And that has shown itself in cities like Manchester, Birmingham, Bradford and Nottingham.

There are over two million people from Pakistani and Muslim backgrounds. And you don’t have a single person in Parliament from those communities. From Asian backgrounds you have over three million.

Councillors and MPs who are currently sitting in their wards feel threatened. They’ve done is they’ve joined hands with the establishment and make sure that people like Gerald Kaufman and Roy Hattersley, Roger Goddard and John HEPPELL are Labour MPs.

The Labour Party has now formed this new membership abuse sub-committee at the NEC just to suppress this movement and ensure that Asian candidates don’t get elected.

Councilors and MPs need to stand together and stop breaking the law. They cannot continue carrying on accepting this treatment and being treated as second-class.

SO: There has been some talk among black activists nationally about a National Black Party that stands in elections against the other major parties. What are your views on this?

If you’re talking about a Black Pressure Group which takes up and fights for the demands and issues relevant to the black communities locally or nationally then that’s fine. It’s a all part of a people’s right to self-organisation.

But to form a political party to contest elections in this context and in particular, not in favour of that, I understand where its coming from, it’s their frustration and their concern that a lack of confidence in trust in the system, but I don’t think under the current political system that a separate black party would bring much progress for black people generally. But if there was a system of proportional representation in Britain then I think there may be some justification for that.

Black Socialists back Hassan

A resolution denouncing the suspensions and expulsions nationally was passed unanimously by the Black Socialist Society’s AGM in Birmingham on May 13.

The Nottingahm campaign will be calling an organizing meeting to set up a national campaign and a Conference prior to Labour Party conference in the Autumn.

The Black Socialist Society is active in 50 co-ordination cells. Its national membership is 2,000. Yet it is denied a seat on the Labour NEC until its membership reaches 5,000.

Hassan was on the Black Sections state for the National Committee. The fact that he wasn’t a delegate still didn’t seem to stop people voting for him as the trouble-shooter up after Mark Wadsworth.

Mike Penn and other white Labour Party members present were not happy at all!
Biggest break-out in history

ALAN THORNEtt reviews How the Blue Union came to Hull Docks by Keith Sinclair

ALL THE memories of the fight for militant rank and file organisation好像back when reading Keith Sinclair’s fascinating and well-researched pamphlet on how the Blue Union came to the Hull docks in 1954.

The switch by 3,500 members of Arthur Deadkin’s right wing TSUW to the Blue Union at the National Arbitration Stevedores & Dockers (NASUW) came during an 11 day long strike demanding the mechanical handling of grain, and was described by one of the leaders at the time as “the biggest jail break in history”.

The move established the NASUW, which had a long history on the Thames and which tended to be more open and democratic than the TSUW, in Hull and the main northern ports until its absorption into the TSUW in 1982. The strike itself, 100 percent successful, was a reflection of the developing rank and file shop stewards movement which was emerging in the ports and which would soon be replicated in other sectors such as cars and engineering and which was increasingly challenging the employers.

The pamphlet does not shrink from analysing the political forces involved in the strike – both in the move to the Blue Union. It does not only detail the involvement of Birkenhead dockers in the strike – one of their leaders spoke at one of the mass meetings and pledged that they would follow Hull and join the Blue – but reveals that Gerry Healy, leader of the Trotskyist group which later became the Socialist Labour Group, also addressed the meeting.

Sinclair quotes fellow Fourth Internationalist Bob Pennington, then a Liverpool NASUW official and Healy’s group, as saying that the intervention of the Birkenhead delegation was decisive in the move to the TSUW.

Whether this is so or not the Healy group built a strong base in the NASUW, with several prominent dockers leaders as members. The main northern ports became better organised and more militant as a result of the launch of the Blue Union.

The pamphlet makes enthralling reading and is a welcome exercise in revising the history of a local labour movement.

Confronting the reality of domestic violence

HEDDIN JONES reviews the Brookside trial

"I WILL HE Kiss me or punch me?" That was the question that best represented Mandy Jordache’s fear of her husband’s violence. Brookside portrayed the reality of long term physical, sexual and emotional abuse. It depicted the growing desperation of two women trapped in a violent relationship.

Contrary to the common view of soap opera as simple and escapist, the Brookside have confronted a difficult and controversial issue with some courage. The guilty verdict is a criticism of the whole operation of British justice and its treatment of women.

The body under the patio story is a real achievement. The storyline’s guilty decision climax was watched by aisan million viewers. It has put domestic violence back in the headlines.

This is particularly important in the week Sarah Thornton was allowed to appeal after being jailed for life following the killing of her partner. Emma Humphreys was thought wrongly in Holloway prison awaiting appeal.

An important counterblast against sensationalist tabloids

The series is an important counterblast against sensationalist tabloid headlines about “women take revenge” and gory details of killings and abuse.

Fear of discovery

Particularly apt was this series’ long drawn out portrayal of the psychological violence inflicted on the women – the terror, panic and on awful fear of discovery created a widespread sympathy for the character.

The programme showed how there was no room in the British justice system for a murderess. The judge had to impose heavy custodial sentences because the law offers no alternative. Legal definitions of provocation, self defence and intent do not allow the experience of women trapped and denied routes of escape – provocation is a key issue in the Sarah Thornton case.

The script writers now face the challenge of the appeal. It is a difficult battle which they will stick to their guns and deny a happy resolution to the soap opera. Brookside has stretched the boundaries of soap opera – now they have to break them.

Socialist Outlook welcomes readers’ letters on any subject.

Write to Feedback, PO Box 1109, London N4 2UU. Letters over 300 words will be cut.

UVF front courted by Militant Labour

ON TUESDAY May 9 members of the Irish Committee for a Marx- ist Programme [Irish supporters of the Fourth International] attended out of the strangest and most disquieting meetings ever organised by a section of the militant movement here.

The Belfast meeting entitled “Is there a future for socialism?” was organised by Militant Labour, and included the platform Bill Hutchinson of the PUP [Pro- gressive Unionist Party].

This man has no place on such a platform, or in such a debate. His party is simply a front organisation for the sectarian gangsters of the UVF [Ulster Volunteer Force] set up in attempt to by-pass the British ban on TV appearances by paramilitaries which indirectly ef- fected Unionist organisations.

The UVF has a horrific history of sectarian gangster- ies. This stretches from the Malvern Stouds murders through the Shankill butchers to last Tuesday’s attack on Dublin’s Connolly station. More recently still, just before the publication of the Framework document, the UVF said it was ready to their linking “all hell would break loose”. We in the ICCP took advantage of this threat to create a workers’ party in Northern Ireland. Needless to say, the UVF accepted.

We can only ask with the poet: “What strange ture shuffles towards Bethle- hem to be born?”

The ICCP has been con- cerned for some time within the ranks of Loyalism they have been the most fnanci- ically right-wing. They have had the most extensive con- tact with British and Euro- pean fascists.

Yet at the Militant Labour meeting Billy Hutchinson confided that he was a socialist. Not one member of Militant Labour contra- dicted him. In fact Peter Hadden, the Militant Labour spokesperson, said that every- one in the meeting be- lieved in socialism – endorsing Hutchinson’s pre- postorous claim. A member of Militant Labour then asked if the PUP would par- ticipate in a “conference of socialism” with a view to creating a workers’ party in Northern Ireland. Needless to say, the PUP accepted.

We would like to hear their ex- planations and we would welcome the opportunity to publicly debate with them. In the meantime we have no option but to sound the alarm bell for the members of Militant Labour, for Irish socialists and for the broad international movement of socialism.

Irish Committee for a Marxist Programme, Belfast

Morals and revolution

I WAS astonished by Enzo Traverso’s article on morality (SO 82). The article starts off talking about Marxism and materialism. It ends up in the dizzy reality of human idealism. Perhaps this explains why Traverso has recently written a very complimentary book about religion.

Whilst it is possible to agree with the criticisms of the Bolshievic’s excessive measures, his conclusions are all wrong. He suggests that some of the “anomolous” Bolshie- vik acts helped “forise the oppo- sition of Stalinism”.

What Traverso doesn’t do is show how it was the ma- terial conditions (Russia’s isolation and civil war) which gave rise both to Stalinism and to the clampdown by the Bolshievics. Traverso is turn- ing an effect into a cause.

Secondly, the equation with Nicaragua really back- fires. One of the reasons that the revolution failed is pro- perly because the Sandinistas chose bourgeois tactics. The (we are all dagnifed) over working class morality.

The Contact told all of their granted freedoms to crush the progressive aspirations of the government. The key question is therefore not what morals/freedom, but those moral/freedom?

Unfortunately the class struggle isn’t a dignified hu- man conflict. This means that the workers have to take the military initiative.

We do not simply wage a defensive struggle and then claim the moral high ground. In the meantime thousands will have been massacred by the other side. This is the case in Nicaragua and Chile.

Of course I am not advo- cating massacres or glorify- ing violence. But there are questions – like Kronstadt, which are military necessities.

Likewise, in times of struggle, the death penalty be- comes a practical rather than a straight moral issue. And we should never advocate free- dom of expression to counter- revolutionaryists.

True we are fighting for a Marxist society without one person dominating another. But first we must go through the transition of the dictator- ship of the proletariat where the workers do dominate the bourgeois elements.

To do this phase is again to counterpose an idealist hu- manism to historical reality and necessity. Regrettably we cannot impose the ideal today. Morals are a product of the stage and must go through the class struggle first.

Joe Naim, Bath
LAST – but not least, UNISON, the biggest NHS union, has now added its voice to the unanimous chorus of organisations rejecting the Tories' insulting one percent pay offer.

A prolonged consultation exercise in UNISON branches throughout the country has shown that health workers have grasped the need to throw out locally-negotiated deals – even where they appear to top up the increase to three percent.

Many of the Trusts with whom they would have to settle want to add productivity strings to help cover the costs of the deal. And even where the full three percent has been offered locally without strings, the acceptance of a deal with an individual Trust means the end of national pay agreements, leaving each Trust workforce isolated in future negotiations on pay and conditions.

That's why the Tories have been so determined to separate out the one percent payment from the 'top up'. But in trying to force home a new structure that would weaken the health unions it has succeeded only in antagonising health workers across the board.

99 percent

It takes the special political talents of Health Minister Gery Malone – the man who urged Margaret Thatcher to bring in the Poll Tax in Scotland and England at once – to have turned the docile donkeys of the Royal College of Nursing into ferocious tigers mobilising 99 percent of conference delegates to vote to drop their no-strike pledge and to adopt a resounding vote of no confidence in him.

The sudden radicalisation of the RCN and RCM has now turned the heat on UNISON, whose leaders had plainly been hoping to be dragged kicking and smiling into an RCN-led sell-out.

The TUC-affiliated union must at least match the militancy of the Royal Colleges and professional bodies if it is not to face a wholesale defection of demoralised members.

Ballot

So far the leadership has been less than dynamic. Months after the original offer stirred the anger of health workers UNISON is still debating whether or not to ballot for strike action.

Yet the issue, overlapping as it does with the fight against hospital closures, offers an opportunity for a high-profile and popular fight in which the Tories would be isolated. Unless the national pay agreements are defended, this could be the last chance for nationally co-ordinated action on NHS pay.

UNISON should be at the vanguard, not the tail end of the campaign. Its health branches must be convinced they will find full support from socialists in mounting a fightback against the Tories.