Tony Blair's government is hellbent on imposing a frontal attack on higher education which even Thatcher and the Tories shrank from implementing.

Hiding behind the recommendations of the Dearing Report, Education Secretary David Blunkett wants to impose tuition fees of £1,000 a year on university students, marking New Labour's final, decisive break with the concept of free education funded from taxation.

The government is using a selection of breathtakingly cynical arguments to justify a policy that Labour would have sprung to denounce at almost any time in the 1980s, even while the new government posse as a champion of “education, education, education.”

The envy and resentment of older, unskilled workers is being invoked to whip up a mood of hostility to graduates who according to Blunkett and co “benefit” personally from their university education, stepping easily into senior and well-paid jobs; the implication is that they should jolly well pay for the privilege. Of course ministers blandly ignore the growing numbers of graduates who have no jobs or who are forced into low-paid work.

But of course if Labour were to adopt a deeply progressive taxation policy, and raise taxes on those earning most, those graduates who do particularly well would automatically contribute far more over their working lives than a miserable £3,000; and the policy would generate extra cash NOW, not five years’ time.

An alternative line is for Labour to argue that there is an increasing need for graduates, but that universities stuck in (Labour's) cash limits cannot afford to expand: the new levy on students is supposed to be offering new “opportunities” for young people.

Blunkett predictably offers no evidence to refute concerns that heaping debts on students is likely to deter new applicants - especially those from lower-income families - even if extra university places could be opened up.

The reality is that Labour, like the Tories before them, have seen higher education as a soft target for spending cuts and for the imposition of charges.

They have seen that while parents, teachers, governors and pupils have mobilised in angry protests against school budget cuts, opposition to university cuts has been weak and muted, with the spineless leadership of the National Union of Students leading the retreat from any defence of free education.

They have timed the attack in such a way as to ensure that none of today’s students will be affected, hoping to avoid any organised protest.

But nobody can afford to allow these new charges to be imposed. They are the thin end of a wedge which could undermine the fundamentals of the welfare state and the very concept of public services funded from taxation.

If Blunkett argues now that university graduates should be charged fees as individuals because they “benefit” from their degrees, how long will it be before he or some other Blairite hack argues that A level or GCSE students, too, potentially benefit from these qualifications and should pay tuition fees?

How long before the same principles are applied to the NHS, arguing that patients “benefit” from operations and should pay as individuals for each item of hospital treatment - or even claiming that imposing charges would give more patients the “opportunity” to attend hospital?

As we can see in the NHS, where Labour have connived at the Tory policy of privatising the long-term care of the elderly and publicly flirted with the idea of new charges (alongside new efforts to persuade profit-seeking firms to build hospitals), once the notion of collective provision of vital services is abandoned, Labour is on the slippery slope to a privatised, increasingly polarised society.

And once the policy of funding basic public services from progressive taxation is repudiated, those who will lose most heavily will be those already at the bottom of the heap.

There are signs that a growing number of Labour back-benchers are uneasy at Blunkett’s latest disastrous policy. They must be called upon to speak out, and to join with teaching unions, students and the wider workers’ movement to fight in defence of free education.
**WHAT'S ON**

**SEPTEMBER**

- **Wednesday 10.** TULA TUG fringe meeting 8 p.m. Brighouse Centre, Brighton.
- **Saturday 13.** Feminist conference in defence of Labour Party democracy. Organised by the Network of Socialist Feminist Campaign Groups, London NW1 (details page 7).
- **Sunday 14.** Socialist Outlook North West Day School on Ireland and the United Front, with a speaker from Socialist Democracy (Ireland). For more details ring 0599 056534.
- **Saturday 20.** European March Reportback conference. 11.30 a.m. - 5 p.m. University of London Union, Mile End Street, London WC1 (near Euston and Russell Square stations).

**OCTOBER**

- **Wednesday 1.** Day of Action and 2nd Anniversary of Millingdon Hospital workers' strike. Mass picket 7 a.m. at Millingdon Hospital. March assembly 11 a.m. from Colham Green, Colham Rd by Hospital to rally 1 p.m. Usbridge Civic Centre.
- **Sunday 5.** Socialist Outlook North West day school on the Labour Party and Women's Liberation. For more details ring 0599 056634.
- **Monday 23 - Friday 20.** October, Labour Party Conference, Brighton.
- **Saturday 18.** Case Network Annual General Meeting. London NW1. See page 6.
- **Set 18 & 19.** South Asia and the diaspora - 50 years after the end of British colonialism. Organised by the South Asia Socialist Group. School of Oriental and Asian Studies, Malet St., London WC1. Further details 0171 354 8744 or 0171 713 7907.
- **November 1.** Torchlight March 30 years since the 1967 Abortion Act. For a Woman's right to choose. Assembly 6 p.m. WEDNESDAY OCTOBER 29 ULU, Malet St London WC1. Watch to rally at Conway Hall, red lion Square, Holborn.
The loneliness of the long-running picket line

Solidarity with the fighters: Labour prefers to forget

It is an outrage that the Labour government has done nothing to intervene on the side of strikers in the mounting array of long-standing disputes. Those workers who have stuck out long days and bitter nights on the picket line deserve solidarity from the whole labour movement.

The Magnet strike ‘celebrated’ in its first anniversary on with a demonstration through rain-soaked Darlington on August 23. Hundreds of abortionists, from across the country marched behind dozens of colourful trade union banners in an impressive show of support for the determined workforce.

They and many others also participated in the two weeks of action with pickets of Magnet showrooms countrywide backing their struggle. This is the demonstration itself.

The mood on August 23 was sharpened by two vicious attacks on the strikers the preceding day. One on invisible with a group of 22 who drove his car out of the plant at a young boy on the picket line who fell from the bonnet and was killed.

There is no doubt that this was a deliberate attack on the strikers and their supporters by any means necessary. It follows an earlier attack on adult pickets by thugs with iron bars who also burnt down much of the strikers canteen.

Despicable as these assaults are, far worse is the behaviour of the local police who are helping violent attacks. The police should be backing the strikers and their supporters by any means necessary. It follows an earlier attack on adult pickets by thugs with iron bars who also burnt down much of the strikers canteen.

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4 LABOUR PARTY

Link up to defeat ‘Partnership into Power’

Pete Firmin

FOLLOWING the "period of consultation", Labour's National Executive Committee has published the rule changes it will submit to Party Conference. Their proposals show that the whole so-called consultation exercise was a sham. Despite that fact that about 100 conference delegates from the NEC either reject the draft proposals or call for any decision be deferred for a year to allow for a fuller discussion, the NEC proposals are nonetheless unamended.

Tom Sawyer's summary of the results of the consultation to the NEC appears in the Labour Journal George Orwell's 1984 "Newspeak". Thus he claims "there was general support for the consultation exercise, with one fifth of respondents specifically welcoming the opportunity to make comment on the NEC document". One fifth of general support? The report states that 24 per cent of those responding expressed expressed qualified support for the proposed revised composition of the NEC. Does that mean 76 per cent rejected it?

We are not told what proportion was not satisfied with the rights of individual members to vote for MPs for the NEC. We should be told. Even this report admits that there was "substantial (unquantified) concern that conference should retain the sovereign policy-making body of the party, with "real" debate taking place at conference.

Behind this façade of "democracy", the NEC leadership remains intent on ramming through its undemocratic proposals. Concerns about lack of focus for serious discussion of the proposals are brushed aside with the argument that the changes will take time to be implemented, and anyway the government is already delivering its side of the partnership.

Amendment

There is only one amendment to the proposed rule changes compared to the original document. Because substantial concern has been expressed that unions and CPLPs would no longer be able to submit resolutions directly to party conference, and more importantly because it looked like some major unions might reject the whole package because of this, a cosmetic job has been done.

The changed rule change says that "Affiliated organizations may submit only one motion on a topic which is either substantially addressed in the reports to Conference of either the NPF [National Policy Forum] or NEC or which has arisen since the publication of those documents."

"The CAC [Conference Arrangements Committee] shall determine the order in which these criteria and submit all issues referred to a prioritized ballot at the start of Conference."

As clear as mud - but it might be used by some union leaders to wriggle out of their mandate to oppose the lot.

The attack on Party-Union link within the general assault on party democracy of "Partnership in Power" is meekly stated in the proposed make-up of the National Policy Forum.

Commitments to maintain the 50 per cent union input into Party Conference are shown to be hollow when we see what that on the National Policy Forum, many in which ways conference as the body discussing policy.

The proportion of union delegates is only 17 per cent. This body would only have a total of 175 delegates.

The reasons for rejecting the rule changes remain the same as those for rejecting the original consultation document: Conference would be downgraded to the sovereign policy-making body to a talking shop endorsing reports from the leadership.

The NEC as the body elected by the whole party would be effectively sidelined by a new 'Joint Policy Committee' with an in-built cabinet majority.

CLPs would no longer have the right to nominate their MP for the NEC, and members would no longer be able to vote for MPs for the NEC, with the 1984 amendment of the NEC being subject to leadership patronage.

Much of the function of conference would be passed to the unrepresentative and unaccountable national Policy Forum.

Blair hopes that Party Conference will be reduced to a pliant, docile and parochial leader and endorsing his every word (and electing his stooge, Mandelson, to the NEC). He is obviously relying on those union leaders whose conferences passed ambiguous policy on the consultation document to persuade their delegations to support the rule changes on the basis of the sop he has made to them.

Blair may be right, but the indication from conference resolutions and even the opposition of MPs to arms sales to Indonesia, is that the ride might be rougher than he expects.

While there are many important issues to challenge the leadership over at Party conference, such as benefits, welfare to work, the anti-union laws and arms sales, the question of Party democracy overshadows them because if these proposals are carried there will be the total destruction of the policy at future conferences.

Union and CPLP activists should be pulling out all the stops now and Party conference to ensure the rule changes are defeated. Pressure has to be brought to bear on delegates to ensure they carry out mandates in defiance of conference link and wider party democracy.

The emergency meeting called by the Network of Socialist Campaign Groups on September 12 to stop the NEC rule changes is already receiving broad support in unions and constituencies - it is vital that all activists make it a priority.

Lubric - the shape of things to come?

Paul Urwin

The forthcoming inquiry into Labour's surprise defeat at the Uxbridge by-election on 31st will no doubt scuppergeist hopeful regional officials and local party members for Labour "from triumph into disaster" campaign in the West London constituency.

The real reasons for the defeat however are signified in Labour's disastrous public relations record in August (crabs and Monserrate) and are summed up in this misnamed "Partnership into Power" programme, before the Labour Party conference at the end of September.

Both encapsulate the accelerated trend towards complete centralisation of the Labour Party that appears to go hand in hand with the desire to out-Tory the Tories whenever we are considered "top pet" in the health service, tuition fees and the rights of local government, capping, refused to allow asylum seekers to stay in Britain etc.

While the chickens will come home to roost in the short to medium term through increasing struggles, industrial action and voter unpopularity, the internal Labour Party changes are an even more disturbing signal of any notion that Labour is a place for radical politics and vehicle for progressive change.

Uxbridge illustrates this nicely.

The seat was "in doubt" and did not get picked for its dazzling oratory but because "he is normally Labour and a complete supporter of mine" (Tony Blair's words a week before polling).

At the selection meeting back in June it was alleged that the Labour whip would break the Labour whip in parliament if ever Labour lost a seat there is not even a mention of the right wing winged whacky in answering in the negative.

Labour had to have discarded the General Election candidate David Williams "because by-elections are national campaigns" and I was told that there would be an attack on phone canvassing and "as few do to door as possible" - as in America, New Labour favours rattatata rather than local involvement or discussion.

Thousands of pounds were invested in huge posters to create an image but there was a complete absence of any message. Whereas soundbites may once have been a summary of something more, now they are completely downloaded - Labour deserves the Best and Uxbridge gave it an answer.

In Uxbridge Blair and co have signalled their continued intention to run campaigns completely from the centre and with the absence of any real grassroots.

This, they obviously felt, was what was required whether the general election result, not an overlooked mandate by working people to elect out of the Tories.

With Partnership into Power the proposal is very clear -conference will no longer decide Party policy and the NEC/CLP influence will be reduced to zero.

This all puts in writing what has been the practice since Blair became leader - that politics, particularly those which offend the City of London, don't matter any more.

All that matters is winning elections - by any means necessary.

This is the time that is now dawning. When the honeymoon finally ends, when cuts and charges really bite, when the next by-election is lost - then maybe the message will get home to people at large.

Uxbridge and "Partnership into Power" signal an important step in the erosion of the Labour Party as a party linked to the struggles of working people via the trade union leaders.

Logically it is those very trade union leaders who will probably deliver "Partnership into Power" Blair next month.

A concerted campaign in the union of which at least half Labour members is therefore still urgently needed so that Uxbridge does not become the turning point that all those who fo脒 socialist ideas hope it is.
Union rights side-lined as Labour courts bosses

WITH A LABOUR Prime Minister addressing the TUC for the first time in two decades what does the trade union movement need from the new government? GREG TUCKER, from the RMT Executive gave some views.

WHATEVER else we might want in terms of social policy, in particular the movement towards full employment, we require two things - a reversal of privatisation and the repeal of the Tories anti-trade union laws.

Unfortunately, privatisation seems to be continuing, though dramatically differently in "Public Private Partnership" And Tony Blair remains committed to keeping the Tory laws. The trade union movement needs to make it impossible for him to continue to ignore our needs.

We are demanding change, not of some blind dogmatism, or to make life easier for us, but because the combined effect of privatisation and the Tories' direct threats to destroy our lives.

Rail workers increasingly concerned that a major rail accident is waiting to happen. With the reduction in maintenance conditions for rail workers have been progressively deteriorating. With responsibility for the system treated like a game of pass-the- parcel, it is only a matter of time before we face another Chatham or Kings Cross. Rail workers' lives and the infrastructure threatened, passengers may also be at risk.

Instead of the improvements promised by the Tories, privatised rail has meant increased fares - the most comprehensive in the world - and worse services as old, clapped-out stock runs over poorly maintained lines.

Rail unions need to develop a strategy which can protect their members in the new climate. But they are faced with obstacles set out at every turn by eighteen years of Tory anti union laws. A clear example is the problem we face in trying to improve the safety of train guards.

Guards' Jobs

This spring, Railtrack announced that it is prepared to effectively do away with guards' train crew safety role. Despite itself being privatised, Railtrack has the key role of maintaining the Rule Book for all rail companies.

Behind all the obfuscation is the clear threat at least some, if not all, of the operating companies have been exerting pressure to get Railtrack to cut on their behalf.

They want to be able to replace the guards with new employees whose first responsibility is collecting tickets, or handing out cups of coffee rather than protecting passengers.

The RMT immediately launched a campaign to defend their members' jobs. But a legal industrial dispute with Railtrack is impossible - it employs no guards, who work for the power companies. In turn, these operating companies have declared that no dispute exists - they only work to the Rules laid down by Railtrack!

Only after some time and effort was it possible for the RMT to place itself in dispute. Industrial action ballots have now been held in a majority of the train operating companies.

But again, rather than one national dispute, over 40 were necessary. And, of course, for each one is it required that full records of all to be balloted have to be passed on to the company.

Arriving at a position where industrial action is even possible has taken months of preparation and jumping through legal hoops.

Despite these hurdles the RMT is committed to taking action. It is vital that is effective. For whilst there may be many jobs at threat, removing the guards' safety role will also put the public at risk.

Track Maintenance

In the other, less obvious side of the rail system problems are equally intense.

A handful of major building contractors are now responsible for track and signalling maintenance. They, in turn, are subcontracting out their work.

Within the last year, track workers have found themselves being moved from company to company. Each move has made it harder to defend working conditions. In some cases workers, who all started out working for British Rail, have ended up in short term contracts for companies with only one night down employees.

Through fragmentation has been used to hide drastic cuts in maintainence. But where work is still formally requisitioned the new contractors are forcing their workers to cut corners.

Lax safety standards have been the cornerstone. Whilst individuals are being threatened, the company as a whole has been let off scot free. Labour is talking about increasing the powers of the rail regulator - but not as long until next year and only if parliamentary time can be found. Even then their proposals will be very little to protect rail workers and rail users.

Serious incidents are regularly being covered up. Rail workers have lost their lives, and it is only a matter of time before passengers become involved as well. But most workers are scared of blowing the whistle.

In one example this year, an RMT activist who had helped expose one serious incident was subsequently sacked on trumped up charges. Defending him through "legal" channels become impossible, not least because so balto his fellow workers required over a dozen separate ballots.

Even then some of his closest colleagues were initially not involved in "secondary action" such is the complexity of rail company ownership.

While the laws remain as they are the bosses can always be able to sub-contract out their work.

In the last year, track workers have found themselves being moved from company to company. Each move has made it harder to defend working conditions. In some cases workers, who all started out working for British Rail, have ended up in short term contracts for companies with only one night down employees.

The proposals involve alternative cuts in conditions.

At the TUC a number of the BA dispute is an indication of much that's wrong with the General Agreement on the Recognition of Collective Bargaining. Rather than pursue strike action from a position of strength to force management to back down, union leaders enter into negotiations on the basis of accepting the need for savings in wages. This acceptance of capitalism means that workers only fight back.

BA workers should lead on the tactic of securing UGC and rejecting any deal which sells out on pay and conditions. The Left in the unions must go on the offensive against the logic behind such deals.

Whatever happened to the British Airways dispute?

Noll Murray

BACK IN July it looked like there would be a prolonged and very difficult dispute between British Airways and its workers. In a cost-cutting exercise management wanted to cut out all ground services - including loading, catering, night staff (etc) and impose changes in pay and conditions on cabin crew.

Both sections voted to strike and management threatened to strike in a bid to weaken the and use individual strikers for up to 24 hours.

One 3-day strike of cabin crew did take place, with considerable disruption to flights. So many workers were intimidated by management threats that a high proportion of those ballots reported sick rather than tell management they were on strike.

Management endeavoured to de-concentrate picketing. Then when the strike was over, management refused to restore strikers for several days after the returns, kicking them back into unemployment while waiting by the phone.

This could have been the precursor to a highly successful defence of conditions. The 3- day strike cost BA millions, and the decision of around 3,000 cabin crew to strike could have meant coordinated action disrupting BA over the busy holiday period.

There were already offers of supportive action by airport staff internationally. What's more, BA's hard line had alienated public opinion.

Instead, the TUCW, which had been seeking ways out of calling a strike from the beginning despite BA's hard line, operated in saying it could offer alternative ways for BA to make the savings it would need from cutting staff conditions. Emotionally management agreed to negotiate on this (no doubt with background pressures from BA's chief Ayling).

It is unlikely that backing management and placing BA under workers' control is on Bill Morris's record in Huntingdon. BA's accountancy is far more likely, especially given Morris's record in leaving airports, cyclical dockers to accept pay cuts, that
Build on the successes of the Euromarch

Terry Conway

After the magnificent success of the Euromarch campaign last year its time to gear up again for the September 20 Conference.

The day will give marchers and their supporters the opportunity to discuss the lessons of the campaign so far. Highlighting our successful victories will give us the impetus to plan new tasks for the months ahead - and a full calendar looks likely to emerge.

Local campaigning strength especially in the North East and North West has been the bedrock of our success so far and must be sustained.

The battle against Blair's Welfare-to-Work is likely to be harder than campaigning against the JSA and Project Work as tragically more people in the trade unions - and even some amongst the unemployed have illusions that these schemes may benefit them.

Never the less the lessons of previous campaigns here, together with the bitter fruits of Clinton's reforms in the States will stand militants in good stead battling against unemployment and job insecurity. Linking up with others campaigning across the continent on similar themes will strengthen our resolve and allow different experiences to be built on.

At the same time plans will be laid for action around the Cardiff Intergovernmental Conference in June - the last before the planned introduction of the single currency.

It may well not be possible to replicate the spectacular demonstration of Amsterdam in June and there needs to be an assessment of whether we should attempt continental wide marches of such length again - but there is more than one way to skin a goose. There seems little doubt that buoyed up by the spirit of solidarity and comradeship we have engendered so far we will ensure that our voices are heard in Cardiff.

The support that has been built for the British trade unions - with national union backing as far as supporting our demands - means that heightened intervention into next year union conferences and into the TUC itself next autumn is a realistic prospect.

Hopefully discussion can also develop as to how we can encourage greater participation of women in the campaign. After all we are so often at the sharp end of attacks - whether as unemployed, as shop stewards or of services. May be it is time to talk about a Women's day of action in the run up to the Cardiff summit?

Discussions I heard at a recent meeting in Southall involving the Hillington hospital strikers and Southall monitoring group around their determination to campaign against job insecurity and low pay in the black community made me feel that there had to be a way of making stronger link-ups on these issues too.

These are just a few thoughts of mine and I'm sure everyone else has at least as many good ideas of their own. It looks like a busy year ahead but one in which I am confident we can build even more on the successes of the last.

Saturday September20. European Marches Repeal back conference. 11.30 a.m.-5.30 p.m., University of London Union, 20 Bedford Street, London WC1 (Euston).

II.15 am-5 pm
SATURDAY OCTOBER 18
Opening Plenary with Tony Benn MP, Sharon Allen, MSF President, Maria Exall CWU Executive - and WSN annual report.
Workshops on Welfare to Work, Pensions, NHS, European unemployment, Education, Local government/FPI, Student fees Registration £5 waged/£2 unwaged from Welfare State Network, c/o Camden People's Centre, 183 Queen's Crescent, London NW5 4DS.
For details of deadlines for motions, eligibility to vote and for Steering Committee, ring WSN on 0171-639-5068.

March for Unity
Organised by Southall Monitoring Group Unity. Assemble T.p.m. Dominion Road, Southall.

UNITING AGAINST COMMUNALISM AND RACISM

B. Shankhramkar

RALLY for unity among Southall's predominantly South Asian communities took place on August 17 amid official celebrations of India and Pakistan's fifth anniversary of independence.

The Rally was a response to recent tension and outbreaks of violence between gangs of Sikh youth from Southall and east London from Srihow which has polarised both communities introducing new difficulties to communities increasingly stratified on class lines.

The initiative against communalism drew controversy among local communities as well as Sikh organisations advocating for independence.

The Sikh separatists (Khalistani) movement was prominent in protests to mark the event and their influence included the August 17 event.

In the week preceding the Rally the premier of the Southall Monitoring Group (SMG) was fired and its Director, Sarosh Grover, was the target of death threats and a vicious poster campaign.

Fortunately no one was hurt in the arson attack on the SMG office which was confined to the first floor of the building. No one has claimed responsibility for the bomb attack its timing appears related to the rally and public intervention of SMG against communal groups and their activities.

Key workers at SMG and other political activists formed in June a new organisation called SMG Unity to undertake campaigns against communalism and more particularly attractive to Southall.

Undaunted by the cowardly threats and to SMG Unity proceeded with the rally which was well attended as supporters and members from a range of local organisations including local Labour MP, Parea Singh Khaira.

Southall is also home to a large refugee community from Somaliland and there was participation in the event by Somali women who spoke and performed making their own poignant plea for tolerance, goodwill and unity.

The mainsteam media in its simplistic analysis of the situation claims that communism is being imported from the sub-continent into the diaspora in Britain and beyond.

Yet young people (usually males) drawn to those extremist ideologies know little of society or politics in South Asia, having been born or grown up in Britain. Few have even visited those countries.

Instead those communal identities are appropriated to fill the void created by racism and insecurity.

These political-religious movements offer an easy way out from grappling with the daily problems of unemployment, poverty and overwork, low wages and the loss of educational and recreational facilities in the fight against racism.

They offer a solidarity and support of their own basis communal identities and identity political when you failed to attract and mobilise youth across ethnic and religious divides to struggle against racism and injustice whatever its form and whatever party is in power.

This is the challenge ahead of SMG Unity and its day will focus on precisely those issues which concern people every day in the realisation of the fight being also to understand the craving for an identity which helps make sense of "who we are", "why we are here?" and "where we belong?"

It is that memory of struggle, that tradition of resistance, that spirit of solidarity and brotherhood which is trying to recover. Along the way it will need the support of an appropriate vernacular, original styles of organizing and rhythm of activity.

It does not have the answers nor knows the routes it will take but it proposes that it is the process and method of struggle and a critical assimilation of theory that contributes to these.

On October 12, a March for Unity against racism will take place. It has already attracted the widest base of support locally and will include forces from across London.

The determined effort to make this event inclusive, accessible and relevant to all sections of the community, the March will be followed by a celebration with music, talks, poetry and festivities.

Leading the March will be the Hillington Hospital strikers and it will be accompanied by drummers from the Dhol Foundation. Current support class based around Indians, Khan, Khairullah, Indra Jasraj and Aka Sharrick (both from India) amongst many others.

In facing down the reactionary forces of racism and communalism and in our constant battles for self respect and dignity is a manifestation of our resolve.

It deserves the active support and mobilisation of all those who can and will take part in this movement.

If your organisation would like to get involved in planning for the March, publicising and building it and to see questions you may please contact SMG Unity at 0181-343 2333 or PO Box 304, Southall, UB2 5YR.

SUNDAY OCTOBER 12

Welfare State Network Conference Saturday 18 October South Camden Community Centre, London

SCOTTISH OUTLOOK

7
Scandal of deaths in custody

At the sharp end of police racism

Earlier in the summer two very determined women won a small but significant victory against the Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) which was forced to concede that Shiji Lapite and Richard O'Brien were not taken to the police after the deaths in custody of Shiji Lapite and Richard O'Brien were seriously flawed.

Socialist Outlook spoke to Helen Shaw from Inquest, which has been involved in these particular cases about the background and some of the wider issues they are working to raise.

Inquest was founded in 1981 as a result of campaigns around people who had died in custody. It monitors deaths in prisons, police custody and detention centres and offers practical support and advice to the friends and families of those who have died in custody.

So - Could you explain a bit about your work and about the recent inquest verdicts?

HS - Shiji Lapite was the third black person to die as a result of a neckhold after being severely beaten by police in 1994. It's a really shocking case, and as usual the family had to wait years to get answers to their questions about what happened to Shiji. Shiji died when his larynx was crushed in the neckhold.

Clifton McVey died as a result of a neckhold and then Oliver Price, some years ago. After those two deaths there were recommendations from the Police Complaints Authority and even the Association of Chief Police Officers that officers should be warned about the dangers of neckholds. They said they should only be used as an absolute last resort to restrain someone because it is too dangerous.

In Shiji's case there was clear evidence that the officer had not used excessive force "accidently", and that they were lying in their answers and even in the inquest. The pathologist's report said that the injuries Shiji sustained and the lack of injuries on the police meant that the police account of events was not possible.

In our view, and that of the family, the solicitors and the campaign, the fact that the officer was found guilty of unlawful killing and that the jury clearly didn't believe the police officers involved means that the decision of the Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) not to prosecute any of the officers was wrong and should be reversed.

In July there were justice of the peace cases. This is the case of Richard O'Brien and of Derek Tredaway (which was a case of torture). The CPS conceded before the case had even started that they needed to look again at the decision not to prosecute the police because the evidence was flawed.

It hasn't been for the necessity of the family and the campaign, their strength in being able to carry on through this long drawn out legal process (it is two and a half years since Shiji died), none of this would have happened.

The CPS has been forced to look again at these cases. They won't necessarily prosecute the officers but it is a first step towards a review of what they have done.

In our view the CPS just pays lip service to the investigation - they don't do any serious investigation properly. But it is hard to prove that there is a lack of political will for the CPS to prosecute the police.

So - Well what will happen now with the cases?

HS - The CPS will have to make a decision on whether to prosecute and obviously we will keep raising the issue and the campaign must continue to publicise Shiji's case.

In our view it isn't enough for cases like this to be investigated in court by judges, that's just one aspect. There needs to be a public inquiry into the whole way deaths in custody are investigated.

Until they look at the whole policy making process including policing policies and the whole question of institutionalised racism, we're not really going to see a reduction in the number of deaths.

People are stopped and searched all the time. The black community is under an extent beyond organised.

There is also a reluctance amongst many Irish people to see it as their issue, despite the fact that Irish people are over-represented in the prison population and so on.

The Prevention of Terrorism Act does to an extent discourage Irish people from becoming politically involved in Britain but there is also a greater experience in the black community of really terrible brutal deaths, and people are very frightened that it may happen to them.

So - Ibrahim Sey's case has lasted for a few days time, could you explain more about this death?

HS - Ibrahim Sey died after a struggle with police in which CS spray was used. What's really shocking about this case is that a few months after, all the police were authorised to use this spray.

Research was carried out on the spray which said that although the inquest was still pending on Ibrahim's death, the spray was safe for police to use. What really concerns us is that every time a new weapon is given to the police, somebody dies as a result of its use.

Inquest's view is that there is a tendency to arm the police with new weapons rather than look at ways that they can take the heat out of a situation where there may be violence.

In Ibrahim's case the inquest is going to be a lot of argument about the medical cause of death. What this will point out again is the inadequacy of the inquest forum to investigate the circumstances surrounding deaths in custody.

It will now be up to the Wayne Douglas and Brian Douglas, Inquests the focus is likely to be on medical arguments rather than the actions of the police involved.

It strays away from the issue that someone was killed for allegedly committing a crime and ended up dead. There is no other forum to take up these kinds of issues. What we hope will happen is that there will be an unlawful killing verdict but, as with previous cases there is no guarantee that this will result in a prosecution of the police.

So - How can people get involved in these broad issues of deaths in custody?

HS - It is difficult because in the past people have become involved with a bereaved family in a not very positive way, and families are sometimes felt used by campaigns.

People should take the issue into campaigns and organisations they are involved in, trade unions, political parties, and take up the broader issues of deaths in custody and their investigations. It is important to get involved in family campaigns but what happens with all these cases is that the way that the state looks at them is that they are all individual cases.

At Inquest, although we see each case as individual, we also look at the pattern between all these individual cases.

It is important that when people take these issues up in broader campaigns and organisations that there is a debate that addresses all the issues surrounding deaths in custody, policing and the investigation process itself.

We should be demanding a public inquiry into investigations and racist policing. It's not a case that the left has been particularly good at integrating into public campaigning.

There is need for national organisation or campaign that deals with the whole range of deaths not just around deaths in custody. Inquest can't be it, only a very small organisation. There are a few surviving campaigns around monitoring police actions but only a very small number.

If there was a national campaign it would help to establish much broader campaigns across the country.

For further information about the Ibrahim Sey Memorial Campaign contact

Newham Monitoring Project,
PO box 273, London, E7, telephone 0100 555 815

Inquest can be contacted at Inquest, Ground Floor, Alexander Note House, 330-338 West Green Road, London N4 2PF, telephone 01081 - 802 7430

EMERGENCY CONFERENCE
Unite for Labour Democracy!
SATURDAY SEPTEMBER 13
12.00pm, St Aloysius Social Club
Phoenix Rd London NW1 (Smirn Euston station)
SPEAKERS will include
Lew Adams, Aslef General Sec; Tony Benn MP; George Brunnswell, UCATT General Sec; Anne Black, Labour Reform; Tony Durning, GPMU Gen Sec; Maria Exall, CWU Executive; Mark Seldon, editor Tribune.

Admission £1. Details Network of Socialist Campaign Groups, c/o 3, North House, London SE11 5TW (011) 254-0294

Socialist Outlook
Richard Hatcher

LABOUR'S new Education White Paper Excellence in Schools has been widely welcomed by a spate of opinion from the teaching unions to the Tory press. All teachers and parents should welcome the ending of some of the worst features of Tory education policy - the assisted places scheme for private schools, nursery vouch- ers, opting-out, etc. It will improve education in provision such as maximum class sizes of 30 in infant classes. But it is not surprising that the Murdoch press, from the Times to the Sun, also approved.

Firstly, because Excellence in Schools is seen as the key to the education reforms of the previous govern- ment, rather than replacing them. The Conservatives' national curriculum, the national tests, league tables, the Tory version of local management of schools, the Ofsted model of inspection, all remain.

Secondly, the rationale for what is different about New Labour's educational policy is that they will serve the needs of the capitalist economy better than those of the Tories.

Managerialism

One of the main criticisms of Tory education policy was the huge increase in central government control. New Labour's approach is an even more centralised managerialism.

The White Paper sets national targets for pupil achievement. It tells schools where to teach literacy and maths, and soon they will be told how to teach them. LEAs are rescued from the Tory scrap-heap, but only as the local implementers of national government policy.

The clearest signal of the change in control was given by the government only a few weeks after it was elected, when Stephen Byers, junior minister and vice president of the Socialist Educa-
tion Association), named 18 "failing schools", and Chris Woodhead, the chief inspector, called for more teachers to be sacked.

Among the sacrificial victims are Islington Green school, in spite of an increase in GCSE grades A-C from 25 to 38% in one year, and In- gram School in Croydon, where a quarter of the teachers are told that they must "improve" by Christmas or be sacked, overseeing agreed employment procedures.

The government's defence is that all this is just a demand that raised standards in education, and who could be opposed to that? There are two positions here. One is that this is the main instrument of the opposition to the government's educational policies.

The second problem is that New Labour's approach may well raise standards overall, but it will also increase rather than decrease inequality in education, and in particular the wide gap between what middle-class and working-class pupils gain from it.

Selection

Blunket says what matters is standards, not structures. No one staff, and seen by many parents as 'better' than the LEA 'community' schools.

"Specialist" schools are en- couraged, selecting pupils by 'apti- tude'. They will inevitably disadvan- tage other neighbouring schools, as the American 'magnet schools' on which they are modelled have dem- onstrated. They will also be re- quired to secure private funding.

There is no national admiss- ional policy of 'nearest and siblings first', leaving the door open to covert school selection.

Grouping pupils by ability will be the norm - setting, fast-tracking, 'accelerated learning'. Yet the evi- dence is that these policies do not work for outstanding repairs now, and a total of £5.9bn over the next 5 years.

Blunket's borrow-the-Tortoise Pri- vate Finance Initiative, mortgaging the schools to the banks.

The other £1 billion is for educa- tion spending, but at least half of it will be needed to fund teachers' pay - which the White Paper has nothing to say about improving.

Councils will be under pressure to transfer some of the remaining money to other services such as So- cial Services which the government is starved of cash.

Pupils, parents, teachers

The consequence of New La- bour's commandist managerialism is that, in spite of the rhetoric of 'partnership' with teachers, par- ents and school students, Labour has already written their scripts for them.

• Teachers will be even more regulated, not just in what they teach but how they teach it.

• Parents are offered more places on school governing bodies, and representation on Education Committees, but without structures linking them to the mass of parents these are largely token.

• There is no place in Labour's thinking for pupils as young people with gender, ethnic, sexual and class identities, bringing to the classroom their own experiences and purposes.

As a result, the opportunity is missed to release the creativity of teachers, pupils and parents work- ing democratically together to radi- cally reshape working class education.

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Still available

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Education Action Zones

The clearest test of Labour's policies, and the sharpest expression of the new one, is Labour's "education Action Zones", what it will mean for poor working class areas.

The White Paper proposes to create up to 25 Action Zones over the next two or three years in so- called deprived areas with 'underper- formance' schools, each having 2 or 3 'specialist' schools. These are one of at least 11 strategies which will be a 'specialist' school and associated primary schools.

Each Action Zone is based on an 'action forum' of community, business and education representa- tives. There is obviously the poten- tial here for exciting developments, but there are other dangers of repeating past failures such as the Educa- tion Priority Areas and Community Development Programmes of 20 years ago.

No extra money is to be allo- cated, although the A22's will have first call on any national support programmes. No account is taken of the economic and social fac- tors outside the schools.

And the White Paper suggests that the 'action forum' may put for- ward plans to close schools and open new ones, again, Labour's "management by threat" approach.

Support and Pressure

Support and pressure is what the White Paper says schools need - the combination of management- istic and underfunding means if they are to be able to function.

That could also sum up the re- sponse we should make to Labour's 'new vision' - something like 'the realisation that we should support what is positive in it. But we need to build the mass- movement of parents, communities and the wider labour movement—to oppose its anti-democratic features.

The first lines of defence are likely to be attacked.

• Funding - the campaign led by FACE against Tory cuts will need to be continued to prevent under- funding.

• Selection - old and new forms of selection will combine to favour middle class children and young people at the expense of the working class (with some ethnic minor- ity groups particularly hit).

• Management by threat - in particular, the crude victimisation of "failing teachers" and "failing schools" as scapegoats for a system which inevitably creates few 'win- ners' and many more 'losers' -

But it is not just a defensive struggle. Excellence in Schools offers New Labour's 'can-do' vision of education - what is our alternative?

The Education Action Zones initiative is an opportunity for the left to put forward its own ideas for the education of working people could begin to look like.
Socialist Outlook

EUROPE 9

Fighting for Lesbian and Gay Equality in Europe

Peter Purton, long time activist in the Labour Campaign for Lesbian and Gay Rights (LCGLR), gave a presentation at a workshop of lesbian and gay rights at the European Counter Summits, Acts in those of the Conservatives. Here we print a shortened version of his contribution.

IN BRITAIN today, there is a sense of a new age, a new range of opportunities, a new world. The lesbian and gay communities in their great majority voted for the "Yes" to the "New" Labour Party. They have great expectations.

But what exactly did they vote for? They voted to get rid of a Conservative government hostile to the idea of lesbian and gay equality that it introduced laws which made our situation worse -- such as Section 28 which outlawed the "promotion of homosexuality" by local authorities. They also voted Labour because they wanted to stop being second class citizens of the New Britain which Labour promised to create.

Radicalism ditched

Labour Britain will have similar social and political policies to those of the Conservatives. All the radical or socialist policies have been abandoned. But Blair did promise "fairness." Not very concrete, but it seems it was enough.

Among the policies it held onto were those LCLGR had won during the 1980s and 90s. When we started, Labour had nothing to say about us apart from accepting the Nios document which was gathering dust.

We argued and struggled to be taken seriously and eventually won a comprehensive Labour conference policy. In 1994, 80 percent of Labour MPs voted for an equal age of consent. Ten years before such support would have been beyond imagining.

But there is a big difference between a Conference vote and action by the leadership, and every time we found the leaders more backward. Each time we persuaded them they changed their minds.

The big support for Labour in 1997 from our communities has not all been because they were so successful, newspapers like the "Pink Paper" concentrated not on the advance, but on the fact that some Labour leader still held reactionary views.

While we were trying to "talk up" Labour support for equality, our press was denouncing us as betrayers! Now ironically the same community press has fallen in love with Labour.

Throughout the years of struggle for equal rights, the best way to win lesbian and gay equality was to work through the labour movement. Few have shared our commitment to involving and fighting for the needs of the most oppressed in our communities. Someone asked me recently: "Will Labour introduce equality laws for us?" Well, Britain, which today has the most reactionary laws on homosexuality, become a country which takes the lead in Europe?

We know Labour's public commitment. It will allow a free vote on the age of consent -- repealed Section 28 and incorporate the European convention on Human Rights into English law.

But when they do these things and whether they go beyond them depend to a great degree on what we do.

Don't wait

I fear that our communities will sit back and wait - wait for Tony Blair and rights from Europe. This will be the worst choice. Labour has many other priorities. After these there may be another election coming up, but the time to introduce anything controversial.

Maybe we should be looking at a second term of government. You can see it all drifting away and they can still argue - surely you prefer us to the Conservatives?

The gay sex offer for gay men may be lowered in the autumn. Repealing Section 28 - in any case a gesture (albeit a significant one) - will not happen this year. A new Human Rights Commission is possible - but will it include us? Not automatic then? Not automatic chance!

These reforms ignore the interests of whole sections of our community and concentrate on the interests of the noisiest and most powerful sections of gay men. Lesbians' rights to custody of their children, and fostering and adoption of lesbian and gay men would be left out and the current discrimination would continue.

"In 1994, 80 percent of Labour MPs voted for an equal age of consent. Ten years before such support would have been beyond imagining."

The specific concerns of black lesbians and gay men, of disabled lesbians and gay men would be ignored.

Whole areas where discrimination is not so much widespread as unchallenged, like in the education system, would remain, thus assuring the continued transmission of anti-gay ideology. Of course, an early opportunity to work for an equal age of consent would be a fantastic victory. It will help to change the mood of the "public" over the issues, just as it did in 1994. It may create a momentum, sustaining it may be very hard.

Tens of thousands of lesbians and gay people - and lesbians too, even though they are not directly affected - mobilised on the streets and in every town to call for this reform. But only hundreds took any public, trying to win support for our demands from other forces in society. We want the support of the labour movement not only because it is part of changing public opinion but because it is just that - a movement of millions of people whose interests lie in unity, in diversity, in community action.

We need to be a part of that movement for social progress, for social change reform.

To achieve legal equality for lesbians and gay men will be an enormous triumph. It will be a giant stride on the road to liberation - but still not being liberation.

The principles adopted by our organisation also suggest, we be used for campaigning in the European Union. Already for many years people from Britain have appeared against our reactionary laws to European courts and in many cases have won.

Not surprisingly after 18 years of reaction many people believe that further integration into Europe would be good for lesbian and gay equality.

European Integration

We support the use of these institutions to achieve positive results but we must also be cautious. There are also negative aspects to these institutions.

The institutions of Europe are not accountable to us. The Parliament has no power. We have no control over the council of ministers and even less over commissioners and bureaucrats. Genuinely democratic is a necessary accompaniment to permanent social progress.

Britain and the states of the European Union all possess the same capitalist system and all have the same social order, one in which homosexuality has never been allowed an equal role. Even in liberal society homosexuality is not of equal worth. It may even be "natural", but it is still not equal.

Nowhere are we treated as well as heterosexuals in anything we do or wish to do. I do not myself believe in marriage as I see it as a form of oppression of oppressed persons every day. But is this not something which we could achieve in Europe?

"The crucial issue is the family. Tony Blair is against prejudice, but he also believes that the heterosexual two-person family is the superior way to raise children."

A campaign for equality which only seeks legal changes either within a single state or within the boundaries of the European Union has limitations. Even with the best laws, discrimination will continue. We will still be queered, bashed, still find it hard always to be honest about our sexuality.

When the day comes when we can associate freely with each other, when we have no fear of being attacked, or dismissed, or discriminated against, because of our sexuality; when there is never any question about being completely open about ourselves to everyone; when children are taught in school about lesbian and gay relationships as normal choices for them: then we will have achieved some kind of liberation. That is a big step from making these things not illegal, which is where we are still in Britain.

Social order

To get to the causes of this oppression, which has been around for a long time, means more than gaining an audience with liberal politicians. It means challenging the social order, alongside the many millions of others who have an interest in creating a better world.

As a socialist gay I view my work as being part of the struggle for a better world for lesbians and gay men, as part of a better world for all humanity, in Britain, in Europe, and beyond Europe too.
Yes - IE! for a Welsh Assembly

Dafydd Rhys and Bronnane Thomas

ONE OF the positive consequences of the election of a Labour government has been the decision to call referenda for a Scottish Parliament and a Welsh Assembly.

The proposed Welsh Assembly will be a devolved body with limited powers. It will be elected by an additional member system, 40 seats being elected by first-past-the-post, based on the Westminster boundaries, and 20 seats allocated from Party lists, based on the proportional system of first-past-the-post.

Democracy is central to the arguments being put in favour of a Welsh Assembly. During the last 15 years in which the Tories have constructed a high faluting pseudo-democracy, the people of Wales have been denied any influence over their own destinies.

The Assembly has no direct influence on Welsh affairs; in contrast to 1273 communities elected to Welsh local councils. The Welsh Office currently has a budget of £7 billion, £3.3 billion of which is spent directly by the quangos.

The quangos, the post of Secretary of State for Wales is increasingly used as a testing ground for young hopefuls, such as John Redwood and William Hague. Far from being representative of Wales in the Assembly, they have done much to destroy the reputation of London in Wales.

Labour's current proposals for Wales, though limited, warrant at least close scrutiny, as they are driven by an ideology of control over their own destinies and the state.

Perhaps more importantly, the Assembly cannot be seen as the means to becoming a focus for the demands and struggles of Welsh workers. Around 50 per cent of the Welsh vote in the last two general elections, Labour will more likely than not be a minority Assembly in the Assembly.

Lack of political force in the Assembly will mean it will not be able to elected or to speak in the name of the Welsh working class, so we cannot expect it to stand up to the cuts and attacks on other minorities.

Many in the Labour Party support the Assembly proposals for very different reasons to these. The traditional core leadership of the Wales Labour Party, based on national government and the trade union bureaucracy, has gravely confused the question of what an elected body should be set up.

The whole idea of a Welsh Assembly rests on the idea of a strong trade union and Labour movement in Wales. The trade union movement can and must play a key role in the Assembly, and in the labour movement in Wales.

They hope to turn it into little more than a glorified county council, staffed with the kind of men and women who populate Labour councils in most valleys. The Blairite project is more sophisticated. They acknowledge the need to address the demand for greater democracy in Wales and the Assembly proposals are described as "biased" for a minimal Wales.

As the Assembly is in its infancy, it is logical that there can be very few changes to the current Labour government.

The demand for women to be equally represented in the Assembly is crucial in this respect. Support for an Assembly is now universal on the left in Wales. A conference held in Cardiff on July 14th entitled "Socialists and a Welsh Assembly".

The purpose of this event was to begin to develop a socialist agenda for a Welsh Assembly and to debate whether socialists should call for a YES vote in September. The conference was attended by activists from the Labour Party, Plaid Cymru, the Communist Party, Trade Unions, pensioners' and unemployed workers' organisations and the like.

It was found that broad agreement existed amongst conference participants on the need for an Assembly and a democratically elected Assembly to deal with a range of issues.

The conference also discussed the need to make the Labour and Assembly proposals more socialist in character and to ensure that the Assembly does not become a Labour Party council chamber.

Left wing MP Llew Smith needs to explain how he can support a NO vote, a position which only the Tories support in Wales!

back up his claim that the Assembly is "a new economic powers house" development agency will revitalise the Welsh economy.

The new agency will have no increased funding however, since the millionaire targets for European Monetary Union require reductions in state spending.

The question is, how effective can a new Assembly to the existing Tory regional economic strategy of infrastructural development and investment strategies. This strategy has failed to alter the pattern of uneven economic development both within Wales and across Britain as a whole, with mass unemployment and low wages in Wales and the North of England and relative prosperity in the South-East.

The Assembly proposals are part of a move towards the creation of regional assemblies across Britain in a strategy that seeks to spread the blame for the difficult times that lie ahead.

Neither of these scenarios can cause the left to reject a Welsh Assembly.

On the contrary, our position is the same as for both projects: in an effort to create a genuine new opportunity for people and campaigning assemblies, we are in favour of rights policies of the current Labour government. The demand that women are equally represented in the Assembly is crucial in this respect.

Socialism is inseparable from a real Welsh Assembly.

Socialism in England must raise the issues within the English Labour and Trade Union movement. A victory in September will be a gain for the working class throughout the British state.

The Cardiff declaration

Socialists Say YES!

This Conference declares its support for the people of Wales to self-determination and calls for the establishment of an Assembly with the right to decide for itself which power it wishes to retain in Wales and to determine its relationship with the rest of Britain and Europe.

That the Assembly should have the law-making and financial powers necessary to begin to overcome the damage inflicted upon Wales by 10 years of Tory rule from Westminster. It should pursue policies which will begin the expansion of public services and social democratic initiatives as a first step. It should call upon the National Health Service to take back their present unacceptable form, and take back into public ownership and other public ownership.

A Representative Assembly

Its electoral system should ensure that it is representative of the whole of Wales, through a system of proportional representation for the election of all seats in the Assembly, and is composed of equal numbers of women and men.

Members of the Welsh Assembly should not be able to accept payment as MP, MEP or councillor, even though councils are not waged.

Labor's proposed Assembly falls short of these objectives but at least offers the people of Wales some measure of democratic control over the decisions which will affect their lives. However, it will be an important line of defence against any future right-wing government at Westminster. It is therefore essential to support the potential YES vote in the referendum on September 14th.

We call upon all socialists in Wales to organise and publicise those who support the NO vote.

We completely reject the stand-point of those in Wales who advocate a NO vote on supposed socialist and internationalist grounds. It is a hollow imitation of a political stance which cannot recognise the specific needs and aspirations of the people of Wales, a strange socialism that is no help to the unorganised and outcast British state.

Campaign for a YES Vote

This Conference resolves to publicise this declaration under the banner 'Socialists Say YES!' to work with all existing YES campaigns and to argue the following case throughout the labour movement and beyond. We also take every opportunity to fight for a strengthening of the proposals, in line with the objectives and aims set out above.

We call upon the Labour Party to conduct a vigorous mass campaign on the Yes side as widely as possible. Volunteer proposals. Victory will only be assured if Welsh working people are convinced that an Assembly which will give them a real democratic voice.

What you can do

Help to distribute the Cardiff Declaration will be widely as possible. A shorter AS campaign leaflet is also available, along with a poster, all available for a Welsh Assembly.

Contact Socialist Campaigns, Welsh Centre for Trades Union Studies, 131 Crwys Rd, Cardiff CF2 4HR. Tel: 01222 390273.
SCOTLAND II

Yes, Yes, we want more democracy in Scotland!

Gordon Morgan

THE WHITE Paper on a Scot-
tish Parliament outlines a de-
veloped Parliament with substan-
tial economic and legis-
lative powers.

It will have full legislative pow-
ers over Health, Education, Local Government, Economic Develop-
ment, Housing.

It will manage a Budget of £14 million and will have pow-
ers to adjust some existing taxes such as Business rates and could vary Income Tax by 1p in the pound.

The creation of this parliament will go a long way to ending the
democratic deficit in Scotland whereby the Secretary of State acts as a
colonial governor in allocating funds by personal fiat and Scottish
laws are largely tagged on to En-
lish hills with no concern for the
different circumstances of
Scotland.

Despite many concerns in the lead up to the White Paper and pref-
dictions of backsliding on key ques-
tions, Donald Dewar has main-
tained his enthusiasm for the
detail of the Scottish Conven-
tion proposal.

It was reported that the first draft of the paper was written by coun-
bents of the Scottish
Movement. Jack Straw and others. The Scottish
Office response was to hold the re-
ferendum on September 11 - the
700th anniversary of the Battle of
Stirling Bridge when Wallace de-
feated England.

Most concerns related to adjust-
ments to the FIT system - to reduce the numbers to secure a Labour ma-
lority in the Parliament. Not only
has the Convention system been
adopted, but certain line details have been addressed to increase the likelihood of a fair proportionality and its usability on the present scheme. Labour alone would have a

seats gained. If all 16 members were
elected proportionately, 6.25 per
cent of the vote would guarantee
a seat and 5 per cent would be most
likely to win a place.

Under the proposed scheme in
theory 1.25 per cent is required to
guarantee a seat; however, most
considerable circumstances a seat
will be gained with 7 per cent and may be gained with under 6 per
cent.

The scheme proposed is in fact

Many Scottish MPs are looking to Edinburgh for their future. If the Left and the SNP can continue to demand justice for the poor and mobilise against Government attacks - perhaps Donald Dewar will become more "Braveheart" and lead Scottish Labour to the left.

The Scottish left lines up for double Yes

THE SCOTTISH Socialist
Alliance (SSA) - a formation with no equivalent south of the
border - held its first
conference in June.

The SSA has had an impres-
sive first year on the streets, leading campaigns against
council cutts in Glasgow, in-
cluding protests against
school closures and the oc-
cupation of community centres, and has campaigned against
domestic violence. Its
showing of the General
election was less impressive
than many expected - it re-
mains to be seen what lessons will be learnt for the elections to the
Scottish Parliament.

CAMPBELL McCREGOR re-
presented the SSA at the con-
ference.

The ALLIANCE was formed
last year by socialists from a
wide range of backgrounds. Scottish Militant Labour (SML), who retained this name in Scotland are the largest component.

The Scottish Socialist Movement also played an important role in the formation of the SSA. The move-
ment was formalised in parallel with the Socialist Movement in England and
Wales, but did not evolve in quite the same way.

The SSA's politics are largely but
not exclusively informed by those of

Militant, which led them to over-
reach themselves by standing can-
didates in 16 seats, including all 10
Glasgow seats, although they did re-
main standing in Labour marginals.

It would be wrong to accuse
the SSA of electoralism. Tommy Sheri-
don won 11 per cent of the vote in
Glasgow Pollok, the largest share of the vote for any candidate in Brit-
an not backed by a major party, and
one of the best results by a leftist
language for a very long time. The SSA
is not a political party, but
more of an electoral formation.

The "Charter for Socialist
Change" drawn up by the SSA Na-
tional Council is basically a left social
democratic document, although with
large sections seeking revolu-
tionary changes.

The National Council's doc-
ument on "Campaigns and Elec-
tions" was better, with a correct emphasis on putting campaign first and a realistic
view of the SSA's electoral success.

The conference voted over-
whelmingly for a double "Yes" vote in the referendum in September, but

Scottish Parliament.

The Republica

l Workers' Union is call-
ing for a wider campaign for a Scottish repub-
lican.

The Social Labour Party
(SLP) has not engaged the SSA
in a head-on confrontation but
has established some offices of
its own, in Motherwell where it has a base in the RMT, and in the
former coal mining area of Ayrshire and Fife. They stood
three candidates. There was a tacit understanding that the SSA and the SLP would not stand against each other.

Some activities in the SLP and the SSA are personified on rea-
sensible terms and many would prefer to promote their
huge SLP members feel they cannot do anything which the London leadership would disapprove of.

Further information on the SSA's home page can be found online on the Internet on the SSA's home page:
http://webbys/cablei-
net.co.uk/declaw.htm

support the proposals now.

The main disadvantage is against
smaller parties - there is no na-
tional step-up, meaning that propor-
tionality operates only at Euro Constituency level. Thus the Scott-
ish Socialist Alliance in theory
could receive 5 per cent in every
constituency, but win no seats.

If however, it is only stood in Glas-
gow and received the same vote as
the last Euro elections it would gain
1 seat. In practice this forces the left
and environmental parties to re-
view their attitude to joint slates.

Labour, the Liberals and the SSA
were committed to a Yes vote.

The SNP waited for the paper
and now supports a Yes vote. Once
again Donald Dewar persuaded doubters by affirming that if the
Scottish Parliament voted for inde-
pendence then independence would
almost certainly follow.

Different agenda

In this as on other issues the
Scottish team seems to have a dif-
fert agenda to Blair and Mandelson. Mandelson's statements in his most
recent visit were effectively rejected by the Scottish Office team.

For once the entire Scottish po-
litical establishment is united in
support of a Yes vote. The SNP are
openly campaigning for a Parlia-
ment as step to Independence.

The SSA is the most left-wing of the Scottish parties and was an active participant in the referendum campaign.

Until after September 11 there is
effectively a political truce in Scot-
land. Attacks are muted, friend-
liness amongst political rivals is in the order of the day.

But under the surface all is not well. Labour in England and Scot-
land is preparing to impose further cuts. Local government revol-
lutions are however, being post-
poned till after September 11 -
Glasgow's report is expected on September 4.

I expect 6 months of clearer head-
lines leading up to the elections
to determine the powers and functions of Local Government. Commissions looking at "economies of scale", at "best value", and at rotations of power between Edinburgh and local coun-
cils, are being set up.

Not all is negative. On Educa-
tion, on Health and other issues, Scottish Office ministers are pre-
senting a different agenda to Blun-
ket et al as Westminster.

Brian Wilson at present has the full support of the Scottish teachers' union the EIS.

Many Scottish MPs are looking to Edinburgh for their future. Don-
ald Dewar has openly hinted he would like to be the first Minister of the
Scottish Parliament and com-
bine this with being the last incum-
ent as Secretary of State for Scotland.

If the Left and the SNP can con-
tinue to demand justice for the poor and mobilise against the Neoliberal agenda - perhaps Donald Dewar will be-
come more "Braveheart" and lead Scottish Labour to the left.
 UPS strike - a victory for all

THE UPS Teamsters strike this summer was the first time a major North American union had called a national strike of such significance in many years. The victory the workers achieved will be an inspiration across the United States and across the globe - demonstrating that militant unionism is not dead and that real victories can be won by supposedly outmoded methods of struggle, solidarity and unity.

Below we print comments on the strike and its outcome, the first from Against the Current, a radical American magazine. The second is from a press release from Teamsters for a Democratic Union.

Teamsters for a Democratic Union
Teamsters win big victory

ON MONDAY, Ron Carey and Ken Hall, our union leaders, negotiated a victory. Carey argued that the agreement has most of the features of the union's previous contract but that the company had not been fighting for, and that it bears little or no resemblance to that called "Last Best and Final" that the strike defeated. Carey has made clear that this victory belongs to the members who fought for it. TDU National Organizer Ken Paff stated, "This victory is in part an accumulation of decades of Teamster reform. Teamster members worked hard to get our union ready to fight and win. A decade ago our international officers were orchestrating secret deals with UPS management and forcing UPS Teamsters to accept contracts that were rejected by majority vote. That's now in the past. Now we have a union leadership and membership that can win a major victory for all of labor.

If you look at the union pre-strike time and the company's "final" offer of July 30, the agreement appears to fall about 90 per cent at the union side, in other words, we won! We won because we built a reform movement over many decades that got our union in a place to lead this fight. We won because we selected a Teamster international leadership willing to fight, not sell out.

We won because we campaigned for - and targeted the right issues, we took them to the members and the company's "final" offer of July 30, the agreement appears to fall about 90 per cent at the union side, in other words, we won! We won because we built a reform movement over many decades that got our union in a place to lead this fight. We won because we selected a Teamster international leadership willing to fight, not sell out.

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Unity defies bosses' gamble

Martha Gruelle
The UPS Teamsters strike was about the future of living-wage jobs in the United States but it was also a test.

How well had management done on winning the loyalty of its workers, and how well have the new democratised union and Teamsters for a Democratic Union counteracted "Brown Culture"?

Militaryistic
UPS has brown trucks, workers wear brown uniforms. There is a very militaryistic culture with rules for everything including the importance of shiny shoes. Everything is timed - it should take 30 seconds to do this, 2 minutes to do that - so the drivers are really pushed to perform day in, day out. The crisp, uniformed image and "tightest ship" slogan influence both the public's and workers' views, and evoke efficiency. UPS consistently uses internal promotions to capture the aspirations of workplace leaders.

The cultural, some say cultish, atmosphere of reward for self-sacrifice is combined with a constant scrutiny of workers' pace that keeps many of them working through breaks. Meanwhile, decades of comfortable relations with Teamsters International leaders have led less sophisticated workers to think that management chose to pay drivers decent pay and benefits.

Company's risky bet
The company seemed to be betting they'd won the hearts-and-minds thing - that there would be significant scabbing as the weeks wore on. UPS lost the bet.

The union's flagship issue - the demand to turn part-time into full-time jobs - turned out to be wonderfully unifying, as well as a cause for widespread public sympathy, a rarity in today's industrial disputes.

UPS part-timers do the behind-the-scenes work of sorting packages and loading them on trucks for delivery. It's intense, dangerous work, lifting and placing thousands of parcels of wildly varying size and weight.

A high proportion of sorters and loaders only last a few days or weeks.

The Teamsters fought to slow or reverse the sharp expansion of part-timers. The union also wanted good wage rises, including the first increase in the part-time starting rate in fifteen years.

The Teamsters put their case for "decent full-time jobs" to a public now sensitized to the growing problem of part-time, contingent work. Every young worker and every parent of a twenty-something knows it's hard to find full-time, decent paid permanent jobs.

Pensions
Meanwhile, in demanding control of UPS workers' pensions from the Teamsters benefit funds, the company aimed to split off feeder drivers, who tend to be older and have sometimes organized for higher pensions.

The point of multi-employer pension funds is mutual protection.

When the freight industry consolidate the eighties, UPS and other companies' negotiated pension contributions helped ensure retirement income for thousands whose companies closed and left a debt to the pension fund.

Now UPS asked its union employees to turn their backs on other Teamsters.

Events showed how deeply strike sentiment and union consciousness run among UPS Teamsters. Fewer than three percent broke ranks in the first week.

By holding strong, with widespread public support on their side, strikers shut down the company's only predictable operation, which is inescapable every move overseas.

After fifteen days on strike, that proved to be enough.

INSIDE COWLEY
Trade union struggles in the British car industry in the 1970s.

This sequel by ALAN THORNETT to his book From Militant to Marxism is a unique account of trade union activity in the British Leyland car plants in the 1970s. Its analysis of the conflict between rank and file and union bureaucrats under the last Labour government raises the question: Who opened the door to Thatcher's onslaught? This 430-page, illustrated volume is due for publication in November at £11.95. Pre-publication offer: just £7.95, plus £2 post and packing.

Make cheques to Alan Thornett and send to 14, Colyton Rd, London SE22 1NE

Now where?
Now we move forward to the next phase of the struggle. We can start with the upcoming national freight contract and move on to every aspect of the Teamsters and the labour movement.

Now we move forward to build that reform movement - to build a new leadership, to build a new situation, and to make possible innovative struggles, fresh leadership and Teamster victories.

If we do that, this will be only the first of a series of new Teamster victories that help make labour into a growing, dynamic force.
Plavsic – accomplice of Bosnian genocide

Geoff Ryan

President Alija Izetbegovic has famously remarked that having to choose between Slobodan Milosevic and Franjo Tudjman was like making a choice between leukemia and a brain tumour. The leaders of Republika Srpska are faced with a similar 'choice' – between Plavsic or Radovan Karadzic.

Karadzic's record is well-known: that of Plavsic, the West's current favourite Bosnian Serb, rather less so. She is as much a war criminal as Karadzic and General Radko Mladic. While the latter organised genocide against Bosnia's Muslims, Plavsic provided the ideological justification.

According to Plavsic the Serbs were oppressed as a nation under Tito. Moreover, she also claims to have consequently opposed the Tito regime, arguing that the worst crimes of Tito's Yugoslavia was that everyone had to think as the party did. Such 'national oppression' and 'opposition to the League of Communists' did not, however, prevent her birth and maturation at the University of Natural Science and Mathematics at the university of Sarajevo.

...and a champion of the 'oppressed' Serbs, chose to do her degree at the University of Zagreb in Croatia. Logic and consistency – let alone respect for facts – are not Plavsic's strong points.

Plavsic is a geneticist by profession: her politics reflect this training. She argues that Bosnia's Muslims were originally Serbs, but Serbs of 'genetically deformed material' who embraced Islam. Inter-marriage between Muslims and Serbs led to further deterioration in the Serb genetic material – a process which has led to a 'de-Serbianisation' of Bosnia's Serbs.

Yet, when 'pedigree' Serbs like Karadzic and Plavsic came to power the supposedly 'degenerate' Bosnian Serbs suddenly regained national consciousness.

Abused

Such absurdities would be laughable if they had not had such serious consequences.

Plavsic takes her socio-genetic nonsense further, whilst berating the Bosnian Serbs for their genetic deficiencies she also argues that the Serbs of Bosnia are, at the same time, politically and racially superior to the Serbs of Serbia.

Living in frontier regions supports Plavsic's Bosnian Serbs to develop a special ability to sense danger to the Serb nation and develop measures in self-protection.

One can only wonder why Plavsic was in favour of the unity of all Serbs within a single state. Her biological determinism should surely mean that the 'pure' genes of the Bosnian Serbs would be diluted by contact with the 'inferior' genes of the Serbs of Serbia.

Plavsic is known in Bosnia as the 'Iron Lady', the 'Serb Empress' and even the 'Godess Biljana'. Mirjana Markovic, however, has called her quite different – more appropriate – name: Dr. Mengede.

Markovic's husband, Slobodan Milosevic, claimed that Plavsic should be detained in a psychiatric hospital as a result of his speech in which she virtually welcomed NATO bombs. 'Even if six million Serbs perished', she said, 'that six million will live decently'.

Today Robin Cook and Madeleine Albright may portray her as champion of biologically determined nations as a moderate who has troops have intervened on her side in the battle she and her supporters are waging against Karadzic.

Western leaders clearly hope Plavsic will win September's elections.

An electoral victory for Plavsic, however, would not mean an end to the division of Bosnia. Indeed the elections (including those in the so-called Muslim Croat Federation) will take place in conditions where people will be able to vote in the area where they now reside – i.e. where the racial/ethnic boundaries have been 'ethnically cleansed'.

This is expressly against the provisions of the Dayton Accord yet is being sanctioned by the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe.

The electoral procedures agreed by the OSE/OSCE 'ethnic-cleansing' can and only encourage an intensification of ethnically based politics in Bosnia. These manoeuvres by the OSE/OSCE led to the nomination from the Provisional Electoral Commission of Kastim Becic, the representative of Bosnian Herzegovina.

But just because the West is backing Plavsic – including with military force – this does not mean societies should support Karadzic. We do not take sides in a conflict between two gangsters.

Neither Plavsic nor Karadzic have anything to offer Bosnia's Serbs, let alone the non-Serb population.

Certainly we are in favour of the arrest and trial of Karadzic – by the people of Bosnia. And when Karadzic and Mladic do find themselves in the dock they should be joined by Biljana Plavsic, their accomplice in crime.

Fears got under the skin...

The Tenth Circle of Hell' by Rezek Hukanovic (Little Brown & Co 14.99)

Reviewed by David Crosher

READERS will recall television and press pictures of a Bosnian woman's decapitated body standing behind a barbed wire fence. This was in August 1992 in Tuzla prison camp.

The story was subsequently not about pro-Serb nationals that the man was suffering from starvation and maltreatment at the hands of Bosnian Serbs, but from concentration camp survivors. Nor, contrary to more recent allegations in Living Marxism, was he possibly the anti-partisan wire so that ITN could cook up a story.

Rezek Hukanovic also survived an ordeal in a prison camp run by Serb nationalists. He was in Omarska. The Tenth Circle of Hell is Hukanovic's account of what happened to him, his son and his neighbours.

In this account he is also describing the fate of many thousands of Bosnian prisoners. Over the course of two days more than three thousand inhabitants of Prijozd and its outlying villages were arrested in their homes and brought to ... Omarska.()

Hukanovic describes how the prisoners were tortured like this: Soldiers burst into his countryman's house, apparently looking for weapons. One of the soldiers said 'There's shooting all over the place. They're taking aim. We're safer here at the station.'

From the railway station, prisoners were taken on buses to Omarska. Hukanovic describes the filthy and overcrowded conditions in which even icy and disease could thrive. They were not given food for four days. On the fifth day there was food but, the prisoners were told, not enough. Many had to wait another day.

In one building, so many people were cramming that they had to try to sleep standing up. They were deprived of water. "When somebody took a leak, others gathered round to cup their hands and catch the drink to put to their plates and even drink it." Hukanovic describes this as the third person, giving himself the name of Djemo. He says that at the time he felt that "the death was nearer than Serbs had been on other occasions."

"When new prisoners were brought to the camp ... they were given a bowl of instant noodles like a kind of luncheon as soon as they stepped off the bus. Many never made it as far as the dorm: the guards would have smashed their heads against the brick wall of the building."

That was a truly horrible sound – a skull being smashed ... fear got under the skin.

With the frequent arrivals there were frequent departures: prisoners who were taken away and who have not been seen since.

For those who did come back after being tortured, the prisoners provided what help they could.

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Fianna Fail, a symptom of workers' political weakness

For all the talk about the "Celtic Tiger" they are still as tied politically to the British as they were before independence.
Behind new Irish ceasefire

Diplomacy clashes with reality

All the real concessions that have been made to open up this month's peace talks in Ireland have been made by the republican leaders, and the whole situation could swiftly unravel, warns John McNally in Belfast.

THE NEW IRA ceasefire in Ireland reflects the outcome of a sustained round of secret diplomacy by the new Blair administration in Britain. Unfortunately for the peace process mark II, it also coincided with the continuing split between Irish and Loyalist assault on the nationalist population of the Grevagh road and graphically demonstrated the limits of what is on offer.

The Sinn Fein leadership's explanation for the failure of the peace process in Ireland was based on what they saw as former Tory leader Major's dependence on unionist votes and an unsympathetic regime in Dublin. They had posed a dream ticket of a strong Labour government, a PFI sale in Dublin and the Ulster Unionists in government in June. All these elements of the dream ticket came into play in a series of meetings.

This analysis, borrowed from the 'right' of the local nationalists, John Hume, left out of the picture the whole question of the intervention of English and American imperialism. That interest was spelt out in a vengeful manner by the new Labour publication The Irish Times. They brought new energy to the process, but in support of the cause of the domination of the peace process, not the price of a ticket.

"The future is Orange" boys

Tony Blair rushed to Belfast to assuage unionists that the future of Orange – that the outcome of the peace process would be the continuation of partition generations. He took the opportunity to thank of the loyalist death squads for their restraint on a day when one of the victims of loyalist sectarian violence was being buried.

The new British secretary, Mo Mowlam, adopted a no-nonsense, "meet the people" diplomacy. The result was the same – on the 6th July British forces moved in at dawn to attack the civilian population at the Grevagh Road in Portadown in order to block the "biggest" loyalist in the sectarian Orange order to assert their supremacy over the minority population by staging their annual march through the nationalist area.

A leaked official document – a "peace plan" – also revealed that the British had decided weeks before that this would be their policy, and that Mowlam's posturing had simply been a PR exercise.

Mowlam had hoped to talk to the loyalists around, but given that the loyalists already knew that the church which proceeded she had no prospect of winning any agreement from them. The fact that all this happened when the British had already finalised the diplomatic details of a new ceasefire shows just how little this is on offer from the peace process.

British policy

In order to understand this we need first of all to understand British policy. The British, through the Irish peace process, have enlisted local nationalist politicians and the Dublin government to shore up the Northern state.

"In Patrick Mayhew, the former British secretary, spelt out the limits of what Britain could offer in return after Drumcree II – a carbon copy attack on civilians by the RUC, the sectarian local police force, in 1996. The British had never promised to confront Osman, hardly surprising given that they are the mass base for the British occupation of the area. What they had promised to do was try to talk them around."

The strategy was faithfully applied when the most extreme loyalists began a series of weekly attacks on Catholics attending mass in Harratten, Rallymen. For a year, with the support of the Catholic hierarchy who pushed the RUC into their schools in an attempt to rehabilitate them, the British tried to marginalise the loyalty blocs.

They fired up a whole series of local loyalist diaspora, including Robert Sturwell, the Orange leader, to denounce the demonstrations.

After a year of demonstrations and sectarian attacks the loyalists walked over the half-hearted resistance of the RUC to break into the church, and the communications surrendered shortly afterwards.

The same policy was applied by British soldiers in Portadown in the run up to Drumcree. Again, with the same result; the bigoted marched and the state assaulted the residents.

A test for Sinn Fein

Sinn Fein leader Gerry Adams called the parade a test of the British. It was also a test for Sinn Fein – and it showed a seriously disoriented movement.

Adams rushed back from Tralee in southern Ireland to convene a rally on the Falls Road in Belfast to bring a non-aggression of occasions that he was an Irish man, the chief publicist and calling an open meeting that Monday to discuss mass action. By the time the meeting was held the republican leadership had closed ranks, debate was barred, and instead a bizarre lesson was held where the audience was asked to make tactical suggestions with out being allowed to discuss strategy or policy.

It was clearly indicated from the platform that Socialist Democracy were not welcome at the meeting.

The strategy that finally emerged was one where the leadership held on firmly to the nationalist family and their interpretation of the peace process, and continued to boist the SDLP on to their platforms.

The vehicle for activity continued to be the narrow nationalists' commission. These are confined to areas directly under attack, with no attempt to build a broader solidarity. Their policy expression of the nationalist family, with concessions made to the Catholic church and Orange leadership into retreat and the cancellation of a number of marches through traditional areas.

Political decommissioning

Within days a new ceasefire was announced by the IRA. Rarely have the timetables of diplomacy and rank file action been so at variance. The decision was too close to a raw exhibition of the reality of the sectarian state and to the British role in support of that state and led to a number of expressions of commitment by Sinn Fein activists.

The basis for the IRA decision was that the roadblock of prior decommissioning was all that the IRA would have to do and that the focus was the all-Ireland project. The 50th anniversary of the Easter rebellion was called a new chapter in the battle.

The British have engineered these situations before, and the Loyalist base has always won. All the initiatives of the past 20 years have failed to win the right under the pressure of loyalist bigotry.

But it made clear that this commitment did not extend to the state forces.

It also made the demand that those participating accept in advance the outcome of the talks. This is actually a demand for political surrender, and it appears that the republican leadership have conceded this.

The day before the ceasefire, in a move clearly linked to the secret diplomacy with the British, Gerry Adams upheld an extensive document outlining that the programme of the leadership. It lists a number of reforms in tackling discrimination and repressive legislation and went on to call for a renegotiation of the union - a clear recognition that the demand for a united Ireland could not be realised through the talks.

Following criticism Adams re- potencyed the article. In a nice bit of peacemaker he claimed he had been claiming the leadership of the emergency rallies were held in Belfast and thrust the pressure of the British leaders in the joint declaration that the prime minister of the movements remained a united Ireland.

The Sinn Fein leadership did not say that was that the "primary aim" would not - and could not - be realised through the peace process, and that the drift to reform meant that the revolutionary elements of their programme were forced by the logic of the drift to move to a long and indefinite future.

So the ceasefire returned, but without the fanfare and support that existed at the base of republicanism in the past. The focus will now shift to unionism.

Unionist division

In a mirror image of their role in the sectarian marches the British have managed to talk around some sections of big business and thus pressure elements in the leadership of the Unionist party.

They have voted against the de- commissioning document, thus putting the process on hold... but they have not walked out. This reprehensive and little-known sect, who are willing to accept some cosmetic reform, and elements of the bourgeoisie and petty-bourgeoisie wedded to the full expression of their sectarian privileged.

The British have engineered these situations before, and the Loyalist base has always won. All the initiatives of the past 20 years have failed to win the right under the pressure of loyalist bigotry.

The British calculate that this time the unionists are even more fragmented and that they will be able to use the representatives of the death squads, whom they have helped to dress in the sheep's clothing of working class modernisation, further to weaken the reaction.

However it does not take much imagination to see how little the leadership of unionism will cede under this kind of pressure. How that will play out for the republicans to lead the limited cosmetic changes as a stepping stone to a united Ireland.

Drumcree III split out little substance there is to British peace pressure, but it leaves little room to regret uncovering the reality.

• John McNally writes on behalf of Socialist Democracy, the Irish section of the Fourth International.
Nick Robin
Writing an obituary is hard. How can you sum up someone's life in a way that does them justice, that reaches out with your memories to those that read it in a way that they can recognize the person you're writing about? The achievements, whose loss is in the centre of it.
Nick Robin, life-long socialist and activist, died on July 19 1997 aged 41 after a battle with cancer. He was an exceptional person; demanding near perfection of himself but patient with others' shortcomings, warm, inventive – a pleasure to know. He is sorely missed by all who had the privilege to know him, by his many friends, by former Bridge and children Scarlet, Liam and Joel. Nick threw himself into politics in the 1970s and quickly joined the International Marxist Group. A fervent internationalist, he became prominent in the Turkish Solidarity Campaign. He was the 1980 campaign to declare parapath of the USSR, and was himself well versed in the history and politics of Turkey, and visited the country several times. He became well known in the extra community here as a comrade and as a friend. For revolutionaries being able to communicate ideas clearly in an accessible manner, produced material that invites involvement from the reader is as vital a skill as any other we need.
Nick became not only a vital writer but skilled at the unseen backroom jobs of editing, layout and production. In that way he became a vital part of the print staff of the Internat i onal Marxist Group and the Socialist League.
The same skills were also crucial to the protection of the first issues of Socialist Outlook as bi-monthly magazine.
These talents, developed in his political life, were used to good and ready profession, the maga zine of the Socialist League, early in 1983.
Terry Conway

Storming heaven

On March 18 1871 the workers of Paris seized power and ruled for two months. This was the first proletarian democracy in history. Nick Robin reassesses the Commune.

KARL MARX and the first International had counselled the workers of Paris against rising in such hostile circumstances but they threw their full support behind them when they did.

Members of the International participated in the movement with the enthusiastic backing of their Executive Committee. Marx, in London, wrote of this glorious beginning of a new society (whose) mains are enshrined in the great heart of the working class.

In 1870 the imperial adventures of Emperor Louis Napoleon, Bonapart's nephew and the absolute ruler of France since the revolution of 1848, resulted in the defeat of the French armies by Bismarck of Prussia and the capture of the Emperor himself.

On September 4 1870, with the Prussian army in the streets of Paris, a Republic was once again declared in France. The French army was crushed and demoralised and Paris was defended by the armed people, known as the National Guard.

The French bourgeoisie was frantic to make peace with the Prussians in order to turn on its own insurrectionary subordinate classes. It organised itself in a "Party of Order" of monarchists, Bonapartists and, as Marx put it "all that was dead in France and set up a "National Assembly" at Versailles outside Paris.

The remnants of the army were withdrawn from Paris and regrouped in Versailles. The leader of this decadent assemblage was Auguste Thiers who, according to Marx was "consistent only in his greed for wealth and his hatred of the men that produce it". His was truly a 'regime of avoided class terrorism and deliberate insult to the "vile multitude"'.

Armed Paris, the only obstacle to the counter-revolution, was besieged and starving. Thiers' assembly could not decide the National Guard into giving up their arms and ending their fight for the defence of the Republic and for revolution.

So on March 18, with the Prussian armies still stationed at the gates of the city and collecting massive reparations from the National Guard, the 'Versaillais' sent a battalion under General Lecomte to seize 400 guns - which they claimed as 'state property' - from Montmartre in the very heart of revolutionary Paris.

The local population frenzied with the troops. The only shots fired that day were those that killed General Lecomte, fired by his own soldiers.

The Central Committee, a body of delegates from the National Guard battalions in each Parisian town, decided to march on Versailles, issuing a manifesto in the name of the population:

"The Parisians of Paris amid the failure of the ruling classes, have understood that the hour has struck for them to save the situation by taking into their own hands the direction of public affairs... they have understood that it is their imperious duty and their absolute right to render themselves masters of their own destinies, by seizing the governmental power."

To which Marx adds, in The Civil War in France: 'but the working class cannot simply lay hold of the ready-made state machinery and wield it for its own purpose'.

This was the prime lesson of the Commune and one well understood by the Communards themselves; their experience prompted Marx and Engels to make their only correction to the Communist Manifesto to include the necessity of the destruction of the bourgeois state.

The Central Committee immediately prepared elections and on March 28 the newly-elected representatives of the people of Paris declared the Commune and with it the destruction of the old state machine.

The standing army was abolished, the separation of church and state was decreed and enforced, the police and army were replaced by citizens' militias whose officers were instantly recalled, as were the judges. In the Commune's short life, two chiefs of the militia, Clausrtet and Rossel, were both sacked by popular demand.

The brutal and authoritarian Code Napoleon, "a parasitical excrescence upon civil society" was abolished at a stroke. In place of the old state with its "obviously and complicated military, bureaucratic, clerical and military organs (enmeshing) the living civil society like a boa constrictor", a "true republic" of the working class was brought into existence.

The Commune was a working class republic, "the restoration of the state power by society, as its own living forces controlling and subordinating, by the populous themselves, forming their own force instead of the organised force of their suppression."

All this was prosecuted with the maximum order and efficiency. While out on the streets, the heroic citizens were summoned by their owners were put to work under the control of the workers. The lawless, the armed, the unemployed, were marched under the eyes of Caminella, a member of the International, and drafted out of Paris. Baseball uniforms, abolition, war widows and orphans were provided for, pawnshops were closed down, the working class were taught to read, were taught to read, to write, to improve their lot, to read, to write, to improve their lot.

This was the very antithesis of the International ideal: 'the restorations of the state power by society, as its own living forces controlling and subordinating, by the populous themselves, forming their own force instead of the organised force of their suppression.'

Whether these actions were set up from among representatives to oversee the police, labour, education, health, or a mixture of all these, they were sponsored by their owners were put to work under the control of the workers. The lawless, the armed, the unemployed, were marched under the eyes of Caminella, a member of the International, and drafted out of Paris. Baseball uniforms, abolition, war widows and orphans were provided for, pawnshops were closed down, the working class were taught to read, to write, to improve their lot, to read, to write, to improve their lot.

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Ireland: The Promise of Socialism

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Send cheque payable to Socialist Outlook Fund, 31 Chatsworth Street, London N1 1D9, London N4 2UU.
"In place of the old state with its 'ubiquitous and complicated military, bureaucratic, clerical and judiciary organs (enmeshing) the living civil society like a boa constrictor', a completely new form of state was brought into existence."

was put in charge of the Commission of Edu-
cation. He was at fault for his 'revolution-
ary system of abstinent drinking' as for his per-
verted escape of 30,000 socialists."

The aged revolutionist, Auguste Blanqui, was elected delegate to the Commune from the two different arrondissements despite his in-
carceration in the south of France. It was Blanqui who observed of Rouget that 'he was nothing but a gutterstrip, but a policeman of genius'.

There were many veterans of the barri-
cades of 1848 and subsequently of many prison cells, among them Delescluse and Félix Pyat.

On April 12, six days after the public burn-
ing of the guillotine, the whole of working class Paris assembled to observe the destruc-
tion of the chief symbol of the Empire. The enormous column in the Place Vendôme, on top of which stood a statue of Napoleon as the Emperor Caesar, was reduced to rubble by skilled engineering.

The column, the epitome of a savage and wattle dictatorship, had been inscribed 'a monument of barbarism, symbol of brute force and false glory, an affirmation of militarism, a negation of interna-
tional right' (Marx) and draped with the red flag.

The destruction of the Maréchal's Place Vendôme was renamed the Place Internationale; a fitting tribute to the internationalism of the Com-
munards who accepted as citizens the oppressed workers of the entire world, who appointed as two of its principal military defenders the Polish Dom-
browski and Wróblewski, and designated the Russian internationalist, Frankel, its 'minis-
ter' of labour.

The destruction of the Vendôme column was a symbolic act but a powerful one. Lis-
sagarry in his participant account History of the Paris Commune (translated into English by Marx's daughter Eleanor) puts it like this: 'It showed that a war of classes was to supersede the war of nations. It was not surprising, therefore, that 'one of the first acts of the vic-
torious bourgeoisie was to again raise this enormous black cock, and symbol of the go-
everty. To lift up Caesar on his pedestal they needed 30,000 corpses."

To look for a detailed governmental pro-
gramme in the Commune is a waste of time. Its short existence was absorbed in a life and death struggle against the armies of the bour-
goisie. Yet the International recognised in the Commune the germ of a new society. The new society of labourers."

Sometimes, it is true, it was, in Lissagaray's words, 'as a crime without a confessor, each individualist playing what he liked, confusing his score with his neighbour's'. Yet the Communards taught a crucial lesson to the international workers' movement: 'That the political instrument of their enslavement cannot serve as the political instrument of their emancipation' (Marx).

The experience of the workers in power was worth a thousand books or articles. The news from Paris spread fast and demonstra-
tions of support broke out all over Europe; throughout the major cities of France, the Commune was declared.

In Paris itself the debt-ridden middle classes aligned themselves with the working class against the predatory bourgeois credi-
tors; the workers championed their demands to rid of clerical oppression.

The middle classes, Marx wrote: 'Feel that only the working class can emancipate them from priest rule, convert science from an in-
strument of class rule into a popular force...

"The Commune was a working body in which legislative and executive functions were combined and delegates and other state officials were paid no more than the wages of a skilled worker."

Science can only fully play its genuine part in the Republic of Labour'.

The Commune commanded the over-
whelming support of all sections of the masses. On March 29 the Freemasons joined the Commune with a demonstration of 10,000 headed by a banner declaring 'Love one an-
other' after Thiers had rejected their attempts at reconciliation.

The Commune legislated the abolition of consecration and the taxation of the bourgeois-
ies to pay for the war, the key demands of the peasantry. This was another lesson of the Commune, the lesson of Permanent Revolu-
tion, that the working class is the only class which can lead the social emancipation and liberation of all the other oppressed classes against their rulers.

The Commune also put paid to the ideolo-
gies of utopian socialism by proving that the real movement of the working class would be the agent of social change.

But we jump too far ahead; there was, after all, a further lesson of the Commune -- the bourgeoisie character of a ruling class con-
fronted by an insurrectionary people. The collaboration of the Prussian army with Thiers and the disorganisation and technical inferiority of the Commune's forces ensured that when the army did enter Paris on May 21, it took only eight days to destroy the Com-

mune; the provincial communards by then had already been crushed.

As the barricades crumbled, the ruling class and its army indulged in an orgy of mas-
sacres and blood-letting. The population of Paris was no more than half a million; yet be-

tween 20,000 and 30,000 were killed of whom perhaps only a quarter fell in battle.

In his diary, M Aubourdou, a Paris bourgeois, wrote: 'What a joy to see them lying there, their flesh in... it is a pleasure to bath and wash our hands in their blood' (Jellinek).

46,000 were taken prisoners.

The Commune's final death agony came with the massacre at the cemetery of Père Lachaise where the Commune had decided to build a granite temple to the Republic. 5,000 of the captured National Guards were slaughtered on the site now known as the 'wall of the Fédérés'. Engels described the wall as 'a mute but elo-
quent testimony to the frenzy of which the ruling class is capable as soon as the working class dares to stand up for its rights'. This was order restored in

Paris.

The trials, executions, and deportations to the Pacific colony of New Caledonia, dragged on for five more years. Marx commented: 'A glorious civilization, indeed, the great prob-
lem of which, how to get rid of the heaps of corpses it made after the battle was over'.

It is well known that Marx and the Interna-
tional had counselled against a rising of the Paris working class against the bourgeoisie while the Prussian army was still on the offen-
sive. But Marx never placed himself outside the living movement of the working class whatever his detailed criticisms of this or that aspect of the struggle. When the Commu-
nards rose, Marx's solidarity and admiration was without bounds.

In a letter to Kugelmann, he wrote: 'What elasticity, what historical initiative, what a ca-
pacity for sacrifice in these Parisians! After six months of hunger and ruin caused by in-
ternal treachery more than by the external en-
emy, they rise, beneath Prussian bayonets, as if there had never been a war between France and Germany and the enemy were not still at the gates of Paris! History has no like example of their greatness!'

The Petersburg Soviet of 1905 was the first confirmation of this and the October revolu-
tion an outgrowth.

When Lenin left for Finland in July 1917 he took with him two books: Clausewitze The Art of War and Marx's Civil War in France. He arrived back secretly in Russia two months later having jettisoned Clausewitze and writ-
ten State and Revolution.

Paraphrasing Marx, he wrote that the Commune was the 'political form in last dis-
covered', by which the smashed state and must be replaced -- a revision, incidentally, of his previous position in The Tactics for Social Demo-
cracy in which the Commune is criti-
cised for 'confusing democratic and socialist tasks'.

The Commune heralded a new era. The
disposed and exploited took power and governed without bosses or generals. The Communards not only showed the workers of the world the possibility of a new society free of exploitation, they created one.

One hundred years after Marx's death, sixty years since Stalinism consummated the notion of proletarian dictatorship, Marxists should forcibly reassert the true, genuinely democratic, content that our tradition a-
taches to these words.

With Marx we love 'Look at the Paris Commune. That was the Dictatorship of the Proletariat'.

[First published in International January-April 1983]

Further reading
- Karl Marx, The Civil War in France
- Frank Jellinek, The Paris Commune
- Lissagaray, History of the Com-

mune of 1871
- Marx and Engels, Selected Works
- Lenin, Selected Works.
Get Indonesia out of East Timor!

B. Skanthakumar

ROBIN Cook visited Indonesia at the end of August, just one month after agreeing to complete the sale of 16 Hawk aircraft, 50 armoured personnel carriers (APCs), to unveil his six-point plan for improving human rights.

His plan aims to limit access to British arms sales to countries with a "significant commitment to, and record of, internal repression". This includes all the British advisors on "non-violent civilian control". In short, the Indonesian dictatorship will have to stop its water cannon, armoured cars and rockets in a peaceful way, just as the British state does in the North of Ireland, if it wants Britain to continue to sell them.

In occupied East Timor there has been an upsurge in armed activity in recent months. Shorty before Indonesia's general elections on May 29 units of FAIUNIT, the armed Timorese militia, launched attacks on army and police units killing several dozen soldiers.

The timing of this campaign suggests it was aimed at disrupting the talks for future peace process and at demonstrating further the Indonesian military's control. It appears to have succeeded.

Meanwhile in a number of large towns the unarmed resistance which operates as a clandestine front of all East Timorese groups organised attacks on polling booths and was involved in street fighting with police and army personnel.

Indonesia's army of occupation responded in its customary way. It launched punitive raids on villages in areas of FAIUNIT activity terrorising their inhabitants. Many have been beheaded, arrested and taken to torture centres to extract information and false confessions. The whereabouts and fate of others abducted or arrested is unknown.

The absence of foreign journalists and independent human rights monitors and the lack of local media make it difficult to establish an accurate picture of the situation.

Fresh detachments from the feared Kopassus (Special Forces Command) unit headed by President Suharto's son-in-law Major-General Gada Suryo have also been rushed from Indonesia.

The capture on June 25 and probable death in custody of David Alex, the legendary second-in-command of FAIUNIT, is a blow to the resistance forces and the Mundur people as a whole.

The military claim that Alex died after torture to death is baseless. The Mundur people say that he was either tortured to death or murdered in some other way.

He was buried under tight secrecy and his family members were unable to see his body nor have military permitted exhumation and an inquest.

The state visit of Nel- len Lewa, the Prime Minister of Indonesia, to mid-July focused atten- tion on international efforts to mediate on East Timor but has also de- tected attention from the growing violations of human rights and tyranny of the Indonesian rulers.

Mandela visited Indo- nesia at the invitation of the minister for General Social Affairs, Mr Suharto. His visit coincided with President Suharto's arrival in South Africa.

Mandela was officially denied permission to visit when he arrived in South Africa. South Africa's anti-apartheid policies for soliciting copyright of his name and the head of state of South East Asia's dictator.

In an effort to make amends he has recently made some high profile statements on the situation in East Timor and publicly called for the release of FAIUNIT leader Xanana Gusman who is serving a twenty-year prison sen- tence.

To the city of Jakarta, Mandela sought and obtained an unprec- edented audience with President Suharto to assure him of his per- sonal support.

The many East Timor campaigners are sceptical of both Suharto's good faith and Monsanto's interest that the South African arms industry enthusiastically supported by the ANC-led Gov- ernment has shown in the Indo- nesian market.

As the US Congress blocks arms sales and the Labour Gover- nment is about to freeze all funds over its sale of Hawk aircraft, the Indonesians are looking to South Africa and Russia for their purchases.

There are rumours that the re- gime is in agreement for early release and exile to Europe of Xanana Gusman and certain information of its occupation and cru- elties in East Timor. However it is unlikely that this has been formally said that the issue at stake is not his own freedom but the freedom of the Indonesian people and independ- ence of his country.

JAMIE

Stuart's view

The Journey Begins

10.30pm - Thursday night - I hopped the bus to London. I arrived in the city at 5am - the next day.

7am - Friday morning. I arrive in London. Stopped off in a great Spoon cafe for a cigarette and a coffee. After leaving the cafe I came across this old woman sleeping rough. I offered her some food but she said "give the food to someone else". She asked her for tube directions and she said goodbye.

That evening we caught the bus from Paris to Victoria.

Arrival in France

We got to Paris, hopped on the tube across Paris to that main train which took us to Brede. The train journey was long and hectic, 6.7 hours. We finally got there tired and knackered and we still had another journey of three more miles to the camp.

Arrival at the Camp

We got to the camp and we pitched our tents and as I looked around it looked like a small part of Che Guevara's army and people were hundreds of revolutionaries.

Everybody seemed to get on with everybody else - the camp was great! The disco and parties were fantastic. Everybody seemed to get on with each other. There was discussion about all sorts of stuff including the massacre of four resistance fighters from the area in the war. We discussed the politics of the right wing and how we can fight to make a better world.

International youth camp

A breach in Fortress Europe

February 5, 2000

Simon Deville

FIVE HUNDRED young revolu- tionaries attended the fourteen- day youth camp in solidarity with the Fourth International.

Discussion started with the struggle against Mussolini, the rac- ism and fascism accords and other con- cerns of the North American and European groups. More specific cases such as the violence in the South American revolution.

Young people exchanged experiences of struggles against budget cuts in education, against racism and fascism, for the defence of the environment, to develop the mu- tual understanding which is an in- dispensable basis for common work. After the Euromarches and the counter-summit in Amsterdam in June, the mobilisations must continue and the links between struggles and activities in different countries be strengthened.

The camp was held near Brinse in the French Massif Central region, where four Trotskyists were murdered by Stashinetta after their escape from a Nazi concentration camp. Larry Macaron spoke in mem- ory of the three who died: Pierre Trejom, a former member of the PCF, Pierre Ferro, a trade unionist, and Edouard Verdun, a well-known activist in the region and co-founder with Pierre Boutros of the Union des Jeunes communistes.

A high point of the week was the meeting of Italian comrades in a camp operated and run by the Young Socialists, activists, Puglia, and the Spanish.

The central organis- ers of the camp, spoke about the situation in Latin America and the struggles of young people, of the landless peasants of Brazil, of the in- dignous people in Mexico with the Zapatista Army of National Liber- ation.

A commitment was made to build a youth network against the bosses' Europe, starting with events such as the demonstration at the next Euro- pean summit in Luxembourg in November.

The camp is also an occasion to try to put our principles into prac- tice. It is first of all a struggle against racism, sexism and homophobia are not tolerated. It is also a space which is self-managed by the young com- rades.

The leadership of the camp re- mains in the hands of the daily meeting of the representatives of the different delegations. Young people from Portugal to Poland, from Sweden to Italy, learn to work together in a context of friendly cooperation, political, discussions and debates, the focus on social events.

Women comrades have a place for themselves, to organise discus- sions, take part in meetings.

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Women comrades have a place for themselves, to organise discus- sions, take part in meetings.
Sectarianism plays into hands of British state

RELIEF should not blind us to reality. The Orange Order blinked on the edge of chaos. It made a tactical retreat and as a result there are divisions within its ranks. That’s gain, but neither the Loyalists nor the British have conceded anything in principle.

Patrick Mayhew spells out British policy after Drumcree II and that policy was confirmed in the ‘game plan’ for Drumcree III.

There was no question of opposing sectarianism. What the British had promised to do and what they would do was try and talk the Loyalists around.

That’s what they did at Harryville.

That’s what they did at Drumcree III. That’s what they did prior to the 12th. With a mass nationalist revolt on the cards they finally got the Orange leaders to blink.

So what have we and a process controlled by a government that has ruled out in the harshest terms any consideration of a united Ireland and has also made it clear that any reform needs the co-operation of the Trimble and Sutlers of this world.

That means that the long term outcome of a review of parades is likely to be the institutionalisation of sectarianism. On the broader political front it means a peace process that can only end in the same way.

The peace process and the nationalist family proved useless in the run-up to Drumcree. The only thing that prevented complete disaster was Sinn Fein breaking in action from that family and calling for mass action on the streets.

We need a strong united 32 county action against sectarianism. Local committees are too weak and give weight to reactionary forces such as those in the Catholic church and other members of an imaginary nationalist family.

As socialists we specifically call on a silent trade union movement and on Irish working class organisations to condemn the concept of “equality of the two traditions”.

This is a barely disguised recipe for sectarianism built into the fabric of a new state.

The only real alternative to sectarianism is an Irish workers’ movement united against Orange sectarianism and British sponsorship of that sectarianism.

John McAnulty, for Socialist Democracy

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In SCOTLAND, vote YES.

The referenda on a Scottish Parliament and a Welsh Assembly raise the prospect of democratic change in the structure of the British state.

Labour's proposals will not solve national or social questions in either Scotland or Wales, but defeat for the anti-democratic unionism of the Tories will be a victory for workers and the oppressed throughout the British state, be they in England, Ireland, Scotland or Wales.

It is also clear that the existence of bodies of Scottish and Welsh government combined with continuing regional inequality has the potential to deepen the political crisis of the British state.

As Marxists we favour constituent assemblies for Scotland and Wales. By this we mean elected bodies that define their own powers, both legislative and executive; that are not subject to Westminster vote or veto; that are prepared to act on all economic, political and cultural questions; that are independent of all British state structures and can themselves decide on their relations with the EU.

We would demand that such assemblies act to defend the interests of Scottish and Welsh workers against British and international capitalism. Labour's proposals fall far short of this. Indeed, constituent assemblies will not be established by a ballot alone, but through the struggles of Scottish and Welsh workers.

We call for a 'Yes' vote because we support a Scottish Parliament and a Welsh Assembly as democratic advances and because we regard the YES campaign as a starting point in the struggle for real constituent assemblies. And we urge all socialists to campaign for a 'yes' vote.