Wealthy few join £500 a plate celebrations, while workers suffer

Twelve months hard Labour!

A YEAR AGO the whole labour movement celebrated the demise of John Major's vicious Tory government and the end of almost 20 years of brutal attacks on the working class. Tony Blair's government swept to office with Labour's biggest ever majority, leaving the rump Tory opposition splintered and demoralised.

The new Labour team could literally do anything they wanted: and what they wanted to do was... implement Tory policies! They have been ruthless, and consistent. They have offered "fairness" only to the rich and the ruling class, while the "firmness" consists of attacking the working class movement that created the Labour Party and put them in office.

12 months on we have student fees, no moves for a minimum wage, no rights to union recognition, no let-up in the cuts in health and local government, and no reprieve for the asylum seekers and refugees. Nobody expected the Blair team to offer us socialism, but it didn't have to be this bad!

One welcome result is that there have been signs of a revival of anger, activity and militancy in the labour movement. The few illusions in Blair have quickly begun to be dispelled. Fighting back for our rights is the best hope of winning real gains after 12 months of frustration and betrayal.

No to a bosses' Europe! Demonstrate in Cardiff June 13
2 SOCIALIST OUTLOOK

Hillingdon strikers approach victory

Simon Deville

AFTER MORE than 2 years of struggle, a partial victory at least is in sight for striking workers at Hillingdon Hospital. A representative of Pall Mall, the company that sacked the strikers, has written to at least 20 of strikers conceding that they were unfairly dismissed.

Their case will now go back to the Industrial Tribunal in the middle of May, but the admission from Pall Mall will mean that a settlement in their favour is almost certain.

Having been refused support for continuing the strike from their own UNISON branch, the Hillingdon women had their branch membership revoked under the wording of a union rule that says that members who have been unemployed for over 2 years do not have an automatic right to remain in the branch.

This victory is a testament to a courageous struggle that could have been ended years ago if the national leadership of UNISON had put in half as much time and energy into supporting their dispute as it did in trying to prevent the strikers even speaking at various union conferences.

UNISON officials withdrew official support for their dispute at the beginning of January 1997 year after they failed to impose a settlement that the strikers had already rejected. Since then the only official support has been to fund lawyers to mount the legal challenge to Pall Mall.

While UNISON is supposedly a "member-led" union, the national leadership were not prepared to allow the strikers to even have a say in whether or not their dispute continued.

The strike started when Pall Mall tried to impose an attack on pay and conditions on the already low paid workers. UNISON leaders constantly talk about defending the interests of low paid workers, of part-time workers, of black people and of women members of the union.

This dispute has shown that their interests can only be defended through militant action. It also shows that the current UNISON leadership is incapable of leading such a struggle.

Magnet strikers vote to end dispute

AFTER 21 months on strike, Magnet workers could vote on May 4 by 47 to 34 to accept redundancy.

After heated debates the workers were unable to reach an agreement on a recommendation to the strikers and the deal was put to a secret ballot without one. 340 workers were sacked from the factory area in Darlington after going on strike for a minor pay increase. Since then they have organised a picket throughout the dispute facing physical attacks and intimidation.

Magnet, along with the numerous other long running trade union disputes (Critchley Labels, Hillingdon, Liverpool Dockers), was always going to be extremely difficult in a period where the wider labour movement has been so passive. Without a militant trade union movement that can mobilise support for such disputes it is no surprise that many of the strikers felt unable to see any strategy that could win back their jobs.

At the same time, disputes such as Magnet have inspired an inspiration for working class militants across the country and have exposed the myth of 'partnership' between bosses and workers that is currently being pedalled by union leaderships.

Ian Crommond, secretary of the shops committee, told Socialist Outlook 'If the trade union leaders would get their heads out of the sand and stand up for the people they are supposed to, we wouldn't be in this situation in the first place. "If they stood up for ordinary workers and not the flashy suits and Tony Blair we wouldn't have had to go on strike."

Privatised Tameside care workers say "Enough is enough!"

Adam Hartman

TAMESIDE Care Group workers are on strike against attacks on their pay and conditions.

Almost 300 UNISON and GMB members, employed by the company in 11 residential care homes and one nursing home, voted out on March 30 by an overwhelming majority to go on strike, in response to receiving notice that they were to be issued with new contracts.

Tameside Care Group proposes to cut basic pay by up to £2.68 per hour, cut paid annual leave by a week, abolish sick pay and reduce the enhanced rate for Bank Holidays. The strikers have until May Day to sign the new contracts or be dismissed.

These attacks follow a five year pay freeze, previous cuts in sick pay and maternity leave and the ending of enhanced rates for overtime and weekends.

In 1992, the staff took a pay cut, by up to 35 per cent in some cases, only two years after the homes were transferred from local authority ownership with guarantees to staff that local government pay and conditions would be protected.

Tameside Enterprises Ltd and later Tameside Care Group were set up by the Council as "non-profit-making" trusts, to run their elderly people’s homes in a "hands-off" arrangement. The group was used to avoid real financial difficulties to pressurise staff into accepting pay cuts. However, despite again claiming difficulties the Group made £750,000 last year.

Bankers

According to a report in Tribune (February 6 1998) the Group is believed to have come under pressure from the Royal Bank of Scotland to cut staff costs, presumably to safeguard the bank’s profits on capital loaned to the Trust. If true, this illustrates the damaging impact of private finance on employment conditions and patient care in health and social services.

Management has accused staff of neglecting the needs of residents by taking strike action.

The strikers reply that care cannot be provided on the cheap, and that as permanent staff they are more committed to the residents and understand their needs better than the agency workers now in their place.

The strikers have received support from the residents and their relatives, with one 90 year old man joining the picket line for a while.

In reality, care assistants do a difficult job involving high levels of skill and responsibility. Yet in capitalist society this work is not properly valued. At least because in Britain alone, tens of thousands of mainly women do the same work for free in the home. The skill is not recognised because it stems from women’s supposedly “natural” role as carers.

The strikers have issued a hardship appeal. To donate, send cheques payable to "TAMESIDE Timmeside Branch" at UNISON, 29 Booth Street, Ashton under Lyme, ST6 3ER. Also write letters of protest to Alan Firth, Managing Director, Tameside Care Group, Enterprise House, Grange Road South, Hyde SK14 5NY, sending copies to UNISON at the above address, or phone the Group’s Head Office on 0161-368 9099.

In neighbouring Manchester, hundreds of care workers are balloting for industrial action which could possibly including strikes, against plans by Manchester Care to cut pay from £120 to £90 for 25 hours work.

Manchester Care took over 18 homes from Manchester City Council in 1991. The company are now planning to close two homes, using the excuse of imminent financial crisis – sounds familiar.

These disputes highlight the fact that privatisation is just the start of a whole series of attacks on workers in public services.

The struggle to defend public services and the pay and conditions of those who work in them doesn’t stop with privatisation. Ongoing attacks need an ongoing fightback.

Camden strikers threatened with mass sackings

As the Camden libraries dispute enters its 10th week, Camden's Labour council is becoming more open with its threats to sack all the strikers and recruit a scab workforce. Up until now of Camden’s 11 libraries have been closed throughout the dispute.

A demonstration of around 300 people were at the scene at the end of April and the strikers supporters include Christine Lampard, Michael Foot, Dennis Skinner, Michael Peto and numerous other well known radio commentators from Hampstead and Highgate.

Whilst the council are unlikely to carry out any mass sackings prior to the local elections it is clear that the council are digger into the deep end and even be prepared to lose some councilors from the Labour group in order to defeat the workforce. It is also clear that the strikers will need to spread the dispute in order to defeat the council in their fight against restructuring and down grading of posts.

Get your copy!

INSIDE COWLEY

Alan Thornett’s first-hand account of trade union struggles in the car industry from the 1970s, with serious lessons for trade union activists today.

48 pages, illustrated £11.95 plus £2 post and packing from Socialist Outlook, Box 1169, London W1U.
Time to sink the Euro

AS THE GOOD ship Euro prepares to set sail on the choppy world financial waters, an unseemly fight has erupted on the bridge as to who should be the captain.

The key factor in maintaining the single currency will be the authority and tight-fisted monetary control of the European Central Bank, a continent-wide quango whose six billion members will be appointed for an 8-year term, and who will not be subject to the control of any elected government or the European Parliament.

Control of the ECB is therefore a vital issue, and the German government has been pressing hard for Wim Duisenberg, a Dutch banker, to take the top slot as president, with Bundesbank chief Otto Asmussen as his deputy. This has triggered a major row with the French government, which has insisted that Bank of France boss Jean Claude Trichet should get the job.

The Dutch-German stick-up has apparently broken a secret deal struck by Helmut Kohl and Francois Mitterrand in which the bank would be in Frankfurt, but its first president would be French.

Repeated efforts to resolve this angry hoo-ha have failed - even Tony "Mr Peace Process" Blair has been unable to soothe French feelings, while Duisenberg supporters have rallied all the main political parties in the Netherlands in the run-up to their general election, with the Finance Minister warning that "If he does not get the job it would be even worse for us than losing to Germany in the World Cup".

This is just one expression of the tensions that are being carefully covered over as the main players drive on towards the single currency.

-target missed

Last month's announcement that eleven EU countries had qualified to join European Monetary Union was rather soured by the publication of figures showing that six of them - including Germany and the Netherlands - had failed to meet the target of reducing government debt to a maximum of 60% of Gross Domestic Product.

In the case of Italy and Belgium, despite frantic fiddling and mas- sing of figures, the debt figure - at 118% of GDP this year - is almost double the target set by the Maastricht Treaty, and far worse than the 107% notch-up by Greece - the only EU country ruled out of applying.

These problems have not gone unnoticed, and there is growing opposition to Italy joining the new currency, especially in the Netherlands, where the government has threatened to vote against it unless there is a tough new austerity budget, and among conservative German bosses, fearful that the new currency would be weaker than their beloved deutschmark.

Duisenberg has nailed his colours to the mast, warning that countries entering EMU will have to take further steps to cut public sector debt - policies which seem likely to trigger new cuts in welfare spending.

The complications of imposing a single currency are underlined by a new survey showing enormous variations in levels of poverty across the EU member states. Parts of Greece, Spain and Italy receive less than 20% of the annual income of the richest regions. The EU "poverty belt" includes the whole of Portugal except Lisbon. Average per capita income in Britain ($11,400) is less than the $12,000 EU average.

Any new austerity package would further widen these gaps - and with this price tag, as French Communist Party leader Robert Hue said in April, the Euro would benefit only the bankers and financiers. Far from a step towards internationalism, the Euro will intensify national rival-
ries and conflicts, and leave no democratic levers of control over the European economy.

Opinion polls in Britain show that support for the Euro is largely confined to those on the £50,000-plus income bracket. Even the Guardian's chief cheerleader for the Euro, Mark Atkinson, has warned that in many prospective member countries it is seen as "something which has been thrust on them from above by the financial markets and political elites."

Tied to Maastricht

Nevertheless Tony Blair has declared his ambition to press forward with the launch of the single currency, while Gordon Brown's economic policy is already tied in to the Maastricht criteria and the demands of a future European Central Bank. He must be stopped.

This is why it is so important to build a major protest demonstration to challenge the single currency and Maastricht austerity at the EU summit in Cardiff on June 13.

Much of the British left is now committed to support this initiative, with the promise of strong support from other European countries. There is still time to sink the Euro, before it drowns more jobs and welfare services in its wake.
Labour Party - back left NEC slate

Kathy Jamison (Scotland)
Christine Shawcroft (London)
Liz Davies (London)
Mark Seddon (Southern)
Peter Wilsman (London)
Andy Howell (W. Midlands)

whom must be women. Given the difficulties of securing nomination, this makes it possible that the slate will have less people on it than there are places. The best response to this method of deciding the slate is to build a Left which is open and democratic throughout the election campaign. At this stage the crucial thing is to secure nominations. Previously candidates had only to secure the nomination of their own Constituency Party. As the changes made at last year's conference under 'Partners in Power' left the details suitably vague, sent an insulting letter to the unification conference.

The key decision on April 15 was to finally set the date for the proposed national demonstration, May 1, 1999, which is a delaying tactic, was agreed. Although some may be disappointed at yet another postponement, it gives us plenty of time to organise what should be one of the most important labour movement demonstration Britain has yet seen. Building a powerful and united national campaign will be an enormous challenge for the traditionally fractious British left. If next year's March is successful, the success will be determined by the work done now. Momentum is the key to that success. A whole range of local, regional, national events, meetings, etc., will be required. Effective interventions in five or six rounds of trade union confer-

TUC retreat on recognition

A SPECIAL meeting of the TUC General Council was called on April 20 to discuss the dispute with Downing Street over the interpretation of Labour's election pledge to legalise the right of workers to union recognition where a majority in a workplace vote for it. But the result was to offer further compromises beyond the original TUC position. Blair has lent heavily towards the CBI proposals, which were originally to require the participation in the ballot of a majority of those eligible to vote, and now call for 40% of those eligible to vote - an almost equally impossible figure to achieve under the conditions the ballots will take place. Having already backed off of the original TUC position of requiring a simple majority (51% of those voting in the ballot) the special meeting agreed to accept that a minimum of 30% of those eligible to vote should vote yes, as well as and some form of exemption for "small firms".

Crucial

The debate over the detail is of crucial importance if what goes into the government White Paper "Fairness at Work" in the next few weeks is to have any positive effect in the workplace. For the TUC and the trade union leaders it is a crucial issue: union recognition was the one thing they thought they were going to get out of New Labour.

The was reflected in the recent STUC conference in Perth, which adopted the TUC formula, and where John Monks was criticised by UNISON chief Roger Moody for the concessions which have been made.

For Blair, however, the most important victory is his relationship with the employers. He will not allow the TUC or its views to get in the way of that, particularly if no serious pressure is being mounted to force him to do so.

A 4 SOCIALIST OUTLOOK

NHS staff defeat wage cuts: but the key is strong, recognised unions

The candidates proposed are: Kathy Jamison, member of the Scottish Party Executive; Christine Shawcroft, former Tower Hamlets Councillor (kicked off the panel for opposing cuts) and member of the London Regional Executive; Liz Davies, former Councillor for Whitechapel; Pete Wilsman, member of the General Arrangements Committee; and Andy Howell, Labour Reform member. Nominations have to be in by June 5, which leaves little time in new campaigns, with two places reserved for the LCFTU, if they change their minds.

Representatives of those national unions which have affiliated are also included.

The new committee is intended to ensure there will be a recall national conference of the new campaign in July. There is a strong agreement that the affiliated national unions should be represented on any national committee. The leaderships of those unions now affiliated are clearly ardent supporters of the campaigns. Problems may emerge if supporters succeed in winning other unions, with less friendly attitudes. The campaign is marginal, those unions will send a token sup-

The secretary of the LCFTU sent an insulting letter to the unification conference. The key decision on April 15 was to finally set the date for the proposed national demonstration, May 1, 1999, which is a delaying tactic, was agreed. Although some may be disappointed at yet another postponement, it gives us plenty of time to organise what should be one of the most important labour movement demonstration Britain has yet seen. Building a powerful and united national campaign will be an enormous challenge for the traditionally fractious British left. If next year's March is successful, the success will be determined by the work done now. Momentum is the key to that success. A whole range of local, regional, national events, meetings, etc., will be required. Effective interventions in five or six rounds of trade union confer-

The TUC retreat on recognition

A SPECIAL meeting of the TUC General Council was called on April 20 to discuss the dispute with Downing Street over the interpretation of Labour's election pledge to legalise the right of workers to union recognition where a majority in a workplace vote for it. But the result was to offer further compromises beyond the original TUC position. Blair has lent heavily towards the CBI proposals, which were originally to require the participation in the ballot of a majority of those eligible to vote, and now call for 40% of those eligible to vote - an almost equally impossible figure to achieve under the conditions the ballots will take place. Having already backed off of the original TUC position of requiring a simple majority (51% of those voting in the ballot) the special meeting agreed to accept that a minimum of 30% of those eligible to vote should vote yes, as well as and some form of exemption for "small firms".

Crucial

The debate over the detail is of crucial importance if what goes into the government White Paper "Fairness at Work" in the next few weeks is to have any positive effect in the workplace. For the TUC and the trade union leaders it is a crucial issue: union recognition was the one thing they thought they were going to get out of New Labour.

The was reflected in the recent STUC conference in Perth, which adopted the TUC formula, and where John Monks was criticised by UNISON chief Roger Moody for the concessions which have been made.

For Blair, however, the most important victory is his relationship with the employers. He will not allow the TUC or its views to get in the way of that, particularly if no serious pressure is being mounted to force him to do so.

The candidates proposed are: Kathy Jamison, member of the Scottish Party Executive; Christine Shawcroft, former Tower Hamlets Councillor (kicked off the panel for opposing cuts) and member of the London Regional Executive; Liz Davies, former Councillor for Whitechapel; Pete Wilsman, member of the General Arrangements Committee; and Andy Howell, Labour Reform member. Nominations have to be in by June 5, which leaves little time in new campaigns, with two places reserved for the LCFTU, if they change their minds.

Representatives of those national unions which have affiliated are also included.

The new committee is intended to ensure there will be a recall national conference of the new campaign in July. There is a strong agreement that the affiliated national unions should be represented on any national committee. The leaderships of those unions now affiliated are clearly ardent supporters of the campaigns. Problems may emerge if supporters succeed in winning other unions, with less friendly attitudes. The campaign is marginal, those unions will send a token sup-

The secretary of the LCFTU sent an insulting letter to the unification conference. The key decision on April 15 was to finally set the date for the proposed national demonstration, May 1, 1999, which is a delaying tactic, was agreed. Although some may be disappointed at yet another postponement, it gives us plenty of time to organise what should be one of the most important labour movement demonstration Britain has yet seen. Building a powerful and united national campaign will be an enormous challenge for the traditionally fractious British left. If next year's March is successful, the success will be determined by the work done now. Momentum is the key to that success. A whole range of local, regional, national events, meetings, etc., will be required. Effective interventions in five or six rounds of trade union confer-

The TUC retreat on recognition

A SPECIAL meeting of the TUC General Council was called on April 20 to discuss the dispute with Downing Street over the interpretation of Labour's election pledge to legalise the right of workers to union recognition where a majority in a workplace vote for it. But the result was to offer further compromises beyond the original TUC position. Blair has lent heavily towards the CBI proposals, which were originally to require the participation in the ballot of a majority of those eligible to vote, and now call for 40% of those eligible to vote - an almost equally impossible figure to achieve under the conditions the ballots will take place. Having already backed off of the original TUC position of requiring a simple majority (51% of those voting in the ballot) the special meeting agreed to accept that a minimum of 30% of those eligible to vote should vote yes, as well as and some form of exemption for "small firms".

Crucial

The debate over the detail is of crucial importance if what goes into the government White Paper "Fairness at Work" in the next few weeks is to have any positive effect in the workplace. For the TUC and the trade union leaders it is a crucial issue: union recognition was the one thing they thought they were going to get out of New Labour.

The was reflected in the recent STUC conference in Perth, which adopted the TUC formula, and where John Monks was criticised by UNISON chief Roger Moody for the concessions which have been made.

For Blair, however, the most important victory is his relationship with the employers. He will not allow the TUC or its views to get in the way of that, particularly if no serious pressure is being mounted to force him to do so.
Stop scapegoating the Campfield 9

Labour's immigration policy should be on trial

Bill MacKeith

The protests that erupted inside Campfield immigration detention centre on August 2 1997 put detention policy in the dock once more, and triggered two developments that have now come to the fore.

The first was the commissioning of two reports, one by the asylum rights campaign, the other by the government — from its own chief inspector of Prisons.

The second development was a show trial staged to intimidate refugees and nip any future protests by detainees in the bud.

Nine young West African refugees have been selected to be scapegoats for the protest that called the failure of the UK's detention policy on that day in August.

50-100 detainees of many different nationalities and both sexes protested at yet another sudden, arbitrary and violent removal to prison, in this case of two detainees. During the protest, placards were hastily made up said 'Prisoners of conscience', 'And freedom for all'. They appeared on our TV screens.

The nine are charged with riot and violent assembly. Their trial opens at Oxford Crown Court on Monday June 1 and will last weeks, maybe two months. Eight of the nine have been in prison since August, after months (up to 17 in one case) in detention.

Six of the nine are from Nigeria and sought refuge in the UK from the Abacha regime. Two of these are Ogonis from lands devastated by Shell. The others are from Gambia, Ghana and Liberia.

Three of the nine have attempted suicide.

The two of them are minors. All of 16 last August; one of them is now in a secure psychiatric unit, driven back by memories.

The message is clear enough and close to all but Labour's ministers, stuck on Tory policies

The message is loud and clear: There's no money for a legal aid policy.

The refusal to provide any legal aid is part of aiding and abetting, as political asylum and immigration law is the same under all regimes.

The message is loud and clear: There's no money for a legal aid policy.

The refusal to provide any legal aid is part of aiding and abetting, as political asylum and immigration law is the same under all regimes.

Refugees are not criminals.

There are 100,000 asylum seekers in the UK, 90% of them have been in the UK for less than six months.

The message is loud and clear: There's no money for a legal aid policy.

The refusal to provide any legal aid is part of aiding and abetting, as political asylum and immigration law is the same under all regimes.

Refugees are not criminals.

There are 100,000 asylum seekers in the UK, 90% of them have been in the UK for less than six months.

The message is loud and clear: There's no money for a legal aid policy.

The refusal to provide any legal aid is part of aiding and abetting, as political asylum and immigration law is the same under all regimes.

Refugees are not criminals.

There are 100,000 asylum seekers in the UK, 90% of them have been in the UK for less than six months.

The message is loud and clear: There's no money for a legal aid policy.

The refusal to provide any legal aid is part of aiding and abetting, as political asylum and immigration law is the same under all regimes.

Refugees are not criminals.

There are 100,000 asylum seekers in the UK, 90% of them have been in the UK for less than six months.

The message is loud and clear: There's no money for a legal aid policy.

The refusal to provide any legal aid is part of aiding and abetting, as political asylum and immigration law is the same under all regimes.

Refugees are not criminals.

There are 100,000 asylum seekers in the UK, 90% of them have been in the UK for less than six months.

The message is loud and clear: There's no money for a legal aid policy.

The refusal to provide any legal aid is part of aiding and abetting, as political asylum and immigration law is the same under all regimes.

Refugees are not criminals.

There are 100,000 asylum seekers in the UK, 90% of them have been in the UK for less than six months.

The message is loud and clear: There's no money for a legal aid policy.

The refusal to provide any legal aid is part of aiding and abetting, as political asylum and immigration law is the same under all regimes.

Refugees are not criminals.

There are 100,000 asylum seekers in the UK, 90% of them have been in the UK for less than six months.

The message is loud and clear: There's no money for a legal aid policy.

The refusal to provide any legal aid is part of aiding and abetting, as political asylum and immigration law is the same under all regimes.

Refugees are not criminals.

There are 100,000 asylum seekers in the UK, 90% of them have been in the UK for less than six months.

The message is loud and clear: There's no money for a legal aid policy.

The refusal to provide any legal aid is part of aiding and abetting, as political asylum and immigration law is the same under all regimes.

Refugees are not criminals.

There are 100,000 asylum seekers in the UK, 90% of them have been in the UK for less than six months.

The message is loud and clear: There's no money for a legal aid policy.

The refusal to provide any legal aid is part of aiding and abetting, as political asylum and immigration law is the same under all regimes.

Refugees are not criminals.

There are 100,000 asylum seekers in the UK, 90% of them have been in the UK for less than six months.

The message is loud and clear: There's no money for a legal aid policy.

The refusal to provide any legal aid is part of aiding and abetting, as political asylum and immigration law is the same under all regimes.
Union anger at tube privatisation

Prescott runs off the rails

by Greg Tucker (RMT National Executive, personal capacity)

EVEN before the vote in the General Election it was obvious to most rail workers that New Labour was not going to be rushing to re-nationalise the railways.

But frustration at lack of progress has now turned to anger in the wake of John Prescott’s announcement that the government will be privatising most of London Underground.

To add insult to injury, his plans are deliberately focused on attacking his fellow trade union members in the RMT. Indeed, at his “behest” LUL management have drawn up their strategy for the privatisation which has as its first stage, plans to smash the RMT organisation on LUL, which they admit is the only force trying to stop Prescott’s plan.

The RMT is to respond in kind. At a mass rally on April 30 Jimmy Knapp will announce that all LUL members will be balloted during May for industrial action against the effects of privatisation.

To quote the message LUL Northern Line Guards will be holding their third day of industrial action the following day in furtherance of their dispute over the introduction of One Person Operation.

On the main rail network things have gone from bad to worse. Whilst a small handful of ex-BR managers are becoming overnight millionaires, the full weight of privatisation is falling on passengers and rail workers alike. As services deteriorate, drivers are facing pay cuts, job losses and the imposition of worse conditions.

It is becoming evident that whilst there are some winners, some other rail companies are close to financial collapse. In particular, for rail infrastructure workers (track and signal maintenance etc), this has meant increased uncertainty as contracts pass hands between different companies.

The RMT answer has been to present a single national claim to all the infrastructure companies, demanding a major restructuring of terms and conditions on our terms, alongside a significant pay increase.

Faced with little serious response from these companies, ballots are now to take place in all eleven key companies across the country. Along with LUL, June could now see effectively a national rail dispute.

As an indication of the workers’ mood signal maintenance workers at Euston are set to start action on May 1 on a week long stoppage over local issues.

And on South West Trains, Guards are being balloted over the introduction of Driver Only Operation. With around 200 jobs threatened RMT members are in no mood to allow the management to roll over on them. A series of mass meetings have been held and the Guards are determined that they will protect their jobs, taking whatever action is necessary.

Having had the industrial agenda set for them over recent years by government attacks, core rail workers are now saying enough is enough and trying to respond with their own demands. The task facing the government “we could do business with”. On the other hand, the pressure from delegates and members meant the leadership had to criticise Labour on a wide range of issues such as the naming and shaming of allegedly “failing” schools.

These tensions are likely to continue. The leadership is going to be unable to satisfy the demands of members and keep a cosy relationship with the government. It is the job of the left in the union to push forward members’ demands to ensure real pressure is put on Blunkett and Blair and their supporters running local councils.

The Socialist Teachers’ Alliance is organising an important conference on EAZs in London on 9 May. This conference will be used as a springboard to launch a national campaign including a national march in one of the EAZ areas, possibly Tameside.

Scientific tests confirm no trace of socialism or radicalism in David Blunkett
Hitting back at the G8 bankers

AS FAMINE again raises its ugly head in Africa, the world's richest nations passed a meeting in Birmingham at the G8 summit. Many of their bankers are concerned not to relieve poverty and hunger, but to recover debts from bankrupt African countries. Estimates suggest external debts of African countries will rise to over $200 billion in 1995 — more than double the 1985 figure.

Plans for "recovery" drawn up by the World Bank and the IMF insist that African countries can sustain an external debt equivalent to twice their export earnings — incurring massive interest payments, and imposing new austerity on workers and peasants to line the coffers of Western bankers. An alternative view will be spelled out at the People's Summit, sponsored by the New Economics Foundation to coincide with the G8 Summit.

Discussions on Friday 15th will include an African and Caribbean People's Summit, a debate on Sustainable Development, and a session looking at Oxfam Against the People. Attendees will see a People's Forum on Globalisation, a Jubilee 2000 Coalition rally on Tuesday, a G8 Night and a People's Summit website at http://g8.wgspot.com/people/summit98.

THE EUROPEAN Union has become an agent of neoliberal policies, designed to serve the interests of transnational corporations (TNCs). The EU promotes globalization strategies for fragmenting our resistance and for throwing us all into greater competition with each other. The EU's central project is the 'single market', a European 'free' trade zone. Officially this aims to make production more efficient, to make European industry more 'competitive' against foreign rivals, and so to protect employment. In reality, this project frees capital from local or national constraints, helps capital to become integrated globally, especially across the Atlantic Ocean, and intensifies competition amongst countries to attract "investment projects".

The Single Market creates a buyer's market for the cheapest wages, the most 'productive' workforce, and the lowest environmental standards. As GNP rises overall, most of us lose out in this competition; social inequalities deepen between the regions and within them. In the name of 'international competitiveness', the EU has imposed many harmful policies: * EPU with its convergence criteria, requiring massive budget cuts (whose first targets are social welfare programmes), and requiring higher productivity in order to keep down inflation; * further deregulation, privatization, job insecurity, and exploitation of labour, with Britain leading the way for the rest of Europe; * massive investment in transport infrastructure, especially the Trans-European Network (TEN), which underlies the recent motorway developments in Britain; * R&D subsidies for information technologies, which helped the TNCs to displace and discipline labour; as well as for agriculture biotechnology, which intensifies competitive pressures on farmers and forces dependence upon "genetic fixes".

The EU has also promoted neoliberal globalization beyond Europe. The EU has been a leading proponent of the MAI (Multi-lateral Agreement on Investment), which would provide legal enforcement of global deregulation, e.g. by guaranteeing companies equal access to markets worldwide. Rather than protect us from TNCs, the EU has imposed neoliberal globalisation on their behalf. Recolonisation was established to catalyse a network or resistance to this assault.

Our aims stand in contrast with nationalists who oppose European integration as a threat to national sovereignty. For us, the main threat is the neoliberal policies, regardless of which state promotes them. The EMU convergence criteria have been imposed on us for many years, and we will continue to suffer the effects, regardless of whether Britain officially joins EMU.

In June 1997, tens of thousands matched against Monsanto's security in Amsterdam.

Now for Cardiff!

Cardiff, such as the European Network of the Unemployed (ENU), will ensure that the demonstration has a truly international character. The conference overall was a big success, possibly the most successful yet, certainly the most focused on campaigning. Most importantly it demonstrated the ongoing strength of the Euro-march campaign and the role it can play in uniting the struggles across Europe.

Reclaim Europe!

June 1997: tens of thousands matched against Monsanto's security in Amsterdam.

Now for Cardiff!

Cardiff such as the European Network of the Unemployed (ENU), will ensure that the demonstration has a truly international character. The conference overall was a big success, possibly the most successful yet, certainly the most focused on campaigning. Most importantly it demonstrated the ongoing strength of the Euro-march campaign and the role it can play in uniting the struggles across Europe.

Labour, environmentalist, anti-racist, feminist and other issues - from all over Europe. All groups and activists are invited to participate.

June 1997 Reclaim Europe Counter-summit

Counter-summit

Tuesday and a half days of debate, criticism and discussion of the EU, aimed at national and international campaigners, following from previous counter-summits, particularly Amsterdam last year.

- Friday evening: Meeting with International speakers
- Saturday: Forum on the EU, covering four main themes: Employment; Social Welfare; the Environment; and Implications for the rest of the world.
- Sunday: "Alternatives to the EU and campaigning strategies".

Contact Reclaim Europe (c/o Temple of Peace, Cathays Park, Cardiff CF24 4DJ, e-mail reclaim-europe@earthlink.net, Web site http://www.peacelink.com/Rainforest/5581/)

Socialist Teacher

Get your copy of Socialist Teacher from John Yanndell, 96 Carysfort Rd, London N16 9AD
tel 0171 690 4308 fax 0171 690 4611 e-mail john@tsecteas.demon.co.uk
Green paper on welfare reform
Field fenced in

John Lister
FEARS that junior minister "Mad Frank" Field be unleashed to mount a full-scale axe attack on social security and the welfare state have been somewhat exaggerated, according to the relatively tame formulations in the new government Green Paper.

It appears that Field has been unable to persuade his New Labour colleagues of the viability of embarking on a root and branch demolition of state-funded services.

There is little hint in the document of Field's deep, public afflication for the privatised pension schemes forced upon the people of Chile in the aftermath of the brutal military coup of 1973 which smashed the trade unions and working class political movement. Perhaps Field's fellow ministers are saving this for a later stage in the evolution of the welfare state.

The relative blandness of the Green Paper should not however imply that it has anything but potentially devastating implications. It presents a wholesale ideological retreat not simply from "socialists" - of which Field, Blair and co have never been supporters - but from any notion of redistributing wealth, and from any policy of progressive tax allowance.

Thatcher's gap

It begins by drawing attention to the widening gap between rich and poor under the Thatcher government - between 1979 and 1994/95, households in the top fifth of the population saw income rise in excess of 50 percent; but the incomes of those in the bottom fifth barely rose in real terms. The increased inequality "has been particularly marked among pensioners," while children are also suffering: "nearly 3 million children are growing up in workless households."

But these developments are discussed alongside alleged problems with the "structural problem" - rather than the outcome of deliberate and cynical Tory policies: of tax cuts for the rich; cuts for the poor; creating a pool of unemployment to drive down wages and weaken union resistance; and of course the great take-up by Thatcher's government to axe the link between the state pension and average earnings - thus rapidly devaluing it.

Of course we can immediately see why the Green Paper does not draw attention to these policies - because New Labour has already decided to preserve them intact - but to preserve them intact! Gordon Brown's pledge not to increase taxes on the rich for the lifetime of the government effectively rules out any attempt to redistribute wealth and narrow the gap between rich and poor.

The Green Paper echoes previous statements by government ministers that New Labour has no intention of restoring the link between pensions and average earnings; and the "New Deal" schemes to press-gang the unemployed into subsidised jobs are just a new version of the long unemployment to hold down wages.

Of course the rhetoric of the Green Paper is one of concern for "inequity", "social exclusion" and "social exclusion". But it has no tangible perspective on how these problems are to be addressed.

An old-fashioned Labour view might be that a decent minimum wage might make a significant contribution to those at the bottom of the pay scales, but a few, small steps towards closing the gap. But we already know that the government is looking to fix subsidies to welfare at a pitifully low level - perhaps £3.50 an hour, with a host of exemptions to allow some of the worst skinflint employers to keep costs as low as possible.

The trade union view would be that organized workers could be given a chance to fight for wage increases if the Labour government would simply sweep away the battery of anti-union laws brought in by the Tories and give a legal right to recognition: but again it is clear that for New Labour this simple option is "unthinkable."

With progressive taxation, a decent minimum wage and the option of trade union action all effectively ruled out, all the Green Paper can offer is empty phrases expressing concern and endless ritual references to education and training as the way to bridge the gap between abject poverty and the leisure of those fortunate enough to have found City slicker friends:

"This third way will take us into the third stage of welfare. The welfare system will become pro-active, preventing poverty by ensuring that people have the right education, training and support. We will widen the exits from welfare dependency by offering tailor-made help for individuals."

This will no doubt be of tremendous comfort to Britain's poor pensioners, who are offered precisely nothing by the Green Paper.

But such abstract nonsense flies in the face of the daily reality of millions of unemployed and low-paid workers, for whom there simply are not enough decent jobs to go round, regardless of how many qualifications they may have.

Worse off

Indeed, while ministers set out to foster the Tory myth of the work-shy, feckless unemployed willfully deciding to live on lavish state hand-outs, the Green Paper tacitly admits that the opposite is in fact the case: hundreds of thousands of people are working for low wages, cheapskate employers despite the fact that they are worse off than they would be on the dole."

"Prior to the implementation of the reforms announced in the Budget, 740,000 people lost 70p for every £1 earned benefit of £35,000, 130,000 families gained less than 10p for every extra £1 earned. ... Almost none in seven people who moved from welfare to work said they were worse off in work than unemployed."

The government answer of course - which they have picked up and continued from the Tories - is to offer a range of benefits to low-paid workers which effectively subsidize the lowest-paying employers. Pay packets insufficient to cover the cost of renting or buying accommodation can be increased by Housing Benefit and Council Tax Benefit, while the employers pocket the difference.

Threshold

Brown's latest Budget handed more incentives for employers to keep wages low, not least by raising to £81 per week the threshold at which earnings require employers to pay National Insurance contributions: workers below this figure will now come even less to employ in their pay.

The Green Paper persists in ignoring the realities of low-paid workers in Britain. We are told that "if a pay packet gives people independence and status in the community and the chance to insure against risk and save for retirement..."

But of course this depends how big the pay packet is. Elsewhere we read that "For many people the absence of paid work is a guarantee of a life on a low income": but for millions, paid work IS a life on low income - and many pensioners are still suffering as a result of spending their entire working lives on low rates of pay.

Comfortably insulated from reality, Field draws up schemes through which low-paid workers are expected to find extra cash for savings ("we will also encourage people on low incomes to save more through Individual Savings Accounts"), or for additional pension schemes to supplement the dwindling state pension ("we will introduce low cost Stakeholder Pension schemes which will give low paid workers the chance to save for a decent private sector pension...")

A similarly cynical approach means that the Green Paper stands as a new threat to people with disabilities, which again begins with access to the Incapacity Benefit - a controversial new All Work Test in an effort to reduce the numbers receiving benefits.

Field, too, seems concerned above all that too many people are "passing" the test and being eligible for benefits.

The problem is that "the Green Paper is that it 'writes off as unfit to work people who might, with some assistance, be able to work, perhaps in a new occupation. It is an all or nothing test ...'. Despite this, there is no even a passing suggestion of course passed over those unfortunate individuals who are deemed to 'fail' the test and lose benefit, despite being clearly disabled and unable to work."

The Green Paper accepts the ruthless All Work Test, and also appears to accept on face value a report which suggested that two-thirds of claims for Disability Living Allowance had presented "insufficient evidence to support the benefit claim". The resulting claim which could make the government's refusal to take any radical action on pensions.

One clear example of victim-blaming comes in a section dealing with reducing teenage pregnancy, where there is an overwhelming whiff of victim-blaming, an overtly moralising, patronizing advocacy of the "work or ethic" which makes clear the government's refusal to take any radical action on pensions.

In fact the "demographic time bomb" is a minor squib in Britain. According to Interna-

ional Monetary Fund projections the "contribution gap" in social security pensions in Britain is likely to be no more than 1% of Gross Domestic Product. There are 1.3m claiming "sickies" and no need for draconian policies to deal with it.

Field's words leave little more than a manifesto for inequality, a commitment to long-term poverty for the low-paid. It is significant that the attempts to give the policy statement a gloss of historical overview, the Green Paper should list the state of the welfare state and its services, but omit the model of the National Health Service, which was set up to provide a genuinely non-commercial service on the basis of need, free at point of use and funded from general taxation.

Rather than giving a clear sense of the current performance, a genuinely radical policy would expand the NHS model, and look to progressive taxation to help fund the future provision and improvement of welfare services.
Socialist Democracy Statement

“A rotten deal that reinforces partition”

The Stormont deal is being hailed as a new beginning and a defining moment in the search for peace and healing of division. It is nothing of the sort. The new deal entrenches sectarian division inside the Northern state and strengthens the undemocratic division of the country. It promises a perpetuation of the injustices of the past by endorsing continued British rule. It is presented by politicians and an uncritical media as a lasting settlement but it is not a solution and cannot therefore promise a lasting peace.

A sober examination of the deal, away from the media hype and spin doctoring shows that the deal is a rotten reinforcement of British imperialist rule and a betrayal of the democratic aspirations of the majority of the Irish people. Its successful imposition would set back the unity of the Irish working class and its struggle against oppression and exploitation.

■ The deal calls for the amendment of the Southern constitution to include an endorsement of partition and support for the sectarian northern state. The British claim to the six counties is actually enforced, while “balance” is supposedly achieved by the British scrapping the Government of Ireland Act that is not even the fundamental legislative basis for British rule.

■ A new Stormont parliament is to be set up, which will institutionalise and strengthen the sectarian basis of the state. Secular patronage will be dispensed by a majority unionist assembly which will be called upon to share some of its sectarian privileges with the representatives of the Catholic middle class. The unionist veto in the new Stormont will ensure that there will be no attempt to dismantle or challenge the sectarian fundamentals of Northern society.

■ The demand by the ‘nationalist’ parties for representation and a free-standing cross-border bodies has been brushed aside with the connivance of this same nationalist party. The cross-border bodies will be utterly subordinated to the assembly’s nationalist majority who will have a veto over any decisions. In any case, the proposed functions of these bodies can only be described as pathetic - ‘animal and plant health’, ‘teacher qualifications and exchanges’ and ‘water and waste management’, etc.

■ Prisoners are to be kept as political hostages, with their release dependent on the good behaviour of their movements. There is not even a recognition of their political character, and the struggle against British rule continues to be defined as a terrorist conspiracy.

■ The RUC is not going to be disbanded and there is no real promise of reform. Instead, the British once again promise ‘independent commissions’ to report back later. We have recently seen that such ‘representative’ and ‘independent’ commissions, as the parades commission, are staffed by middle class Catholics who work for the RUC - and prominent loyalists. It can be confidently predicted that there will be minimal change.

In fact Gerry Adams has now claimed 1998 to be a high point for republicanism.

■ The destruction of the deal by unionists would not represent a step forward, but only shift the agenda of the debate further to the right and lead to further steps to appease orange reaction.

■ Despite all this, the leadership of the republican movement cannot bring itself to oppose the deal, despite the demand for decommissioning within two years.

Workers’ unity

The new movement must be based on seeking the unity of the Irish working class, north and south, and on working class struggle against injustice and exploitation. We need to begin the creation of a new campaign that can go beyond ‘peace’ movements for civil rights and political status.

Division can only be overcome by unity. Peace can only be meaningful and secure if based on justice and an end to inequality. This rotten deal proposes neither.

Socialist Democracy calls on all socialists to demonstrate maximum unity in the months ahead to defeat this reactionary settlement by a united campaign for a NO vote in the May referendum.

The alternative to the new partitionist settlement is a working class movement that rejects the politics of imperialism and green capitalism and trusts its future to a struggle for a new vision, a United Worker’s Republic.

Check out the socialist alternative

Ireland: The Promise of Socialism

A Socialist Democracy publication

STILL AVAILABLE, £5 from Socialist Outlook, PO Box 1109, London N4 2UU
"We need analysis and new thinking"

Gerry Foley from the US paper Socialist Action interviewed BERNADETTE DUNN ON MAULACHA in late 1994, just before the Stormont agreement was signed. Below we print an extract:

SA: What do you think the possibilities are for starting up new mass protest movements at the moment? Are there still very deep illusions among the Sinn Fein rank and file? Unless the Republicans start to see things differently, it will be very difficult to go anywhere without them.

BDM: The best possibility for building a mass movement at the moment is the redistribution of power. A lot of Sinn Fein’s new vote comes from people who wanted to see their representatives in power. The link with Sinn Fein — if not with the IRA — is very strong. But the prospect of a political settlement attracted them.

SA: What about polls that show that 37% of Sinn Fein voters will accept a settlement involving the continuation of partition?

BDM: I think they mean what they say. A lot of Sinn Fein voters are looking for a political settlement. They have not taken an interest in day-to-day nationalist politics, and they are not involved in the war. But the prospect of a political settlement attracted them.

SA: They voted for Sinn Fein for peace, and because it has a more dynamic and inspirational delivery than the SDLP but not because of any Republican conviction. Pressure from them could lead Sinn Fein further than it wants to go. I think the present situation most the peace process will have to dissipate before a new movement is possible.

SA: So what do you think can be done?

BDM: Two things. We have to look for opportunities to mobilize people on common issues, even limited ones. We also have to engage in political discussion, to examine the basic realities of the relationship between Ireland and England. We need a new thinking.

BDM: It has been a problem in the Irish movement for some time that there has been little study of the history of political discussion. That has to be overcome.

The deeper the understanding among the people facing the issues, the less likely they are to be misled. That is the first step that has to be taken before we can start to move forward again.

Now it’s official: the future is Orange!

The bigoted, murderous RUC will remain to ensure fairness and equality

David Coen

W

that have they got? was the question many asked when the IRA declared its first cease-fire in August 1994. Surely, they concluded, watching the "victory" parade down the Falls Road, the Republicans must have been promised something in the secret negotiations with the Major government which had been going on since the Spring of 1993.

The doubts grew when the Loyalists declared their cease-fire shortly afterwards — apparently convinced that there was no secret deal and the IRA cease-fire was unilateral.

It’s now clear that although the IRA may not have lost the war they seem about to surrender the peace. It’s a good bet that Sinn Fein will not oppose the Bellag协议.

It’s equally likely they will stand for their seats in the new Assem-

bly at Stormont, which was abolished in 1973.

Their attitude to the repeal of Articles 2 and 3 of the 26 County constitution, the Unionist minority in Ireland will be given a constitutional veto over Irish unity, the British claim to a part of Ireland will be officially recognised — and there will be a com-
mision to look at policing. In other words, the bigoted, murderous RUC will remain to ensure fairness and equality in the revamped Orange state. Even by the watered down standards of reformism this is a insipid brew.

However loudly Sinn Fein may continue to proclaim their oppo-
sition to partition, they are still enacting the end of Republicanism as a serious radical force in Ireland.

Campaigning against would at least have kept their back together and perhaps forced some concessions from the British. Agreeing to the new partitionist treaty indicates not only the futility of the last 30 years, but also that they believe there is no alternative to what has rightly been described as a failed political entity.

Worst of all, by participating they will give it a veneer of democracy, having denied for years that it could be reformed.

If the special Ards-Peish on May 10 votes to accept the deal then there is likely to be an exodus from Sinn Fein, though many unhappy with it will no doubt remain in the party because the opposition has no real alternative.

The other parts of the "nationalist family", the SDLP, Fianna Fail and the Catholic Church, are both in favour of the deal, and the Republican splinter groups offer nothing except discredited militarism. Only the small socialist forces calling for a no vote in both referenda are beginning to point the way forward.

As in the original Treaty of 1921, the leadership of the IRA will come under heavy pressure from the British to hand over arms and to police the new settle-

ment in Northern Ireland. The British are not in a position of strength preventing other elements such as the Continuity Army Council carrying out attacks. The British would be happy if the oppositionists were eliminated by their former colleagues and there would undoubtedly be sectarianism.

Republicans should refuse to hand over weapons: whatever the inadequacies of the IRA in this respect, to disarm would be to entrust the defense of nationalist areas against sectarian attacks to the very state which created them.

One of Sinn Fein’s "palais" from the so-called "Belfast Agreement" is British acceptance of the "equality agenda", a belief that somehow the new arrangement will improve the position of the Northern Ireland nationalists.

But it was the very impossibility of equal treatment within the sec-
tarian state which gave rise to the present phase of the struggle in 1969.

Reform is not possible. The 6 County statelet was created with a built-in Unionist majority — a built-in Unionist veto against Irish independence. It isn’t a sec-
tarian state simply because the Unionists are bigots, though some undoubtedly were and remain so. Sectarianism was and remains the vital necessity for its survival.

If Nationalists/Catholics had equal treatment, there then was no ben-

efit for working class Protestants, and the hold of the Unionists would be weakened.

In fact these workers might (and sometimes did) unite against the sec-
tarian divide against their Unionist masters. Such unity was always smashed by playing the orange card.

The other reason sectarianism is inbuilt is the fear that population changes would reverse the original Unionist majority. The Catholic population had to be kept down through housing, employment and emigration poli-
cies.

A variant of this latter argument has been used within Sinn Fein in favour of the "peace" strategy. If, the argument goes, present trends continue, the current 58:42 split within the electorate could swing to a Nationalist majority in another generation. Sectarian headcounting like this does no place in a move-
nent which traces its origins to the United Irishmen.
SOCIALIST OUTLOOK II

The Sinn Fein Ard Fheis Between a rock and a hard place

Peter Fox

The AGENDA of the Ard-Fheis (Annual Conference) of Sinn Fein was radically altered in the week before the event in order to make room for the debate on the so called Belfast Agreement. There was a vote on the proposed Agreement, the decision being postponed to a special Ard Fheis in May. Officially this was to allow time for more discussion. Or perhaps the leadership could not be confident of winning if it forced the question by a vote — and therefore put it off.

The Saturday session began with speeches from several international delegates, who all intervened directly in the debate. Several others were to appear later, and an appeal that there would be a nationalist majority by 2015 and "would be forced on the government by the need to deliver justice to the people". Many emphasized party unity. Sinn Fein's Ard Fheis on May 22, and the 1937 constitution of the South "were not worth having".

There was some evidence of a division of opinion between northern and southern delegates, and a number of delegates were excluded from the session due to the presence of party leaders. Sinn Fein members were asked to provide security for the delegates.

There were two main motions on the agenda: one was to endorse the deal, while the other was to reject it. The former was carried by a large margin, while the latter was narrowly defeated. The conclusion was that the Sinn Fein Ard Fheis would be in opposition to the deal, but would not formally endorse it.

A poll of delegates showed 50 per cent in favour of the deal, 28 per cent against, and the rest don't know.

This is especially true of the Martin McGuinness speech which consisted of little more than a list of all the meetings which took place in his diary during the last days of the dealers. This cut down the time for delegates to make speeches, especially those that were the intention — the leadership certainly knew in advance that opposition to the deal was substantial and widespread.

A poll of delegates published by the Sunday Tribune on April 19 disclosed figures of 40 per cent in favour of the deal, 28 per cent against, and the rest don't know. In a real vote, with the abstainers excluded, the figures became 61 per cent to 39 per cent, too low to alter the constitutional ban on taking seats in the Stormont Assembly which will be elected on June 22.

The Ard Fheis figure would have been a bit higher if supporters of the Bernadette Fenech-led 32 County Sovereignty Committee had not been expelled before the Ard Fheis started.

Delegates contributions were reduced in order to allow for the possibility that the Agreement was a stage in British disengagement. One delegate said there would be a nationalist majority by 2015 and "would be forced on the government by the need to deliver justice to the people". Many emphasized party unity.

The leadership are likely to call for a "yes" vote in the North and probably will call for a "no" vote in the South. They are likely to move towards a position of criticism towards Irish unity, and have been cautious in their support of the proposed Northern Assembly. Sinn Fein are opponents of this strategy, who think the agreement actually strengthens parition and argue that a move towards Irish unity, are hampered by its being seen as a coherent option. Sinn Fein and the republican movement are exclusionary, and the Sinn Fein leadership seems to want to stay out of the failed deal.
Dail nods through plan to legitimise partition

Not yet back to the future for unionism

Paul Flannigan

FOR THOSE with seasoned memories the Stormont Agreement of 1974 has the look and feel of the 1974 Sunningdale Agreement about it.

Then an incoming Labour government inherited an incomplete political settlement from the Troubles. They faced a similar problem to the present one - selling the deal to the unionists.

The main Unionist party was led by Brian Faulkner. Shortly after he had agreed to the Sunningdale package, Faulkner's Official Unionist Party split. Today six out of Trimble's ten elected MPs have already positioned themselves closer to the 'No' camp than the 'Yes' camp.

Towards the end of 1973 Faulkner, supported by the SDLP and the Alliance, formed an Executive to take control of some of the main departments of government.

Within six months the bulk of Faulkner's party was deserted him, forming an alliance with Paisley and Craig to smash the Executive and to go to the polls. After a ten-day loyalist strike in May 1974 Faulkner and his bewildered government were resigned. All talk of a lasting political settlement was finished - until Partition.

Commenting on the new mood of triumph sweeping over the nationalist SDLP, one journalist wryly observed: "It's because they're all so old, this is back to the Future for them, a chance to recapture a lost youth. It's as if there was one big gap between 1974 and now and until they could get back in."

The leaders of the SDLP, Hume and Mallon believe this time it is going to be different. Back in 74, the IRA were against the deal. They stepped up their bombing campaign to try and destroy it. The IRA onslaught greatly aided the Unionist hard right opposition, organised under the umbrella of the United Unionist Council.

But this process has been memorably described by Mallon as a 'Sunningdale for slow learners'. The SDLP belief is that this time the deal will stand because the republicans now realise that they have wasted the best part of twenty years chasing the unattainable - the mythical Irish Republic.

With the IRA now in on the deal, Paisley and the sectarian loyalist community which is so central in the 'No' camp will have little to frighten the ordinary unionists with. Trimble will be as vulnerable as Faulkner once was to the unionist wheeler, and the settlement will be rejected.

The SDLP is confident that this time the SDLP, which is to say, the nationalists, led by them - not his cup of tea. Paisley left admiring himself, Fionna Fail and Sinn Fein are going to deliver an overwhelming vote to the deal. The majority of unionists are going to follow the leadership of Trimble. Paisley and the rest will be lucky to muster twenty per cent of the vote.

Hume's analysis of the Irish problem and the way towards a solution will be vindicated. Awarded a Nobel prize.

The SDLP's optimistic scenario seems plausible. Trimble has a lot of tricks up his sleeve to stick. The nationalists, led by them.

The Irish capitalist close the door on their historic task of creating a nation state, and open the door in the sub- ordination of the country and its resources to the exploitation of international imperialism. This is what they mean by when they talk of being post-nationalist. The crippling weaknesses of those opposed to the deal is a lack of leadership and the bankruptcy strategy of the republi- can opponents from the deal. All the traditional leadership of the Irish working class are on the crucial point that fall from the table of international capitalism.

They feel vindicated by the success of a southern economy that has been handed a more solid pro-unionist deal than Faulkner was granted. The cross-border Council of Ireland is much less threatening to the unionists than the 1974 one was.

The unionist-inspired 'consent rule' is everywhere. It is mentioned about seven times on the first page of the Agreement. The Irish constitution is even to be changed to include the unionist consent rule. Trimble's strongest position this time around for other reasons. He has the support of most of the loyalist military-political organisations. They played a key role in ensuring a victory for Paisley the last time out.

He can point to the fact that the 'No' camp have no alternative political set- ting up. But all of us can justly point out how little Sinn Fein has done and are supposed to be their peace process.

So the likelihood is that the SDLP are right and the referendum will be passed.

The watchword for us must be 'don't panic'. A big 'yes' vote for the deal that has record of huge gains, but would not signal the end of the affair. The weakness of this deal is that it depends success on pretence and false hopes. It is based on the idea that Trimble has somehow transformed himself and his party into something called moderate unionists left out of power who sin- cerely wish to share power with nationalists.

The context nonsense. Trimble went all the way with Paisley and Craig in 1974, and he hasn't changed. He has just become more astute. He came to promi- nence as the hero of Drumcree. His difference with Paisley is over tactics. He recognises that if unionism is to succeed it needs to take account of the needs and interests of both the British government and the RUC. He has never offered the Irish working class a peaceful, democratic or pros- perous future.

If ever it had to be said that the only alternative to present society is a socialist one, it is now.
South Africa's aborted revolution

Charlie van Gelderen "YOUR HOPES and dreams are about to be crushed" said Nelson Mandela on his release in 1990.

Seven years later, South Africa's teeming millions queued outside the polling stations to vote for the first time in their lives. They believed that their dreams were really coming to be realised; that the long nightmare of apartheid was at last coming to an end.

What were they voting for when they gave the ANC/SACP alliance such an overwhelming majority?

First of all they were voting for The Freedom Charter, the document on which the alliance based their appeal to the newly enfranchised electorate. What is the situation eight years after that historic election?

The Freedom Charter promised that "The People shall share in the country's wealth. Today 5 percent of the population control 88 percent of the nation's wealth and, as in the years of apartheid, the overwhelming majority of that 5 percent are white; the overwhelming majority of the 95 percent are black.

The legal trappings of apartheid may have been shed with the coming to power of a Black government but this has done nothing to lessen the huge economic gulf which divided Black from white.

The ANC government has simply taken over the role of guarantor to the continuation of the giant monopolies. It has given South African capitalism a new lease of life. The emergence of a small Black capitalist class does not threaten the domination of these giant monopolies.

On the contrary, it acts as an additional buffer between capitalist and labour. Cyril Ramaphosa, former leader of the Miners and Secretariat of the ANC, told the local board of the giant Anglo-American Corporation that they must fight the emerging Black bourgeoisie like a "new enemy".

The Freedom Charter promised that "the Land shall be shared among those who work it". This must raise a howl from the landless millions. Wealthy white farmers continue to control more than 80 percent of the land. Their existing property rights are guaranteed by the new constitution.

On April 15, a white farmer shot and killed a baby being carried across 'his' land, by her eleven year old cousin who was also wounded. He was not going to have Blacks trespassing on his farm.

"All shall enjoy human rights" declares the Charter. Tell that to the people living in the rural districts of the Eastern Cape where the women have to walk half a mile to draw water from a well where cattle drink and defaecate — where there is no sanitation, electricity or other facilities which put quality into life.

There is no work, despite the Charter's promise of "Work and Security".

"There shall be houses, security and comfort for all". Under apartheid, the former General Secretary of the South African Communist Party, estimated that half the Black population lacked a secure roof over their heads. As the Minister for Housing in the ANC-dominated government, he was going to change this.

There has been no such change. Millions still live in the same squalor camps as they did under apartheid. The police, often under white command, still bull" dozer "illegal" settlements.

Why is this the situation? Why has there been no fundamental change in the condition of the people? The answer is really simple. The ANC with the compliance of its SAPC allies has renegotiated on its promises.

In 1990, Nelson Mandela said that the ANC in power would take over the great monopolies, including the mines and the financial institutions. "That is the fundamental policy of the ANC" he said. "It is inconceivable that we will ever change this policy".

That was before the elections, that was Mandela the world-famous prisoner of the apartheid regime. President Mandela spoke a different language. "We will reintroduce the market to South Africa", he told his African audience. These words were balm to the ears of international and South African capitalists. Capitalism was safe in his hands.

So we have the answer to the question we asked earlier - the perpetuation of capitalism is the root cause of all their which will persist in post-apartheid South Africa.
Ecological damage worsens in China

Zhang Kai

The destruction and pollution of China's ecological environment has long been an acute problem. Although the State Council published a 20,000-word document on June 5, 1996, entitled Environmental Protection in China, a report issued by the government's policy of environmental protection and actual practices in this area, the fact remains that the ecological degradation in China continues.

On 18 July 1996, the People's Daily editorial congratulated the closing of the Fourth National Environmental Convention and said: "Our country's environmental situation is still considerably severe. Environmental pollution emitting from urban centres is still expanding, and spreading over to the countryside."

"The scope of ecological destruction is also expanding, becoming a constraining factor affecting the overall economic and social development. If more effective measures are not taken, our nation's survival and development will be directly affected." The recent World Bank environmental report pointed out that China's urban pollution tops the world. Of the 20 most polluted cities in the world, 10 are in China. Although laws have been promulgated by the National People's Congress, most cadres pay only lip service to their implementation. The driving force behind the Reform is pursuit of immediate returns of profits, at the expense of other concerns.

The severity of the problem. A writer named Chen Guiyi toured 48 cities along the Huai River for 108 days, then wrote a report entitled Warning of the Huai River. He said that "of the 191 largest tributaries of the Huai River, 80 per cent of the water had turned black and stinky; two-thirds of the river had totally lost any use value."

The Water Works Bureau had organised a survey team of almost 16,000 persons on a 3-year survey, and concluded that the pollution of China's water resources was very serious, with no appropriate control of sewage. Management lagged far behind pollution. The source of water pollution comes mostly from the factory wastes dumped into the river. The authorities had closed down almost 1,000 small scale paper and leather factories along the Huai River, but the damage had already been done.

In 1996, the State Council ordered the closure of 15 types of small factories that are highly polluting. In the beginning of 1997, 50,000 factories had been closed down.

Another serious ecological problem is the abusive logging practices and soil erosion and silting of rivers, which have in turn contributed to more floods and droughts.

A researcher from the Chinese Academy of Sciences, Chen Zhongde, pointed out at a Political Consultation Committee Meeting that there are three major water problems in China. The first is the lack of water in vast areas, especially in North and North-west China. Over half the cities in the whole country lack water. Industrial output value losses due to lack of water amounts to over RMB 100 billion every year.

The second one is the flooding which is increasing in frequency. Four major floods had occurred between 1991 and 1996, each time incurring more damage than the previous time. Direct economic loss in 1996 was RMB 200 billion, an increase of almost two times compared to 1991.

The third problem is the pollution of water.

The Minister of the Civil Affairs Ministry, Fan Baoqin, said that almost 300 million people in 1996 were affected by floods and droughts. 18 provinces were affected by droughts and 24 provinces affected by floods. In addition are typhoons and earthquakes. The state had allocated disaster funds of RMB 3.75 billion, while domestic and overseas donations amounted to RMB 4.38 billion.

On New Year's Day this year, a new journal China Greens Times began publication. 130 journals follow from the Chinese Academy of Sciences and Chinese Academy of Engineering issued a joint appeal to save the Yellow River whose flow is almost at all times since 1972.

From this appeal one can get a glimpse of the severity of the environmental problem in China today.

March against child labour

THOUSANDS of children joined a march through Lahore in Pakistan on April 14 as part of a global campaign against child labour.

Reports suggest that as many as three million children under 14 may be working for factory shop employers in Pakistan alone. The campaign began in the Philippines, and will move on to Sri Lanka, passing through Iran and Turkey.
Dock wars erupt across Australia

Simon Deville
AUSTRALIAN trade unionists are engaged in a massive confrontation with the Government, port employers and the National Federation of Payers. Earlier this month Patrick, the largest employer in the Australian docks sacked its entire union workforce of 1,400 and attempted to replace them with scab labour. Despite a court injunction ruling picketing of the docks illegal, the Maritime Union of Australia (MUA) have responded by blockading the ports. Patrick attempted to train a scab workforce in Dubai last year, but their plans were scuppered when the MUA threatened to boycott any shipments to and from Dubai. Chris Corrigan, the company chairman, claimed that Patrick faced losses of $36 million because of the unions' refusal to accept change: "The continued industrial thugsery and the union's complete refusal to face economic realities have made today's events inevitable." What he didn't mention was that Patrick had splatted off $6.8 million from the ports last September.

DANISH trade unions have launched their first all-out indefinite general strike since 1985. From midnight April 26 over half a million workers in the private sector walked out. The strike follows the rejection of the employers' final offer in the two-yearly contract negotiations in a secret ballot of the membership. Wide sectors of industry and services are closed down, including Copenhagen airport and docks, road and rail transport and manufacturing industry. Within hours supermarkets were being emptied as shoppers panic bought and stock piled up against inevitable shortages. The deal offered by the employers is a 4.5% wage rise this year and 4% next year. The most contentious issue however is holidays. The employers offered only one extra day, against a union demand for the extension of annual holidays from five weeks to six.

Emu and the NHS is available from LHE, Unit 6, Iveybury Court, 325 Latimer Rd, London W10 6RA

Mayday holiday - and may be reluctantly after that. They are concerned about winning the referendum on the "Sion of Maastricht" Amsterdam treaty on May 28th and alienating either the trade union leaders or the trade union members is not the best way to do it. The Danish strike follows the recent one day general strike in Greece. The strike and the militant demonstrations which went with it were the biggest such actions in Greece for many years, and were triggered by plans to cut costs at the state owned Olympic Airways. This included a freeze in wages and a lengthening of working hours.

General Strikes fight back against austerity in Denmark and Greece

The federal government has legal teams on standby in Britain and Australia in an attempt to block international solidarity action in support of the dockers. Already dockers in San Francisco have protested to the consul officials and organised a blockade of the Australian Consulate, and Japanese waterfront unions have expressed their support.

Australian Confederation of Trade Unions ACTU officials have expressed a tactical struggle if the sackings go ahead and the Australian Workers Union has threatened a similar industrial strike in their support. It is clear that the outcome of the dispute will have a momentous impact on the future of organised labour throughout Australia and internationally. Support and solidarity must be organised throughout the labour movement in support of the wharfies heroic struggle.
The meaning of May 1968

"Suddenly we had a real, live, general strike. It is very good for you!"

THIRTY years ago, a wave of struggles erupted in France which shook the European ruling classes and opened up new possibilities for the left. How do Marxists view their importance? What are the lessons of the May-June events of 1968? Should they be looked back upon as grand moments of past history, or seen as reminders of unfinished political business that still confronts us today? JOHN LISTER interviewed DANIEL BENSAD, then a prominent leader of the student movement at Nanterre university and now a leading member of the Ligue Communiste Révolutionnaire, French section of the Fourth International.

Could you speak a little on the background of the events of 1968? Everybody saw at once that the students were fighting back against attacks on their freedoms and the basis that mobilised the working class?

Much of the debate and political explanation of these events in France, especially among those who have broken with revolutionary politics, tends to insist on the cultural, ideological aspects of 1968. But what gave the 1968 events real weight, at least in France, was the combination of the student mobilisation - which also happened in countries like Japan and the United States - with the general strike. It seems to me too much forgotten now, but it was a real general strike of between eight and ten million workers which lasted three weeks. What did it mean to the students? We tended to overestimate the political content of the strike. Obviously it opened up the possibilities of a real social confrontation. But during these three weeks we somehow felt we could say what the limits of that general strike were. Some democratic demands were raised against the strong state of [French president] De Gaulle, a rigid archaic state with very concentrated power; and there were a series of economic, material demands to raise the standard of living, but the fact is that even the big wave of the movement, the enormous general strike, the politicisation remained small.

There was no big crisis in the reformist parties. For example, the communist party (CP), in spite of its line, obtained good results in the 1969 elections, and it was relatively well able to channel most of the radicalisation. There was no big crisis in the unions either: they grew a lot, especially in the middle-sized and smaller factories. There were no big breaks like we had in France in 1945-47 after the war. There was a break, but of a very limited layer of youth and workers which gave room for a new left; this is significant because it still exists, but it was a very small break.

The possibilities for action changed, but not the relationship of forces. That, I think, is to do with the limits, the dynamics of the general strike itself. There was also a difference with Italy in terms of self-organisation. There were factories occupations, yes, but very few elected strike committees or mass meetings. The union officials maintained control and organisation throughout the strike. Sometimes the comments tend to identify the birth of social movement as the women's movement with 1968. In reality in France this came as a result, if you like, of the '68 events, but two or even three years later. There were distinct demands of the women's movement that did not appear in 1968.

A CP-led strike in 1968 had a transitional general strike, which remained under the control of the reformist leaderships, and which, in the framework of the functioning welfare state of the time, served to win more space and social gains, winning back some things that had been lost under the De Gaulle government.

There had been some social security measures designed to increase the weight of the state and the employers against the trade unions, but this was one point which was not won in the so-called agreement. In fact there was no real agreement. There were negotiations but, since the results were rejected in some Renault plants, they remained only as a basis for decentralised agreement. There was no global agreement as there had been in 1936. The main points conceded were on wages, and on trade union recognition, but there was no agreement on social security.

The 1968 stoppage was never actually called as a general strike, was it?

No, that's the other point. It was a general strike, but a de facto general strike. Nobody had raised the slogan of a general strike. This is very important, and not a small point. The argument from the union bureaucracies, especially the (communist party-led) CGT, was that 'we don't need to call for a general strike because it already exists': so to call for it would be 'artificial', 'useless' and so on.

But it could have changed the meaning of the strike, because if they had called for a general strike, they would have been obliged to decide on what general platform they would call it, and the question to call it off would have had to be a general decision too, with consultations. Secondly, if it had been declared a general strike it would have raised another question on the political preconditions to a revolutionary strike, whether they would negotiate with that government, or ask for De Gaulle to be removed before talks began.

Despite the limitations of the strike and dynamics of the movement, there were possibilities to open up a political crisis. We don't say, twenty years later, it would have been an immediate revolution, but it was possible to open up a political crisis in the context of the 1968s.

3

There was a deep movement of the working class that shook the bourgeoisie: but there was no "subjective factor", no revolutionary leadership rooted in the working class.

Obviously many things have changed, and nobody knows exactly what might have been possible, but 1968 changed the situation in France and in Europe in the early 1970s. We are not discussing whether there could have been a real revolution, but the fact that the strength of the movement, in spite of its limitations, promised much more than what was achieved.

Obviously the communist party line was central to this outcome?

Absolutely. If we re-read today the literature of the 3 parties of 1968, mainly the communist party, we see how they were obsessed with the idea of provocation and plots. They were trying to find an answer to the changes in French society, in which for the first time, the working class was in the majority. So they had developed the idea of a new coalition of social forces, expressed at the electoral level by the 'union of the left' (the CP had kept winning more and more elections). At the same time they thought the socialist party (SF) had been pushed to the side by capitulations on the Algerian War. In a real sense the SF was very reduced in influence in 1968. But CP thought there could be an opening for them, like the Italian CIR to become the major party of the left and go into government through elections. This was all being disburbed by the 1968 events.

They were also concerned to control the mass movement. They tried to negotiate a broadening of support which would strengthen the CP by achieving certain gains and by strengthening its control at the level of union bureaucracy because it legalised a lot of rights in the factories, delegates, hours, pay, a lot of things which the unions had wanted. In the end this was the main result of the strike.

Though it did not want to challenge the government, the CP did change its line do during 1968, the demand of a 'popular government'?

Yes, that was at a very short period at the end of the last week of May. It was between 22 May and 29 May, week of open political crisis because the agreements were rejected and there was no possibility of keeping the strike just through that kind of agreement.

The specificities of the gaulists regime left no channels to reach a consensus or negotiate: it was very centralised, and the strength of the regime was its weakness when it was challenged. So there was an opening of a political crisis because De Gaulle announced on 24 May that they could not find a way out, and called for a referendum. Everybody, even reformists like Mendes-France and Mitterrand rejected the referendum. That could mean an open political crisis. There were two answers. The SF was ready to have a 'left government with personalities'; even Mitterrand was ready to propose a new government based not on parties but on personalities, without exclusions and with negotiations - which we termed 'inclusivist bargaining'.

The CP was afraid of being marginalised and of losing power, so the question very abstractly of a popular government, not giving this any clear content. But it did try to open a space for the space for four days. Mitterrand said afterwards in his balance sheet of 1968 that this was the clearest signal that he was ready to take our responsibilities so De Gaulle would withdraw the referendum, then dissolve the assembly and hold elections.

At that time, our position was quite tricky. To raise a governmental slogan in the radical movement was very unpopular because of widespread hostility to the SF and even the CP. However, we had a general answer which was 'yes to a popular government: but no to Mitterrand and Mendes-France! At that time, Mitterrand was a bourgeois personality, he was not personally a member of a small bourgeois radical group: only later did he join the SF.

All this lasted just a few days when De Gaulle disappeared to see the army in Germany and then came back. There was a kind of panic at that time, but it was a very short time.

Do you think now, looking back, that a more concrete governmental slogan would have been better something like 'CP take the SF into the CP alone could not have taken power. The kind of answer was necessary: very concrete but was not so bad, but without playing the struggle. There was a big CP-CGT demonstration
on 13 May or thereabouts. They felt threatened from the right, and based on the left because the day before we had organised a rally which was a mixture between a political meeting and a social festivity. The new left and the CP was frightened by this mixture.

We decided to do their own demonstration – a very big one – and we were the only current from the left to participate, and we were very radical in what is our slogan 'popular government, yes: but no Mitterrand and Mme France!'. And it was not by chance that the CP was frightened because it expressed the political issue and a solution and at the same time showed the right wing of the movement of Mitterrand and Mme France.

The other difficulty with the general strike not having been called was that to call for it would also have raised the question of who should negotiate: who should be the leadership of this general strike – the normal union bodies, or the CP, or the left? In the text we have to be conscious of the fact that there was a current as a human being a current as a human being, and in the fact that there was very little – a few individuals.

Could you say something about the origins of the JCR?

We were expelled from the CP with the organisation in 1965 for two reasons. One was the kind of support we had for the workers' struggle in France (NLF), against the slogan of 'peace' which was the official CP line. The other was that we opposed the CP decision to back Mitterrand as the sole candidate in the first round of the 1965 presidential elections.

We were expelled in 1965 and formed the Jeunesse Communistes Revolutionnaires (JCR) in April 1966 with 3-400 members, 90 per cent of whom were students. Our main activity was Vietnam solidarity and opposition to university reforms, the May 1968 wave. At the same time we participated in the student movement. When the general strike started, it was a real struggle to carry it out, to organise and to try to organise the movement in the factories. We were very much aware of the dynamic part of the movement, through the action committees which appeared. This was not real self-organisation, since the action committees were more like gatherings of radical people. We tried to centralise these gatherings to gain a little strength to push proposals into the movement.

You referred to the student agitation on Vietnam, and it is obvious that internationalism has had a big impact on the French events of 1968. weren't there any important developments in Germany with the student movement?

In France there is a tendency to exaggerate the extent of the radicalisation and politicisation of the youth and student movement before 1968. The real growth came only in 1968, and afterwards. Before, the communist students were the milieus of the maturing of the radicalisation, they never reach even five thousand members; nor were there such massive demonstrations before 1968. The radicalisation of the left came after the bombing of Hanoi in 1966-67, but the demos were not so big.

We were expelled from the CP, and we called what we considered a big gathering of people one Sunday — it was 300 people out of 16,000 students at the university. It was a significant minority of very active people, but the question is not how many more than that was the CP frightened to compare that with the situation now: then there was a kind of happy capitalism, people were enjoying the situation, there was a strong identification not only with Vietnam. Vietnam obviously was centralised, summarised as a fight between versus black people, a clear-cut confrontation, everything clear, politics, morals, everything clear. Suddenly, the situation was the same, no problem.

But at Nanterre the movement also took another position against bourgeois education reforms, against bourgeois, anti-imperialist, and anti-

The only limitation on becoming involved were: no quotas, no programs but what you do.

In the case of the anti-Vietnam movement it was open to everybody. It had three main axes: it was against bourgeois education reforms, against imperialist, and anti-bureaucratic, the only limitation on becoming involved were: no quotas, no programs but what you do.

In Vietnam: that was the case. We didn't want to do too much before it was used. Then it was all very clear, a unified view of the world was a real characteristic of those movements.

The German events had a big impact for various reasons. First, we had established some direct links with the SDS movement of Rudi Dutschke, at the beginning of 1967, with common conferences, meetings and so on. We co-organised together with SDS a big Berlin demonstration in February 1968 before the strategists of Rudi Dutschke. Quite a big German delegation had also been here, so there were fairly strong direct links. When Rudi Dutschke was shot we were in a national conference of the JCR, and we started at that moment mobilising street demonstrations which radicalised very quickly.

How do you assess the other movements of that time, for instance the 22 March movement of students?

That was the first time that a committee had first at Nanterre university, and changed composition as it was a real blow to the JCR, and it was important for the movement at that time. At the beginning there were mainly two currents and two organisations. The others were always opposed to, and there were some Lamberg—members of the Lamberg—Lamberti's Organisation Communiste Internationale, OCI who were very concerned with student unionisation.

They considered the 22 March movement was an 'anti-union movement to destroy the student union'. We didn't consider it was opposed to student unions. So the really dynamic forces in the 22 March movement were the anarchists and the JCR.

Among the youth, the CP was very important. At that time, we were the Lamberg and the Lambergists – very sectarian – and the main current was the waves who were growing as a result of the cultural revolution in China in 1966-67. At the beginning of the 1968 events they were stronger than we were, but we won out in comparison to them through 1968.

Did the JCR grow fast in 1968?

Yes, we had enormous prestige because we were identified from the beginning with the radical wing of the movement, with the 22 March. For example on the night of the 1st May 1968 the standing ovation in every one's imagination because of the pictures of it, we were the only national political current fully par-

And after the strike was over, the JCR was made illegal.

We were made illegal, yes, and again in 1973, but it was advantageous in some ways because if you don't have the crazy line of the masses and if you have some real links with the workers' movement illegality is a possibility and a certain privilege. We had to organise for four months, and 20 people were jailed until September or October, but it was not a big problem for us.

Do you think things could have been done better? Do you think that the events of 1968 led some people to artificilly high expectations?

Obviously it was a high point, those with political potential which were not used, but we should remember what difficulties we encountered. We were formed in 1968, defending the idea that the working class was conscious. Suddenly people had a real sense that the bourgeoisie strike. It is very good for you.

There were obviously other potentialities even for a small organisation if we had had more experience and more maturity. The real question you are raising is firstly one of an estimation of 1968. This is not an academic question. Should we say yes it is a mountain or just a small hill? The truth may be between the two. But what it represents depends on what we do now, if nothing more happens, then it is just a big rock, followed by a general decline. Now is the moment we are living from.

Some say it was the last big strike of the sixteenth century working class. But in 1968 it was the first big strike of the sixteenth to twenty-first century. We don't know, and it depends on what we do now.

A more balanced view of 1968 is not that it was a revolutionary strike – though sometimes we insist on stressing the political potentialities. A older assessment shows that the consciousness of the working class had been formed by the years of prosperity and expansion, the welfare state, democratic rights. 1968 was not a revolutionary crisis like those of the 1920s or 1930s: that is true, and sometimes in polemics with the CP we insist too much on the revolutionary character of the situation.

Perhaps we have been more objective in our polemics with the Lambergists, though at first we didn't know how to express what we felt that the situation was not revolutionary but was pre-revolutionary. Yes, there was a deep movement of the working class that was shaking the bourgeoisie: but there was no "subjective factor", no revolutionary leadership rooted strongly in the working class. The strength of the bureaucracy has something to do with the level of consciousness of broader layers of the working class. We can now see that better.

It is true that there were also many more illusions in militant circles, partly because of the way that the working class itself had been finished. They expected revolution, now, immediately. They went rapidly into decline. Their very illusions, coupled with the frustrations of what happened in Europe and then in China do not justify but explain why so many right wing intellectuals have come from mass currents.

Social democrats tend to interpret 1968 in cultural and sociological terms: some say 1968 was a success because of what the CP was able to do in government — realising democratic aspirations, legalised abortion, and so on. Of course this is absurd: in many countries all this and more has been achieved without 1968. It doesn't explain anything about the peculiarities of such a movement, why a general strike involving millions of people suddenly broke down.

There is a general move to depoliticise the inauguration of 1968. We have to defend the real political content and the dynamics of 1968, not just to celebrate but to give it some present political meaning.
Failed BBC “documentary” feeds Israel’s propaganda machine

Roland Rance reviews the recent BBC series, The Fifty Year War.

THIS WAS MORE than a missed opportunity to examine the causes and reality of the Middle East conflict. There is a good series to be made about the hundred years of conflict between Zionism and the Arab national movement; but this is not it.

Instead by repeating, in a modern and slightly revisionist guise, all of the Israeli propaganda myths, this series actually sets back the search for such an understanding.

Even the title, implying that the conflict began with the creation of Israel in 1948, is misleading. Nor are the programmes helped by appallingly inaccurate translations, which frequently omit key sentences or grossly misrepresent them.

One of the most effective early pieces of pro-Israel propaganda was the film Exodus. It presented a kinship, over-sentimentalised view of the birth of the Jewish state, while leaving the Palestinians almost totally out of the picture. By casting Paul Newman in the lead, the series misses an opportunity to establish the image of the Israeli as tall (Newman wore platform boots), blue-eyed, blond and handsome — in effect, as an Arroz.

The Arabs were presented as shifty, dirty, bloodthirsty and thoroughly un-western — as Semites.

The Israelis as superhero, the Arab as coward — this image has been repeated ad nauseam over the past fifty years, and even accepted by many Arabs.

In one of the useful extracts of archive film in the BBC series, a young Israeli, discussing the 1968 Battle of Karameh, in a striking echo of Zionist language, told how he is struggling to create a ‘new Palestinian’. But overall, the series reinforces the stereotype of the Palestinian as miserable refugee or vicious terrorist.

The emphasis is on archive film and interviews with military and political leaders. In the same series’ earlier series, on Yugoslavia, this proved an effective formula.

But this time, lacking any adequate historical or political framework, they reduce the conflict to a succession of wars between states. Nothing is said about economic or social developments, or even about internal political situations.

Anyone who relied on this series to educate them would learn that the Palestinian-Israeli conflict (or, as the series sees it, the Israel-Arab war) began when Arabs refused to recognise the right of Jewish survivors of the Nazi holocaust to establish a state in Palestine.

The previous half-century of conflict between Zionism colonialism and the Palestinian national movement is totally ignored. The expulsion of the Palestinians in 1948 is presented purely as an unplanned result of the war.

This view is no longer seriously expressed even by Israel, where a new wave of young historians has convincingly established the position long argued by the left — that the Zionist movement implemented a conscious plan of ‘ethnic cleansing’.

The notorious Deir Yassin massacre is presented out of context, as a one-off crime committed by marginal right-wing militias. There is no acknowledgement that this was a massacre and not even the worst of scores of massacres, most of them committed by the mainstream army linked to the then ruling Labour Party.

In a similar vein, the first programme spoke of the Arab ‘invasion’ in 1948. In fact, Arab armies did not invade the area allocated as a Jewish state by the UN partition plan; they sent forces into the areas allocated as a Palestinian state, from much of which they were driven out by an Israeli invasion.

Through their ignorance of the Middle East, the producers do not recognise a real scope when they stumble across one.

Thus, they repeat the accepted wisdom that the goal of the Israeli sabotage ring in Egypt in 1954 was to destabilise Egypt and prevent British withdrawal from the Suez Canal — even though, as the interview with an Egyptian diplomat makes clear, the Israeli army’s real purpose was to undermine the government’s attempt at rapprochement with Egypt and prepare for the 1956 invasion of Suez.

Overall, the series suggests that the prime conflict is between Israeli moderates and reactionaries, with the Palestinians as mere unfortunate bystanders — a classic Eurocentric, Orientalist view.

Fighting for the ‘unpeople’

Terry Conway reviews John Pilger’s film, Apartheid did not die and his latest book Hidden Agendas.

(Vintage £8.99)

JOHN PILGER’S documentary on South Africa shown on BBC on April 4th, exposed vicious attacks in the press. I read some of the criticism before I had a chance to see the film, and I found it difficult to believe I was watching the same material. The film was incisive, honest and soul-searching.

John Pilger was himself banned by the apartheid regime — he makes no plea to turn the clock back.

His film does not suggest that the long struggle against apartheid should not have been waged, or make cynical remarks about those who gave their lives literally or metaphorically in that battle.

Indeed the central hallmark of his work, whether on film or in the written page is the faith he places in the militancy of ordinary people, the ‘unpeople’ as he calls them in his book.

His ‘crime’ is that, like the South African socialists whose pieces we print on p13, he does not believe that enough has changed since the election of President Mandela.

He illustrates the way in which the lives of the black majority remain incarcerated in deep poverty and social deprivation. For that he is pilloried both by those relieved that class privilege has remained entrenched, and those who mistakenly believe that the ANC is infallible.

If Pilger has a weakness it is a classic ‘two stage’ notion of revolution beloved of generations of Stalinists — is what has led to the impasse of today’s South Africa. These were the sort of events that led Leon Trotsky to write his classic book, Permanent Revolution, which explained that in the epoch of imperialism the only way to win any real gains, even things that might seem very small, was through socialist revolution.

Despite this political weakness, Pilger’s work stands head and shoulders above virtually everyone else in the mainstream press.

His importance is precisely that this gives him a vision which is way beyond what this or other socialist papers can reach. Hidden Agendas, published last month follows in the fine tradition of his previous books.

This collection of essays cover many aspects of world politics in which the expression of today’s battles are strengthened by telling the tales of what came before.

Whether in East Timor, Vietnam or the Liverpool docks he weaves a graphic picture of the land, of ordinary people’s lives and convictions. The craft of his writing and the ideas of those he lets speak on these pages has power to win new friends to these struggles and to further inspire the already involved.

‘On the Pamine Road’, an essay about the Irish Famine, is probably my favourite, though it is difficult to choose in this book of gems. Read it — and borrow a video of the film if you missed it on TV.
Bill Hunter, history and the Fourth International

I WELCOME Martin Ralph’s critical observations about my review of Bill Hunter’s book Life under Fascism. If nothing else, it gives the book well-deserved additional publicity. But I was writing a review, not a polemical thesis. Space permitting, I would have liked to deal with many of the points Martin raised and others as well.

I did suggest, in an accompanying letter, that it would be a good idea for Socialist Outlook to arrange a debate around the book, preferably with Bill taking part.

I can not understand why Martin raises the issue of Italy. There was a revolutionary upsurge in Italy after the fall of Mussolini.

But it was a pre-revolutionary situation which could only have been converted into a revolutionary struggle for power, with the leadership of a Leninist party, deeply embedded in the working class, as the Bolsheviks were in 1917. No such party existed.

The vanguard workers were almost completely under the influence of Stalinism and social democracy. Patterns of Stalin were everywhere – even in the headquarters of the Socialist Party in Naples.

“Long Live Stalin” adored every available wall space.

The small Partito Comunista Italiano, which I helped to found, could not fill this vacuum. The imprisonment of Goldman and Morrow, I was the first to announce, was at the line in the leadership of the RCP. Gerry Healy once contemptuously referred to me as “Morrow’s Creature.”

I never referred to Will, being “anti-internationalist”. However, like so many others, who consider themselves Trotskyists, (and there are still far too many about today) they never believed the building of the Fourth International as a priority.

To me, the Fourth International (US) is the legitimate continuation of the International whose founding conference I was privileged to attend in 1938.

I genuinely believe that the WRP under Healy’s leadership, and to a lesser degree the Militant Group, were the major obstacles to the building of a viable section of the F.I in Britain and, because of their attempts to set up “rival” bodies in other countries, hampered the growth and influence of the F.I worldwide.

The Fourth International (US) is not a monopolistic organisation (as Healy’s WRP was). There is room in it for all genuine revolutionaries.

Tony made valiant attempts to keep Max Shachtman and CLR James in, despite their very profound differences. Pablo made the same appeal to Healy.

Bill Hunter was and is a revolutionary Marxist. His place is in the Fourth International, in its British section.

Charlie van Gelderen
Cambridge

You get a better view with Socialist Outlook

Don’t miss an issue: SUBSCRIBE now!
20 pages of international news, views and analysis each month. 12 issues delivered for just £10.
OVERSEAS subscribers 12 issues for just £20.

SPECIAL OFFER (UK only): One year of Socialist Outlook, PLUS one year of International Viewpoint (Fourth International magazine) for only £30.

PLEASE send me □ 12 issues of Socialist Outlook □ 12 issues of Socialist Outlook plus International Viewpoint. I enclose □

Name
Address
Phone
Post Code
Age

SEND TO: Socialist Outlook, PO Box 1109, London N4 2UU
FOR SOCIALISTS in Britain, the Irish question has always been a key test - and one that tragically much of the left here has failed. After all, “a nation that enslaves another can ne’er itself be free”. Socialists who fail to understand the role of British imperialism in Ireland cannot hope to lead a struggle for revolutionary change on this side of the Irish sea.

Socialist Outlook has always argued that the six county state in the North of Ireland is unformable. But the Stormont agreement does not even attempt serious reforms. In Ireland our comrades with other socialists are campaigning for a vote against the settlement, a position we strongly support. Our job in Britain is both to develop an understanding of the nature of the sectarian state in the North and Britain’s role in creating and maintaining it, but also to fight for the end of British involvement.

The hollowness of the supposed peace settlement is graphically demonstrated by the fact that the agreement leaves effectively untouched the hated Royal Ulster Constabulary. These bodies of armed men exist to uphold and maintain the sectarian state.

Tony Blair has now reportedly invited one of Thatcher’s and Major’s trusted henchmen, Chris Patten, to “investigate” and possibly reform the RUC. This neatly sums up the limits of the “peace process” – in which the republican and nationalist parties have been pressed to give up any real demands in exchange for the most marginal and cosmetic changes to loyalist rule in the six counties.

The left in Britain needs to use the opportunity of the supposed review – which we can safely predict will lead to few, if any, significant changes – to broaden the debate here on this neglected issue, and demand the RUC be disbanded.

Blair’s intervention to prevent the publication of the Parades Commission report illustrates that its recommendation on Drumcree was bound to set the cat among the pigeons. Drumcree two years ago was what propelled David Trimble to his current position of prominence. Unfortunately even on the question of the parades Sinn Fein, where they have influence in the residents committees, have given far too much ground to the Orange Order.

In their bid to present an ‘equality agenda’, Gerry Adams and his friends argue that if the unionists want a veto over the future of the Northern statelet then republicans should have a veto as to whether loyalist marches come through their areas. But unionist parades are by their very nature sectarian - this cannot be negotiated away any more than the essence of the Orange State.

Despite the disastrous settlement, even if the referenda go through, battles over these issues on the ground will also be critical. The key problem is that the Sinn Fein leadership has been stuck in a blind alley for some time – the so-called peace agreement is only the logical conclusion of this trajectory.

A breathing space is desperately needed in Ireland north and south for the republican and nationalist movement to reorient, to find a different strategy and develop new leaders.

British socialists must campaigning as vigorously as possible both for British withdrawal and against every manifestation of discrimination and bigotry against the nationalist community.