

● Hutton inquiry ● Top-Up Fees ● Lenin ●

Socialist Appeal

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Lies
on
Iraq,

lies
on
fees...

MAKE

BLAIR

PAY

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Hutton Whitewash - Blair cannot run forever

THE HUTTON inquiry produced few surprises. Naturally Tony Blair and Alastair Campbell were exonerated. This inquiry was no different to any of its predecessors, since no such inquiry ever found a government to be guilty. It was a whitewash.

Yet it goes further, condemning the BBC and vilifying the man at the centre of the inquiry, weapons expert Dr. David Kelly driven beyond the edge of reason by the desire of the government to silence all criticism. Not content with the man's death they now pursue his reputation beyond the grave. Kelly's tragic death has not dissuaded them from their course in the slightest.

This is a government hell-bent on suppressing all opposition. Not content with elbowing aside the PLP and turning the cabinet into a rubber stamp, now they want to stifle the press, journalists and the BBC in particular and close off yet another avenue for criticism.

Marxism has no illusions in the independence of the press any more than the judiciary. The BBC in particular has long played the most baleful role in relation to the workers' movement. Witness their appalling coverage during the miners' strike, recalled so vividly in their recent documentary which sought not only to rewrite history but also as a warning to workers today. 'Militancy is a thing of the past, do not dare to try it again.' Nevertheless, individual journalists can play a certain role in exposing the lies and deception perpetrated by governments to justify the unjustifiable. In general those who run the media do so in the interests of the capitalist system. But are we now to have a press run by government department? Are jour-

nalists to submit their by-lines to government censors before publication?

The conclusions of Hutton's report were known in advance, both because they were obvious, and also because this inquiry into leaks was itself leaked. Blair is said to be "furious", yet one would have to ask which potential headline of January 28 Blair would prefer "Humiliating 'victory' on top-up fees" or "Blair cleared by Hutton". As a lawyer Blair will be familiar with the phrase 'cui bono' - who benefits?

Save for the nasty attacks on the one man not able to give evidence, and the assault on the press, Hutton's conclusions are irrelevant. Naturally Blair and co got off scott free. Nothing more was to be expected. Yet every day that this fills the papers is a reminder of the war in Iraq, and for that there will be a reckoning at the polls and inside the labour movement.

Blair Clique

The ever increasing concentration of power in the hands of a small clique around Blair, further exposed by this inquiry, also points to a far more important conclusion than anything Hutton says in his report. The continued erosion of democracy, limited as it is under capitalism, with the downgrading of parliament, and attacks on the press, both of whom provided at least some measure of a safeguard in the past, for all their limitations, is not a secondary question. The attacks on workers' rights, combined with the undermining of democracy, and new measures like the new emergency powers legislation must serve as a warning to the labour movement.

The ruling class is prepar-

ing for struggles to come. We must do likewise.

Which brings us to the narrow remit of Hutton's inquiry. Some journalists have written that the whole thing is just a distraction. Indeed the pronounced innocence of Blair and co in the leaking of Dr. Kelly's name is no doubt meant as a magician's trick with mirrors, to distract attention from the real issue - there never were any weapons of mass destruction in Iraq and now everyone, except Blair, admits it.

David Kay, Bush's own weapons inspector resigned his position in January concluding that there are no weapons of mass destruction in Iraq. "I don't think they existed" he stated bluntly.

This issue will not go away no matter how hard Blair's spin doctors attempt to sweep it under the carpet. Blair is now under attack from all quarters. A whitewashed inquiry will not save him any more than his 'triumph' in parliament over tuition fees.

The Tories hypocritically try to wrap themselves in a cloak of sincerity over the death of Kelly and the wider issue of the non-existence of weapons of mass destruction. No doubt we are expected to conveniently forget that they enthusiastically supported the war in Iraq.

More importantly Blair finds himself under attack in parliament, from within the Labour Party. Robin Cook who resigned from the cabinet over the war in Iraq abstained in the vote on student fees. The other cabinet minister to resign, Clare Short, was one of the leading fees rebels. In the end they scraped home with a majority of just five votes.

Blair also faces renewed opposition from the trade

union movement. Following their success in defeating the Labour leadership at party conference, the new leaders of Amicus, GMB, T&G, and Unison have called a mass meeting of party members, MPs and trade unionists to demand the implementation of their policies.

On the industrial front too, for all the none too subtle warnings of TV documentaries on the miners' strike, militancy is far from dead. On the contrary it is on the march with civil servants staging their biggest national strike for 17 years, hot on the heels of the firefighters and the postal workers.

Neither the whips in parliament, nor the whitewash of a judge can save Blair now. New Labour is dead. This is not a matter of personal incompetence or the failures of spin doctors, but is determined by factors beyond their control. All the conditions which led to the triumph of Blair inside the Labour Party are turning into their opposite. The economy now balances perilously atop a mountain of debt. Twenty years of accumulated anger in the workplace is beginning to burst through the surface and has already had a major impact inside the trade unions. All these factors combined with the mass opposition to the war in Iraq, and the perception that Blair and co are liars, no matter what Hutton reports, are already beginning to have an impact inside the Labour Party too. Blair's apparent iron grip has now been broken.

Just as the ruling class are preparing for a new period of struggle, the working class must put its house in order too, by transforming their own organisations, the trade unions and the Labour Party. □

Changing mood in Northumberland

**Steve Brown, Secretary, Wansbeck and Castle
Morpeth TUC. Personal capacity.**

NEW LABOUR controlled Northumberland County Council's record on cuts in services grows worse and continues unabated with the announcement of the closure of three elderly care homes, to save £600,000. This provoked a wave of anger and disgust within the whole community, not least at the loss of 130 jobs, but also at the stress and trauma which will be placed upon the elderly residents, some of whom may not survive the move to the new private care homes which have mysteriously been built ready to accept their new tenants. Statistically speaking, because of the upheaval, up to 30% of elderly residents do not survive the move to another home.

In response to these proposals UNISON, side by side with the GMB and the TGWU, launched a public campaign called SOS (save our services) with the active participation of the staff at the homes, the relatives of the residents, the trade union movement locally and the general population of SE Northumberland as a whole. Campaign organiser Barry Purdy, a shop steward from UNISON and Socialist Appeal supporter said, "We have organised a series of meetings with staff at the three homes and all are adamant that these closures must not happen. They are in a defiant mood and will fight to the bitter end to protect this vulnerable section of society. To these workers it's not just about their jobs but it's about providing a stable and caring environment for the residents. All three homes have a reputation for providing good quality care within the local community and the groundswell of support for our campaign is growing by the day."

The mood among the staff at the homes was such that they have been out on the streets of their towns raising the issue with people, getting signatures for a petition and the

response was.... "Absolutely fantastic!" states Barry. "The public are right behind us. Not one person has refused to sign our petitions, not one person has defended the council's plans, in fact the disgust the staff are feeling is mirrored in the local communities."

A meeting was called on Wednesday 14th of January to begin the campaign proper and up to 250 people attended including staff from the homes, relatives of the residents and local trade unionists. Speakers from the floor attacked the council and someone suggested that they were in the pockets of the private contractors as the council had granted them the rights to build new homes in the county almost in anticipation of the closures taking place, thus providing an immediate source of revenue and profits from those who were to be turfed out of their homes.

Everyone present applauded loudly when a cook from Essendene condemned the private care homes and their drive for profits: "They see things only in terms of how much money they can make from people. The pay in these places is terrible. How can they expect people to care properly if they pay them peanuts! A society is judged by how it treats its old people, so that means or society stinks!" Support also came from many of the local trades unions through the local trades council, all unions expressing their shock and disgust at the decision.

With these proposed closures Northumberland county council has unleashed a beast it hoped it would never see. Not since the miners strike have the people of the area expressed their militancy and determination in such a way. They are quite firmly saying "This far, no further!"

Stop Press

"THROUGH A united and determined struggle on behalf of the staff, relatives and members of the local trade union movement the officials and councillors of Northumberland County Council have been forced to climb down in their attempt to close three elderly care homes and one adult learning centre. A lobby of the council took place by the staff of the homes and armed with placards, petitions and anger the councillors and officials were in no doubt as to the feelings of the people of SE Northumberland. This represents the first victory of its kind in living memory and sends a clear message to the government and the right wing in the Labour movement that working people will no longer tolerate the service slashing mentality of the town hall mandarins and right wing reformists. Council leader Michael Davey has stated, however, that he now places the onus on the two local MP's to put pressure on central government for extra cash, therefore conveniently passing the buck and doubtless the "blame" for any future and inevitable cost cutting exercises which they will have to pursue to balance the books. Barry Purdy, UNISON shop steward and campaign organiser said "This victory is astounding and the staff, on hearing the news, were dancing in the corridors of the homes; residents and relatives were crying with joy and relief. But after the euphoria dies down we have to take stock of what we have achieved and remain vigilant as the council will come back at us with cuts elsewhere. We have to remember that they need to make these cuts to balance the books and we have to be ready for them when they come back at us! But what we have shown is that when workers get organised and take direct action to defend their services there is little that can stop them and nothing they cannot achieve. The Northern region of the TUC needs to look at what the workers have achieved here and learn from it; that if they want these councils to stop cutting our services they have to get organised in the work places. We will be keeping the SOS campaign alive and link up with the Trades Councils on this to widen the fight and involve as many people as we can!"

To be Continued!

Civil servants in biggest strike for 17 years

Stop Press

The action by civil servants in the DWP has been suspended for two-week period while the union discusses an improved offer that has been made by the government. The offer includes an additional 2.95% pay rise, this would be implemented in May, backdated to April, and changes to the Performance Development System grievance process. It also appears that the a similar offer has been made to the 4 other sectors who are taking action, which are the Department of Constitutional affairs, the Home Office, the Prison Service, and the Treasury Solicitors. The offer will be thrashed out with the employers, and discussed within the union before a decision is made on how to proceed with the action.

Rachel Heemskerk
Branch President PCS DWP Essex, Personnel capacity

CIVIL SERVANTS in the PCS (Public and Commercial Services Union) in the Department for Work and Pensions, which covers the Pension Service and Jobcentre Plus, voted to take strike action on 29th and 30th January.

The vote for strike action followed the imposition by the Government of a pay increase of 3.7% during November after 40,000 union members voted to reject the offer.

The 61% vote in favour of strike action shows a firm rebuke of the management's decision to impose the first stage of their offer. Members have seen through the management spin, realising that the offer does not honour the expectation given last year to give a fixed system to shorten the time taken to reach the maximum paid to a grade. Instead the time taken has actually increased.

Management have backed them into a corner by imposing a deal which effectively means anyone on their maximum, which is nearly 50% of the lowest paid staff, will receive no pay rise in real terms.

The pay offer is made up of "bonus payments" and has cost some £22 million in non-consolidated salary payments, money that cannot now be re-directed towards funding a fair basic pay increase.

It is becoming increasingly clear that DWP staff and those in the other departments who have also voted for strike action are being expected to pay for New Labour's war on Iraq which has cost £10 billion more than the Government budgeted for. This will lead

to cost cutting in education, health care and the derogatory pay offer to Civil Servants.

Members of PCS, having voted last year for a left unity Executive on a platform of a return to national pay bargaining, have now voted across five departments to join in a fight on pay and the 29th and 30th January will see the biggest strike within the Civil Service since 1987 with 1000's of striking Government employees. The strike will cause disruption to Courts, benefit payments and Jobcentres.

The industrial action in the DWP coincides with action by workers in other sectors of the Civil Service for a national pay scale, and is the product of the increasingly militant outlook among ordinary members. Anger has built up over years of constant attacks and tinkering with terms conditions, and working practices. This mood has exploded in the past with smaller strikes in various sectors over the last few years and has seen a big swing to the left first in the General Secretary election, and subsequently in the Executive elections.

The left stance of our leaders, combined with the mood of the membership is bringing us into collision with Blair and his agenda for public pay. This action will not be the end of the pay campaign as Gordon Brown has already laid down the challenge by saying, "We beat the FBU and will not back down on Civil Service pay". Members must be prepared for a hard battle ahead in the PCS campaign for a national pay framework across Government Departments in order to ensure fair pay for all. □

ASLEF head office dispute

Brady takes union off the rails?

GMB MEMBERS working at ASLEF head office last month voted by an overwhelming majority to take industrial action after attacks from the union's new rightwing General Secretary.

Shaun Brady has shown his true colours in the unfolding dispute. As soon as Brady got into office he began revising staff contracts and refused to honour existing agreements.

Shortly after the plans for the ballot was announced Brady, in a tactic that could have been borrowed from one of the privatised rail companies, sent a letter to all the staff at the union threatening heavy penalties if the dispute goes ahead. In the letter Brady raised the threat of cutting sick pay, ending flexitime agreements, cancelling annual leave and derecognising the GMB, the union that represents ASLEF employees.

As if that was not enough in an attempt to intimidate the workers he is threatening to use scab labour to break any dispute, up until the 8-week time limit has passed at which time he will use Thatchers anti-union laws [which the union is opposed to] to sack the whole staff and re-advertise the job to new applicants.

Brady told all staff in his letter "After eight weeks and one day, all staff who have participated in the dispute will be dismissed and during the dispute ASLEF will advertise for and employ alternative staff to cover the work."

The first days strike action, that was due to take place on January 19th, was postponed pending talks at the TUC between the GMB and ASLEF officials.

The threat by a trade union leader to use Tory anti-union law against workers is a disgrace and will be condemned by ASLEF members. Brady won the General Secretary election last year, defeating Mick Rix; one of the leading trade union lefts. Brady is a supporter of the Blairite policies in the Labour Party and will no doubt try to enact them industrially in the form of partnership with the rail bosses, and support for private involvement in the railways and London Underground. The victory of Brady was a setback for the members of the union who will now have a fight on their hands if they want a union that will represent their interests. □

T&G elections herald new struggle

by Ramon Samblas, T&G member,
Sout Essex RTC branch, 1/247

AS WE go to press the T&G Executive Committee elections are getting underway and the broad left is putting up a full list of candidates. Ballot papers will be in the hands of our 800,000 members by January 21st and voting closes on the February 6th.

These elections come at a turning point in our movement, following the election of the new left "awkward squad" into key positions of the movement and the rise in industrial action in many important sectors. For years rank and file members and activists have had their heads down in the face of an onslaught from the bosses and their stooges in government.

The T&G has suffered as much as any from these attacks on our union in the form of employer de-recognition which have decimated our membership, the anti union laws which has hampered the members ability to defend themselves; this has led to an erosion of basic rights, conditions, and pay. For a long period the leaders of our union were unwilling to lead an effective struggle in our defence and even used Thatcher's laws as an excuse not to take action. These people were an important base of support for the Blairite interlopers who have hijacked our party with policies of so-called New Realism, in effect class collaboration.

Recent events show that workers patience is becoming decidedly thin and they are beginning to take action to change their situation. It is important that the union engages with this layer of members and begins to take

action to address their problems.

Last year's election of Tony Woodley to the position of General Secretary was a huge step forward for the union. Woodley put up a left programme, for a fighting democratic union, the repeal of the anti union laws, and a fight to reclaim the Labour Party, and it was overwhelmingly supported by the membership.

In the election for Woodley's vacated post of Deputy General Secretary the left suffered a setback with the election of rightwinger Jack Dromey albeit on quite a left-

wing programme. The rightwing in the movement are learning from their defeats in key elections and are cynically putting forward a more left position in their material in order to pick up votes and maintain the status quo.

This makes the EC elections all the more important in deciding the balance of forces. A strong majority for the left will strengthen Woodley's hand and push him to take up the concerns of the members. A majority for the right, or division on the left, will tend to give Dromey a stronger hand in the union and hamper any

progress.

However the mood developing at the moment within the union will tend to push the leadership more into action, but it would be a mistake to rely entirely on a left leadership. The left must be placed on an organised basis within the rank and file of the union. This must be done on the basis of uniting all genuine forces of the left, opening them up to wider and fresher layers of activists and beginning a discussion on the priorities and policies we want followed in the union. In this way we can make sure that we win every election on policies that follow the members wishes and that we have proper control over all our leaders.

Socialist Appeal supporters in the T&G are supporting this slate of left EC candidates because it would represent a major step forward in winning the union back to its fine traditions of democracy and struggle, and place us once more at the heart of the Labour movement, and the heart of reclaiming the Labour Party for the working class.

Members will have up to 4 votes for 1) Territorial Representatives (these are the Regional based representatives). 2) The Trade Group Representatives. 3) The National women's Representative and 4) The National Black and Asian ethnic minority Representative. Some Regions (1,5,6,7 & 8) may have a further vote where there is a further space for reserved positions due to gender balance on committees, that is an additional vote in the Territorial Seat for a Woman nominee. □

BROAD LEFT SLATE FOR T&G EC ELECTIONS

Regional Seats:

Region 1(inner) - John Murphy and Leonie Snell

Region 1 (Outer) - Tom Cashman and Teresa Mackay (additional Women's Seat)

Region 2 Brenda Pleasance

Region 3 Jim Kelly

Region 5 Division A Sam Chapman, Division B Adrian Ross, Women's Seat - Monica Taylor

Region 6 Sue Jopson and Tony woodhouse, Women's Seat Brenda Saunders - (Uncontested)

Region 7 "West" Scott McCabe and "East" Richard White Linlay Park

Region 8 Allyson Daykin Dave Mathieson Women's Seat Pauline Robson

Trade Groups:

Passenger Services - Martin Mayer

RTC - Tony Cooper

Docks and Waterways - Danny Maher

Food Drink and Tobacco - Barrie Roberts

Rural Agriculture & Allied Workers - Ivan Moncton

Vehicle Building and Automotive p John Boughton

Textiles - Gabe Hutton

Power & Engineering - Mick Murphy

Chemical Oil and Rubber - Chris Epsom

Public Services - Dawn Stewart

Administrative, Clerical, Technical & Supervisory - Pat Stuart

Building and Construction - John Sheridan

General Workers - Dave Ritchie

National Women's Representative - Sally Keegan

Fund for Our Rights

by Sylvia Courtnage, NUJ member



Land Rover workers take action

WORKERS AT Land Rover's 11,000 strong Solihull plant in the West Midlands were on strike at the beginning of this month for the first time since 1988. The workforce rejected the employers derisory pay offer of 6.5% split over two years. Members from Amicus, GMB, and T&G voted 82% against, and decided to suspend their earlier agreements on flexible working, implement an overtime ban and begin strike action. The first 24-hour strike took place on the 26th Jan and was solid; only the plant managers crossed the picket line.

Workers are angry that the company's offer does not reflect the sacrifices they have made over the past few years in improving productivity. The workforce earlier agreed to implement a flexible working agreement at the insistence of the managers. But they are beginning to find that the partnership the boss espoused in turning the company round does not extend to partnership in sharing out the increased profits. Workers at Land Rover are amongst the lowest paid in the Ford group in Britain, they earn up to £25 a week less than their colleagues at Jaguar.

The unions and the workforce are hoping that the 24-hour stoppage, and the threat of further action will be enough to force the company to discuss a better deal otherwise action will continue and escalate in the next period. □

THE NUJ ballot to establish a political fund is an important development and opportunity for union members to better protect themselves.

Since the early days of the trade union movement, we have learnt that to protect workers' interests involves more than just campaigning over pay and conditions. In a modern state where legislation reaches into every aspect of working lives, the political arena cannot be ignored.

The state has involved itself in trade union affairs many times and, almost always, acted on the side of the bosses. Where it has interfered, by legislation, it has generally impeded unions in taking action to defend workers' rights.

The history of law on political funds is a case in point.

It originally stemmed from the Osborne judgement in 1906, when judges ruled that a trade union could not use funds to finance Labour candidates or for 'political' purposes.

For a fuller account of what led up to the 1913 Trade Union Act, see "In the Cause of Labour" pp.122-123. Here Rob Sewell explains that, following Osborne, injunctions were issued against 22 unions, forbidding them to continue their political affiliations and thus starving the fledgling Labour Party (which the unions had helped to create) of money.

"It was not until 1913 that the Liberal government, under intense working class pressure, finally acceded to new legislation to redress the balance, but not without stringent qualifications...The law now prevented general union funds being spent on political activities."

Following the defeat of the 1926 General Strike, the government again took advantage of victory to 'put the boot in' by passing more anti-union law in the 1927 Trade Dispute Act. One provision made it necessary to 'opt in' to contribute to the political

fund.

In later years, successive Tory and Labour governments changed the law so that workers had to 'opt in' or 'opt out', according to their leanings.

Upping the stakes

The Thatcher government, with the ruling class' interests at heart, in the year of the miners' strike, passed the 1984 Act which created yet more hurdles for trade unions to overcome (in addition to enforcing 'opting in') by making it necessary for trade unions to run expensive repeat ballots every 10 years to confirm that they still wanted a political fund.

It was also intended as an attack on the Labour Party, although this backfired when the number of unions with political funds increased - although not all of these have affiliated to the Labour Party.

A revealing paper from right-wing think tank, the Institute of Economic Affairs, in 1988, explained their view that Part III of the Trade Union Act 1984 had failed. "It has in practice had a perverse effect by encouraging more unions to establish political funds. Trade unions have seen the balloting procedure introduced by the legislation as conferring a legitimacy upon the concept of a political fund." (Striking out Strikes by C.G. Hanson and G. Mather, p.90)

As to the question of political party affiliation, I believe that we should be looking towards the Labour Party in the longer term. If the trade union movement wants to ensure that the Labour Party really represents our interests, we can only do that from inside the Party.

By deciding to have a political fund we are marking our maturity as a union. The NUJ has already contributed much to the wider movement. May that long continue! □

Amicus: Left gains point the way forward

by Espe Espigares, Amicus Shop Steward

AT THE end of December the results for the Amicus Executive Committee elections were announced, and they herald an important breakthrough for the left with 23 candidates from the broad left, Amicus Unity Gazette, slate being returned.

Although this does not give the left an overall majority on the new lay Executive it is undoubtedly a big step forward starting from a very low level of only a handful of lefts on the executive structures of MSF and AEEU, the constituent unions of Amicus which officially merged into a single union on January 1st 2004.

The leadership of both of these unions and their fore-runners has been dominated by the right-wing for years. The AEEU especially has been a pioneer of class collaboration between the employers and union leaders in the form of 'sweetheart' no-strike deals signed behind closed doors, and in the leadership's refusal to fight against the anti-union laws that have tied one hand behind the members' backs in negotiation and struggle.

Likewise the leadership of both of these unions has fully supported the clique of middle-class, Blairite careerists in the Labour Party; firstly in their attempts to hijack the party, and thereafter in their continuation of Tory policies of attacks and cuts in the interests of the bosses.

The years of corrupt and right-wing leaders who have failed to offer a way out of the problems, but instead have collaborated with the employers to introduce new working practices and wage restraint, explains the low turnout in the

election which was not more than 15% and as low as 6% in some industry sectors. Nonetheless as we have explained many times the current right-wing leadership in the British union movement is the product of the lull in the struggle following the defeats of the 1980s - while the working class had its eyes off the ball these people clawed their way to the top of the movement. This process is now reaching its limits and beginning to turn into its opposite, a growing number of workers are looking for solutions to the problems they face and consequently the right-wing's days are numbered.

Serious blow

The right-wing have tried to keep a lid on this mood - but whatever they do they will not be able to hold it back indefinitely. As with all leaders who do not represent the workers interests, they are destined to be washed away and replaced with more honest and effective leaders.

And while they might breathe a sigh of relief, this election result is a serious blow for the Blairites in the union and the Labour Party and their friends in the company boardrooms. They only just managed to hold their majority, which is far smaller and weaker than it was in the past. They are also confronted with an organised caucus of left EC members. This accounts for the gloom and despondency in the bourgeois press when the result was announced.

The result was a big step forward but it could have been

better if Derek Simpson, after winning the AEEU General Secretary election on the Gazette programme, had launched a serious campaign in conjunction with the Gazette to win a left Amicus EC. This would have raised the profile of the Gazette candidates as well as the election in general and meant a higher turnout that would have benefited our candidates.

But instead by engaging in a regional tour pushing a consensus slate of left and right-wingers, and then maintaining an outward position of impartiality during the election, even taking on the role of returning officer, it looked like the result was of little consequence to him. This came at a time when he should have been at the forefront of the Gazette election campaign.

And they are not out of the woods yet. There is a widespread perception among the activists that these elections were manipulated, even rigged. Activists involved in the campaign are investigating these allegations. In spite of the fact that the right-wing hardly campaigned they defeated most of the strong left candidates, including prominent *Socialist Appeal* supporters, while many of those lefts who were standing in difficult seats won, and often with a decent majority. A challenge of the London result has been made, and a number of other challenges to the results are now being considered based on the irregularities in the vote. A few successful challenges would tip the balance of forces on the EC in favour of the left.

The balance of forces on

the new EC as it stands could put us into a dangerous position. With only a few seats standing between us and a majority on the EC some on the left might be tempted into making deals and subordinating their ideas and principles in order to achieve short-term goals. Down this road lies disaster. Why compromise a winning programme?

Most importantly we must keep a sense of perspective. The shift in the balance of forces to the left is the product of a profound discontent among the membership, which only mirrors the broader processes taking place throughout society as a whole. This is not going to go away; in the hands of the right-wing the union will not offer any alternative to the problems the members face but only more of the same.

Now is the time for the left to reinforce and develop the basic ideas. We must consolidate our forces on the EC and build the Gazette into a fighting campaigning body with a life outside election campaigns, one that can inspire and win the membership to socialist ideas.

In this way we can put our ideas across on the EC and to the wider membership on the shopfloor at one and the same time. This will allow us to put enormous pressure on the leadership to take up the struggle for our interests, and begin building and preparing the membership to take the union fully back into its hands. Both those that won and those that lost will redouble their efforts over the next period ready to contest the EC elections in three years time. □

Blair U-turn on Red Ken

by Steve Jones

THE DECISION to readmit London Mayor Ken Livingstone back into the Labour Party has come as no surprise to anybody. For months the spin doctors had been hard at work preparing the ground, silencing the doubters and generally ensuring that the readmission would go smoothly. On the day Labour's ruling body, the NEC, calmly met and after some discussion did what their master bid, like the Roman Senates of old, and pushed through the re-admission. Yet the rules are clear - Ken had another year to go before he could be reconsidered for reinstatement of his party membership. More to the point he was someone who had been soundly rubbished by the very people at the top of the party who were now seeking to bring him back - not least by Mr no-reverse-gear himself, Tony Blair.

Of course this decision rights a wrong which was committed four years ago. In the lead up to the first election for London Mayor, Ken Livingstone was the clear choice of the London Labour movement to be Labour's candidate. Yet the selection process was rigged by the Blairites in the party machine to keep him out and stick someone else in. As a result Livingstone stood as an independent and gained the support of most of the party rank and file who in effect treated him as the de-facto Labour candidate, winning the election by a clear majority. The actual Labour candidate, Frank Dobson, did very badly despite his high profile as a former government minister.

Four years down the road with the next election for London Mayor due in June,

things have been looking worse for Labour not better. All the polls have been predicting that Labour's candidate this time, Nicky Gavron, would have done even worse than Dobson. Things have been looking equally bad for Labour's slate in the elections for the London assembly. This prediction was not only a reflection of Livingstone's popularity as favourite to be re-elected, it was also a direct consequence of the declining popularity of the New Labour government and Blair himself.

Labour lost loads of seats in the last set of council elections in London and more recently had a disastrous result in the Brent East parliamentary by-election, losing to the Lib-Dems. Opposition to the war in Iraq, to student fees, to council tax rises, to ongoing privatisation, to PPP and the Underground, foundation hospitals, etc. etc. All this has eroded Labour's core support both in the capital and elsewhere. The old mantra about Blair being a winner has well and truly fallen from grace.

Now with Blair under

attack from all sides, like Custer at Little Big Horn, the prospect of another bad result come the London Assembly and Mayoral elections in June (not forgetting the European ones taking place at the same time) has become a problem he could do without. So what better to shore up the Labour turnout than by bringing Livingstone back into the fold. Hence the U-turn. The original selected candidate has 'decided' to withdraw and the members are now voting on whether Livingstone should be the new candidate for Labour - no one else is on the ballot paper.

All party members should welcome Livingstone's readmission to the party. Indeed all those socialists who have been expelled from the party over the last period should be allowed back, including George Galloway who was thrown out on the flimsiest of excuses, a travesty of justice. This should ensure that come the elections in June party members are not boycotting the official Labour campaign as they did last time. But we should be clear. Even with

'Red Ken' back in the driving seat, many in the party rank and file may still not be sufficiently enthused, given the government's unpopularity - not least among party members themselves - to actually go out and campaign. Many voters may still not go and vote Labour, or possibly just vote for Livingstone, but not for Labour in the other elections.

Much will depend on the actual programme Labour fights the election on in London. Much was made about Livingstone having to declare his loyalty to the election programme without anyone outlining what that programme should be. The London Labour Party at its last regional conference at the end of 2002 voted through a whole series of left wing resolutions. Are we going to have a programme based on these or something foisted on us from above? The process used to draw up Labour's programme for London must reflect socialist ideas, rooted in the struggle of working people, if there is to be any real hope of reversing the electoral decline we have seen over the last few years. Simply just relying on Good Old Ken to do the trick in getting the votes in will not be enough. And what is true for London is equally true for the rest of the country. A third Labour victory at the next general election is no longer the certainty many once thought it was. Only through a socialist programme alongside a fighting leadership, rather than the pro-big business bunch we have at present, can a Labour victory be assured and the hopes of the Tories and the rest be ground to dust. □



Top-Up Fees - New Labour Attacks Students

by Mick Brooks

ONCE AGAIN Tony Blair and the Labour Cabinet are prepared to take on the wider labour movement and its own natural supporters in imposing the unpopular policy of top-up university fees.

At present students pay a flat rate fee of £1,125 up front to whichever university they attend. Grants were finally abolished in 1998. Some institutions offer bursaries, but this is means tested and uncertain. Apart from that, you're on your own when it comes to paying your way for higher education.

The government is proposing to allow fees to be topped up by the university you attend up to a maximum of £3,000 (for the time being - the pressure is on that eventually they will go through the roof). It is predicted that this will introduce a two tier system in higher education (HE), with 'good' universities charging more than 'bad' ones.

The government argues:

● Higher education is in crisis. This is true. A figure of £10 billion needed to repair the damage is being bandied about. We'll look at why this is so a little later.

● We need more graduates. The government has a target of half of all school leavers ending up with degrees. They argue that this will be a benefit for the country as a whole - a 'skills based' economy will grow faster. This is not so obvious. Surveys by the World Bank have suggested that countries with better education systems grow faster, but is there a causal connection? Does education cause economic growth? If so, how?

Anyway, if we're all going to be better off in an economy with more graduates, shouldn't we all help out to get us there? Shouldn't the

increase in HE provision be paid for out of general taxation?

● Since graduates benefit financially from getting a degree, they should pay for the privilege.

Now, first, not all degrees mean you can earn more for the rest of your life. What do we do about students with degrees in Anglo-Saxon Studies who won't earn any more than non-graduates as a result of their studies?

We suspect the government wants such economically useless qualifications to disappear. The government seems to have got their educational philosophy from the capitalist philistine Gradgrind in Dickens' novel 'Hard Times'. "Now, what I want is, Facts. Teach these boys and girls nothing but Facts. Facts alone are wanted in life... Stick to Facts, sir!" Compare this with Charles Clarke, the Education (?) Secretary, "Education for its own sake is a bit dodgy."

And where does that leave a degree in fine art - is it a useless frippery or integral to design in an economy competing at the cutting edge of high value-added production?

Loss of pay

Graduates who go into many public sector jobs such as teaching may never be highly paid. It is ironic that whilst many university vice chancellors are enthusiastically backing the government's arguments for top up fees, they have been forced to acknowledge that salaries of lecturers and other staff who are required to have degrees have fallen behind year after year. And they are now proposing a new pay structure for these staff which will actually mean further losses of

pay in the future.

Unfortunately specific groups of graduates are already disadvantaged in the employment market. Women who take career breaks to raise a family are going to think twice about going to university. Statistically, graduates from ethnic minority backgrounds are more likely to be unemployed or underemployed after graduating.

Now there is one benefit of the proposed top-up fees. You only pay back after you've graduated. But you have a duty to cough up as soon as you've hit earnings of £15,000 a year. That is a poverty wage. It's the sort of money a school caretaker gets.

Given that we have fees for degrees anyway, the only effect of top-up fees will be to act as a disincentive for working class students to apply for 'good' (elite) institutions. We'll deal later with the argument that there are good universities and bad ones. What is true is that entrance to elite institutions is dominated by middle and upper class students. Mixing together in these places helps them network and bond together like a masonic order to get on better in life after education.

The attitude of past generations of Labour politicians has been that they want to help working class students storm these bastions of privilege. Former Labour leader Neil Kinnock was proud of the fact that he was the first Kinnock to go to university. Though Tony Blair comes from a massively privileged background, many in the present government come from a similar generation as Kinnock. They made it - now it seems they are determined to pull up the drawbridge against later intakes!

People like Neil Kinnock could go to university because, first,

access to higher education was expanded massively with public funds. Secondly government funds were made available on a means tested basis for grants. Working class students could just about make do thirty years ago on the full grant. But life wasn't a bowl of cherries. Also fees were paid for out of the public purse. Yet it was Labour that finally abolished grants in favour of student loans after the Dearing Report in 1998 (Dearing recommended the opposite).

The government is proposing to reintroduce grants but at a level so low it cannot possibly attract working class students into HE.

They are also suggesting means testing on the new higher fees. They say one third of the poorest students won't have to pay.

With the flat rate fees and loans, students already leave university up to their ears in debt. Top-up fees will act as a further disincentive to go for a degree. In particular the elite institutions will be ruled out for working class people.

The hard educational evidence also shows that working class students do worse on courses they do go in for. This is not because they're thick, as the government seems to think, but because they have to put in more hours getting jobs to make ends meet, and so spend less time studying. Also they're more likely to drop out. The additional financial pressures on working class students means universities like London Metropolitan and East London with the highest intake from poor backgrounds also have the biggest dropout rates.

What conceivable justification does Tony Blair have for the blatantly elitist policy of top-up fees? Educationalists argue that inequalities are already set

up by the time children are five years old. Throughout the school years the gap between the classes becomes an unbridgeable gulf in educational attainment. So university is really a middle class thing. They then argue demagogically, 'why should working class people pay taxes for middle class people to widen the difference still further by going to university? Why should we pay for them to acquire yet more privileges?' As Nick Barr, a Blair guru on education, argues - it's like subsidising champagne.

Education for all

Now this argument just gives up on the education system as a potential liberating force for working people. The traditional labour movement case was for higher education to be open for all. Marxists have consistently argued that educational

inequalities are a reflection of the deeper inequalities in society. Education, on its own, cannot be used as a form of social engineering to eliminate class differences.

The working class cannot be fully emancipated without a social revolution. But that doesn't mean we just give up on education. After all, working class youth spend years of their lives in the system. We want value for money for them, and for us! If New Labour is arguing that inequalities are set by the age of five, where is the massive 'front loaded' programme of pre-school education aimed at eliminating these inequalities at root?

What is education for? Traditional social democrats have argued for using education policies to reduce inequalities. They often put this forward as an alternative to social ownership of the means of production. The critics' of progressive educa-

tion policies respond that this means levelling down by getting rid of private schools, grammar schools and other 'centres of excellence'. This is, of course, a profoundly elitist argument which sentences working class kids to the status of 'hewers of wood and drawers of water' from birth.

The Thatcherite argument, continued by Blair in the case for top-up fees, is that people go into education to get the best for themselves. Therefore they should pay. In fact, if it is not paid for by the state, education is generally paid for by the parents.

Marxists believe that education ought to be about setting free young people's potentials. This is an egalitarian project in the profoundest sense - equality doesn't mean making everyone the same. But liberating talents hidden in working class children is a necessary and important part of working class emancipation.

The government's proposals are supposed to relieve the financial crisis of the universities. This crisis is part of the malign heritage of the Tories. During the 1990s there was a massive increase in HE provision. Quite often this was literally a way of sweeping under the carpet their dreadful legacy of mass unemployment. Tuck 'em away in schools! Keep 'em off the dole queue figures! This expansion of higher education was achieved at no expense to the Treasury. Costs per student in HE collapsed from £7,500 per head in 1989 to £4,800 now. Student/staff ratios ballooned, lecture theatres were packed to overcapacity and students were told to forget about library resources and do all their research on the internet.

Top-up fees were specifically rejected in Labour's



Tuition fees

2001 election manifesto. Now they say they are so urgent they have to be legislated for immediately. This will increase the suspicion and contempt members of the public have for politicians. Blair's proposals for top-up fees were triggered by meetings with University vice chancellors, who explained the pickle they were in. He also acted under the influence of his guru Roy Jenkins, who had left the Labour Party in 1981 to found the Social Democratic Party and keep the Tories in power for more than a decade.

Extra money?

But get this. Top-up fees won't actually raise much money for HE! The Institute of Fiscal Studies reckons it will inject just £500 million. (Remember - the sector needs £10 billion) And because students don't have to start paying till they leave to go to work, no money will be available to deal with the present crisis. New Labour is trying to sell the policy of top-up fees to its back bench critics with concessions on working class access to university. They propose an Office of Fair Access (already labeled OffToff, though not yet set up) to pressure the elite institutions to take more working class students.

Labour MP Peter Bradley, a critic of the top-up scheme, has tried to work out what effect it'll have on different universities. Oxford only has 10% of students from lower income backgrounds. The other 90% (or rather their parents) will have no problem paying higher fees. So Oxford would be better off from the introduction of top-up fees. Even if Labour insists they double their intake of poor students as part of the deal, they'll still be coining it in from higher fees. The University of Wolverhampton, on the other hand already takes in 75% of its students from poor backgrounds. They won't be able to put up fees like Oxford. And three quarters of their students will need to be subsidised through bursaries. So rich institutions will get richer and poor ones poorer. Moreover the government proposes to switch research funding towards the success stories

What this is really all about is creating a market - or rather a fantasy market - in higher education. Some university administrators are already referring to this as 'privatisation'. Just like foundation hospitals the 'first class' universities will have the deep pockets to outbid the others for staff such as star academics and researchers and deepen the divide between the institutions.

This is what Blair's 'reforms' are really all about. He wants to introduce the 'discipline of the market' into higher education. Since it apparently costs about £4,000 a year to teach a course, universities that run courses where the students can't earn enough to pay back 'realistic fees' will have to close them. These are contemptuously called 'nobby courses' by educationalists. All higher education will be slewed towards a money-making career. HE institutions will have to orient their education towards the capitalist marketplace. The more money they make, the more they can keep.

Charging top-up fees is alleged to make universities 'efficient'. How? Will Oxford and Cambridge start to feel the pinch and increase their productivity - whatever that means in this connection? The rich will pay whatever it takes to get their offspring to Oxbridge, knowing it guarantees them a life of privilege. In their case being bombarded with higher fees just make for an even more cosseted, sheltered existence beneath their dreaming spires.

Forward to the past!

New Labour is taking us to somewhere we've been to before. We're going forward to the past! In the bad old days only the rich went to university (apart from a handful of scholarship pupils). The rest of us went straight from school to work. The lucky ones got an apprenticeship - providing a practical technical skill. As capitalist production advanced, the bosses screamed for the state to fill the gap with theoretical and practical training for a layer of skilled workers to grapple with a constantly changing technology at work. Thus began the poly-

technics. HE was officially recognised as a two tier system - university for the upper and middle classes, poly for bright working class youth

In the 1990s the Tories, who were using HE policy to massage the unemployment figures, declared the polys to be new universities. All these institutions could issue their own degrees. Now they are to be relegated from the premier league once again through the remorseless grinding of market forces.

How should education be funded so as to make it available to all? If it really is the case that universities make rich people richer, then they should pay. They can certainly afford it. They should pay as rich people, not as graduates. Raising the top rate of income tax on those earning more than £100,000 a year to 50% (we are talking about just 1% of the workforce) would generate revenues of more than £4.5 billion a year. Problem sorted! That is what the National Union of Students is arguing for.

Socialist Appeal puts the argument for socialism. It has to be said that in theory we could have a fairer higher education system with access for working class children without social revolution. It should be in capitalism's interests to tap into and exploit everyone's abilities. So a fairer system would also be more efficient.

Actually capitalism stifles the initiative of the vast majority, the working class. And all the pressure on the state is to stitch up universities as a middle class monopoly privilege. Only 15% of poor children go to university compared with 81% who have professional parents. There has been a massive expansion of HE since the Robbins Report of 1963 recognised that was what modern capitalism needed. Though the number of working class kids going into higher education has gone up, the proportion hasn't changed in forty years. The pressures generated by a class divided society to replicate itself through the education system are intense. So let's fight top-up fees and argue the educational case for socialism. □

Blair Avoids Defeat... For Now

by Rob Lyon



TEFLON Tony, otherwise known as the 'Houdini of British politics' has narrowly escaped a major political defeat yet again. It is however fair to say that his protective layer of teflon may be wearing off, as the Labour majority in parliament was reduced to just 5, down from the on-paper majority of 161. To reduce a majority of 161 to just 5 is the absolute height of incompetence. The bill on tuition top-up fees passed its second reading by a vote of 316 to 311, and the Labour Party's parliamentary group is looking seriously beleaguered after an intense few days of political haggling and back-room swindles.

The Rebellion Fails

As Tuesday's vote was looming, it looked as if Tony Blair was about 20-30 votes shy of the necessary votes to pass the bill. The day began with government supporters telling rebel MPs that they had to choose between Tony Blair or Michael Howard. The whips from both sides were sent out on last minute missions aggressively trying to win support. Some rebels were commenting that the tactics used by government whips 'was an attempt to intimidate us'.

Although Blair and company survived the vote, the serious divisions in the Labour Party point to problems in the future. Tories commented on the 'utter humiliation' of a government that had suffered the biggest revolt on a three-line whip in over 50 years. The Liberal-Democrat spokesman on education denounced the

'shabby charade' that saw a Labour government support 'a Thatcherite policy in direct opposition to what they said during the general election'. In the end 72 Labour MPs voted against the bill, with 19 abstaining. Blair's victory literally came down to the 11th hour. At 6.15 a party whip received a note saying that the government was still down by 3. At 6.45 another note claimed 'the hunt goes on'. Within the last half hour, 2 or 3 backbenchers fell in to line to give Blair his narrow victory.

This was Blair's third major rebellion in under a year. Blair also suffered a revolt on the war in Iraq, and on the question of foundation hospitals where 62 Labour MPs voted against the government.

Tory co-chairman Liam Fox commented that 'Blair reigns, but Brown rules.' Many are saying that Gordon Brown's display of backroom muscle may give him his long-awaited shot at the premiership. His supporters in the party are crediting him with saving the government, making his case for leader of the Labour Party stronger. Apparently the Brownite team worked all day to swing some 20-30 rebel votes to the side of the government. In a perhaps not-surprising move, Nick Brown, the figurehead of the fees rebellion, announced Tuesday morning that he would support the government bill, saying that 'the concessions that the government made are good enough for me'. Well, the concessions may have been good enough for him, a Member of Parliament, but what about all the students

who had faith in him and the rebels and for whom top-up fees will not be good? Mr. Brown's political somersault did not go unnoticed and is not without explanation. Blairite supporters commented that 'the concessions are meaningless, which was pretty clear when Nick Brown struggled to explain himself in the chamber'. It is clear that Nick Brown's cause is Gordon Brown's premiership, and not halting top-up fees. There was also another reason for the Browns to 'save the government.' As a Blairite supporter commented '(Gordon) didn't want Tony to lose the vote and for his camp to be seen as old Labour'.

What Are Students Left With?

After Nick Brown announced that he was switching sides, the NUS announced that they expected the bill to pass its second reading. NUS president Mandy Telford claimed that she was still hopeful, but disappointed that Nick Brown, the leader of the rebellion on top-up fees had jumped sides.

In the end it is students who lost yesterday, as top-up fees will only mean a two-tier post-secondary education system, less accessibility for students and workers to attend university, and a skyrocketing amount of debt for those that do actually attend university.

Top-up fees were rejected in Labour's 2001 election manifesto. Now Labour lead-

ers and University Chancellors have joined in a chorus claiming they are so urgent that the bill on top-up fees must be immediately legislated. What this is really about is creating a market in universities and education. Some university chancellors are already talking about the 'privatisation' of the universities.

The divisions in the parliamentary Labour Party are unfortunately still based on back-room politics and not on issues. The division is not between old and new Labour, but divisions amongst right-wing careerists and bureaucrats jockeying for power, prestige and positions. This vote and the divisions in the Labour Party should serve as a warning to the working class - Labour MPs sat with long faces, looking beleaguered, while Tory MPs sat with the largest smiles on their faces in years. It is entirely possible that if Labour continues down this road, that the Tories could carry the day in the next general election.

Blair's victory in parliament has not settled this matter. Top-up fees can still be defeated. The NUS must immediately organise action including a mass demonstration as well as appealing for support from the TUC. The NUS must begin organising school students who are most hard-hit by this attack. A mass movement can still defeat this bill even if some Labour rebels don't have the backbone to do so. □

The Civil Contingencies Bill - a threat to the labour movement?

THE CIVIL Contingencies Bill which is to come before the present session of Parliament has as yet attracted little attention except from civil rights campaigners. However its implications need to be taken seriously by the trades union movement.

The government is using the present war on terror and national security fears to introduce this legislation which is allegedly to update previous emergency legislation, but in reality goes far further in giving the government of the day full powers and also has a wider definition of emergency.

The legislation which this Bill is to replace is the Emergency Powers Act. Introduced in 1920 to replace the 1914 Defence of the Realm Act. The 1920 Emergency Powers Act was intended for use in peacetime as well as war. In 1920 it was introduced by the government of the day to be used in times of industrial unrest. In the aftermath of World War 1 there was widespread industrial turmoil in Britain as all the major sections of the working class - the miners, transport workers and railway workers took strike action. Fearing growing militancy the government introduced legislation, supposedly to secure vital supplies. The Act was used in the 1926 General Strike when members of the central committee of the Communist Party of Great Britain were arrested for the duration of the strike and held without trial. It has been put into practice

By Barbara Humphries



12 times in its 80 years history. On these occasions it has been used against the labour movement. The last time it was used was during the 1974 miners strike, when Ted Heath declared a state of emergency and put the whole country on a three day week. Of course it did cost him the election some weeks later. The government refusing to settle the miners' pay claim called an election on the issue of who runs the country - the government or the trades union movement. The Tory Government led by Ted Heath was defeated and Labour was narrowly elected.

Civil rights critics of the Civil Contingencies Bill say that it is more than an attempt to update existing

legislation. For instance in its definition of an emergency. The 1920 Act defined an emergency as a situation which interferes 'with the supply and distribution of food, water, fuel or light or with the means of locomotion to deprive the community or any substantial part of the community of the essentials of life'. This definition has been broadened in the draft Bill. An emergency is now defined as a situation which presents a serious threat to the welfare of all or part of the population, to the environment of the country, to the political, administrative or economic stability of Britain (or part of it) and to its security. A threat to political or economic stability is then defined as possible disrupt-

tion to the activities of government, public functions, the activities of banks and other financial institutions. A threat to the welfare of the population could include disruption of energy supplies, transport, and education. This should set alarm bells ringing! Government spokesmen say that this would not be used to prevent strikes. However once on the books there would be no guarantees about the future use of legislation. Some of the Tories wanted troops to be used to move fire engines during the course of the fire-fighters dispute last year. Some have also wanted strikes in public services to be outlawed. Once in place this legislation could be invoked by the government of the day without any other legislation having to be passed. Although this Bill is being introduced in the context of the war against terror and 9/11 aftermath, its potential use is very much wider. Home Secretary, David Blunkett has already hinted that it could be used in civil disputes, such as floods and the fuel protests of 2000.

Powers contained in the Bill would allow the government to declare a state of emergency without any reference to Parliament. These powers could be in force for a week before they were ratified by Parliament. The regulations would include powers to ban freedom of movement, prohibit people assembling together and to confiscate or destroy property without

compensation.

Demonstrations against a government's foreign policy, such as the two million strong anti war demonstration, or the demonstrations against the visit of President Bush last year could be banned under these powers. Organizations legitimately campaigning against government policy could have their property seized. At a time when civil rights were under attack all endeavours to defend them would be ruled as illegal. One critic of the bill has said that the government could invoke these emergency powers merely to keep itself in power! The original Bill would have revoked the Human Rights Act and courts would not have been able to consider human rights abuses during the state of emergency. This has now been removed from the Bill during its committee stage.

Why is the government trying to update emergency legislation now? The 1920 Emergency Powers Act saw the country through a world war and the IRA campaign in the 1970s. In addition to that the present government has introduced the Anti-Terrorism Crime and Security Act of 2001 which has brought in detention without trial and suspects with foreign (especially with Muslim or Arab connections?) can find themselves locked up in Belmarsh Prison.

Much of the pressure has come from US government, for other governments in the so-called war against terror to follow its own actions. In the US the Patriot Act was passed just 45 days after 9/11 and has already been targeted by groups such as the American Civil Liberties Union for its

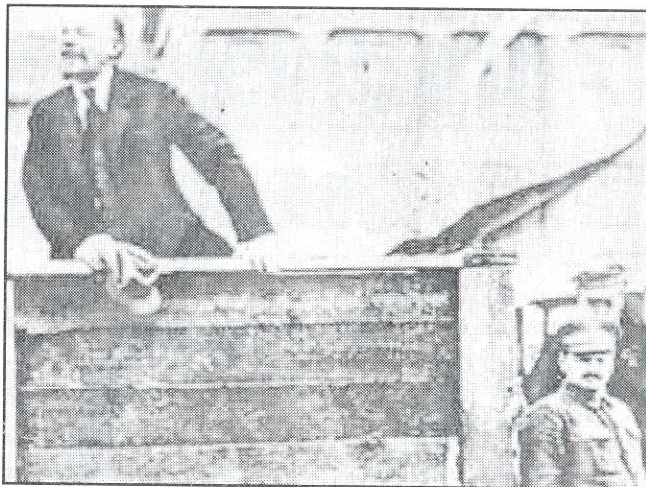


attacks on the rights contained in the American constitution. It has given the FBI carte blanche powers to spy on anti-war organizations (in case any of their members are terrorists). Not since the days when Hoover spied on Martin Luther King has the FBI been involved in so much secret surveillance. Opposition to the government has been criminalized. Many of the local state governments in the US have passed resolutions condemning this piece of Federal government legislation including Vermont, Alaska and Hawaii. There have been cases of arrests of individuals for being seen looking at a foreign web site in a library. The FBI has demanded access to library records in hundreds of cases. If the librarian protests or reports this, then they themselves face arrest! Having to pass on information such as this would be in serious breach of the Data Protection Act in the UK. Hence the concern of civil rights organizations such as Liberty about the creeping erosion of human rights gains which have been made over the years by similar legislation which is proposed in the UK. The rights of the individual could be undermined by the war against terror. Now immigrants in the US are threat-

ened with losing their citizenship. Michael Moore in his book *Dude - where's my country* cites the case of a Lebanese woman with a parking fine who was asked if she had any connections with a terrorist organization when she came to court. This she said is not what she expected in the land of the free!

In wartime governments have traditionally curtailed the freedom of their own people in the name of protecting them and with the aim of silencing opposition to their warmongering policies. Both the last two world wars saw curtailment of the rights of the individual including the rights of the working class to defend its living standards. Class struggle was put on hold during two world wars officially. In both instances Labour joined in a coalition government with the Tories and there was an electoral pact not to contest by-elections. This was only challenged by minority parties. But in real life the class struggle went on. There were strikes against government policy, for wage increases and against profiting during these wars. Bush and Blair are using the war on terror to attempt to silence opposition from their own population. But opposition to their policies will continue as they are seen to fail. The Civil Contingencies Bill is but one of the measures that the state can use against its opponents, be they anti-war protesters or trades unionists. However we should be aware of its contents and the possible ways that it can be used against the labour movement and the anti-war movement. □

VLADIMIR ILYICH LENIN



80th Anniversary of his death The relevance of his ideas today

By Rob Sewell

EIGHTY YEARS ago, on 21st January 1924, Vladimir Ilyich Ulyanov, the leader of the Russian Soviet state and Communist International died after a prolonged illness. He was fifty-three years of age. His life covers years of profound upheaval, crisis and transformation - the last quarter of the nineteenth century and the first quarter of the twentieth century - crowned by the First World War and the Russian Revolution of 1917. Known simply as Lenin, a pseudonym from his illegal underground work, he was without doubt the greatest revolutionary of his time, a giant of a man, whose actions changed the course of history in the 20th Century.

The following is not a detailed account of Lenin's life; as such an enterprise would fill a large volume and more. Readers are invited to read or reread Alan Woods' book on *Bolshevism* and Ted Grant's book on Russia for a more detailed account. On this anniversary of his death, the intention of this piece is to briefly summarise the ideas and historical role of this great revolutionary Marxist. As such, it is a defence of Lenin - the revolutionary - against all the attacks and slanders that have poured down upon his name like a Niagara. This is no simple eulogy of a revolutionary hero; but has value only in so far as it assists us in understanding the real Lenin, his revolutionary contribution, as well as the

tasks that lie before us in this present epoch of revolution and counter-revolution. Above all, its intention is to draw inspiration and knowledge for today's battles.

In reference to Marx, Lenin warned against those who, after his death, would blunt his revolutionary message: "During the lifetime of great revolutionaries, the oppressing classes have invariably meted out to them relentless persecution, and received their teaching with the most savage hostility, most furious hatred, and a ruthless campaign of lies and slanders. After their death, however, attempts are usually made to turn them into harmless saints, canonising them, as it were, and investing their name with a certain halo by the way of 'consolation' to the oppressed classes, and with the object of duping them; while at the same time emasculating and vulgarising the real essence of their revolutionary theories and blunting their revolutionary edge." (Lenin, *The State and Revolution*).

Apologists

This was certainly the case with Lenin, whose ideas in the hands of the Stalinist reaction were cynically twisted to justify every counter-revolutionary policy of the Soviet bureaucracy. Much to the delight of the world bourgeoisie, the apologists of

Stalinism shamefully mutilated the revolutionary essence of Lenin, turning it into its very opposite, in order to cover up their crimes against the working class. Thus bourgeois historians have always tried to falsely equate Stalinism with Leninism or Communism, in order to blacken the name of Lenin.

Vladimir Ilyich Lenin was born on the 10th April 1870, at Simbirsk on the Volga. He was the third of six children born into a well-to-do family. At this time, tsarist Russia was going through enormous transformations. The law of uneven and combined development revealed itself in its most glaring fashion as semi-feudal Russia copied the most advanced capitalist models already well established in Britain, Germany and France. In 1861 serfdom was abolished and new western influences were beginning to cause ferment within the Russian intelligentsia, long stifled by tsarist oppression. The Ulyanov family was caught up in this swirling current and was carried along in its wake. This was the period of the *Narodnaya Volya* or People's Will, a revolutionary idealist movement that sought to overthrow tsarism by individual terrorism. In 1881, they eventually succeeded in assassinating tsar Alexander II, the very success of which was to undermine the People's Will in the wave of savage oppression that ensued.

Lenin's eldest brother, Alexander, joined the Narodnaya Volya and directly participated in the attempted assassination of tsar Alexander III. He was caught and hanged with four others in May 1887. This personal tragedy had a major impact on the young Lenin, then aged seventeen. In the autumn of that year, he entered university at Kazan to study law. Shortly afterwards he was expelled for joining a student protest against the authorities, thus marking the beginning of his revolutionary life.

Although Lenin had sympathies with his brother's views, he decided instead to join a Marxist circle in Kazan, where he studied *Das Kapital* and *Anti-Duhring*, among other things.

"Thanks to the emigration forced by the tsar, revolutionary Russia, in the second half of the nineteenth century, came into possession of rich international connections, and of an excellent grasp of the forms and theories of the revolutionary movement such as no other country had", wrote Lenin. (Lenin, *Left-Wing Communism*).

Lenin was by no means a fully-fledged Marxist at this time. His commitment to Marxism did not come easily. Not until 1891, after an intensive and detailed study of Marxist literature, did he become a convinced Marxist, and dedicated himself to the socialist revolution. He adopted a new vocation, the centre of his life, subordinating everything to this aim. He separated himself from his privileged background and came over wholeheartedly to the standpoint of the proletariat. This experience in the early revolutionary movement changed Lenin's entire life.

The new revolutionary ideas of Marxism confronted a whole series of confused tendencies of the surviving Narodniks (later to become the Social Revolutionaries) who idealised the peasantry, denied the necessity of Russian capitalist development and saw the village commune as the basis for socialism. As was seen, the Narodniks justified individual terrorism as a means of eradicating oppression. In contrast, Marxism saw the inevitable development of capitalism in Russia and with it the growth of its gravedigger in the form of the working class. As opposed to individual terror, the Marxists advanced the class struggle as the only revolutionary weapon that could overthrow the autocracy and bring about the socialist revolution.

"Capitalism is going its way," wrote Plekhanov, the father of Russian Marxism, "it is ousting independent producers from their shaky positions and creating an army of workers in Russia by the same tested method as it has already practised 'in the West'." However, even the Marxists were divided, with the appearance of a non-revolutionary legalistic type (Legal Marxism) led by Struve, which embraced Marx's economic analysis of capitalism but drew back from its revolutionary conclusions.

Plekhanov

George Plekhanov, regarded as the founder of Russian Marxism, was originally an active member of the Narodniks. Disillusioned with the movement, he made contact with Frederick Engels and from then on became a convinced Marxist. Plekhanov founded the first Russian Marxist organisation - the Emancipation of Labour Group - in Geneva in 1883, and conducted a struggle not only against the Narodniks, but Bernstein's revisionism, and so-called "legal" Marxism, producing in the process many Marxist classics, especially on philosophy.

Lenin also threw himself into this struggle. Within Russia by 1895, his consistent work had borne fruit in the creation of the Union for the Struggle and Emancipation of the Working Class, a precursor of the Russian Social Democratic Labour Party. However, he was arrested by the authorities and after a year's imprisonment was exiled to Siberia for a further three years. It was under these underground conditions that he completed his classic work, *The*

Development of Capitalism in Russia. Krupskaya, who had been a key political cadre in the Petersburg organisation, soon joined him in exile. From this time onwards, they worked closely together as comrades and companions until Lenin's death in 1924. "On the whole", recalled Krupskaya, "our exile was not so bad. Those were years of serious study."

By 1898 the Russian Social Democratic Labour Party was formed at its first congress in Minsk; but Lenin was still in exile. In any case, it was a short-lived affair as the congress was raided and nearly all its participants arrested.

At this time an opportunist revisionist tendency emerged within the Second International around the figure of Eduard Bernstein, a German Social Democrat. He attempted to revise Marxism, saying its theories were out of date and needed adapting to the new situation. Although Bernstein was defeated politically, this revisionist current arose within Russia under the guise of "Economism". This trend argued that politics was above the heads of the workers and the Social Democratic movement needed to concentrate on economic, day-to-day demands instead. Such an approach simply abandoned the political field to the rising bourgeoisie in their fight with the autocracy, leaving the working class to trail behind in its wake.

Lenin enthusiastically took up the struggle against "Economism", writing a series of articles that were finally published as a book in 1902 under the name of *What is to be Done?* This book however was not simply an argument against the "Economists", but was used by Lenin to develop his ideas on party organisation, especially the need to build a party based upon professional revolutionaries with an all-Russian central newspaper "as a collective agitator and organiser." The Russian Social Democratic Party was to be a disciplined party based upon democratic centralism, and modelled in reality on the German SPD. While the book contained a flaw about the working class only being able to achieve trade union consciousness, which was a mistake of Kautsky (and later repudiated by Lenin), it served to educate a whole generation of party activists and prepared the ground for the building of the Russian Social Democracy.

In particular Lenin laid heavy stress on the need for theory within



the party. "Without revolutionary theory there can be no revolutionary movement", stated Lenin. He goes on to quote Engels concerning this point: "Let us quote what Engels said in 1874 concerning the significance of theory in the Social-Democratic movement. Engels recognises, not two forms of the great struggle of Social-Democracy (political and economic), as is the fashion among us, but three, placing the theoretical struggle on a par with the first two..."

"The German workers have two important advantages over those of the rest of Europe. First, they belong to the most theoretical people of Europe; and they have retained that sense of theory which the so-called 'educated' classes of Germany have almost completely lost. Without German philosophy, which preceded it, particularly of Hegel, German scientific socialism - the only scientific socialism that has ever existed - would never have come into being. Without a sense of theory among the workers, this scientific socialism would never have entered their flesh and blood as much as is the case. What an immeasurable advantage this is may be seen, on the one hand, from the indifference towards all theory, which is one of the main reasons why the English working-class movement crawls along so slowly in spite of the splendid organisation of individual unions..." (Lenin, *What is to be Done?*)

From December 1900 onwards, given the repression in Russia, the development of a party newspaper was undertaken abroad with the publication of the *Iskra* (Spark). As a mature 30-year old, Lenin moved to Munich to collaborate with Plekhanov and others to produce the paper. By 1902, it became too difficult to publish *Iskra* in Germany and the majority of the editorial board moved to



**Тов. Ленин ОЧИЩАЕТ
ЗЕМЛЮ ОТ НЕЧИСТИ.**

London. Lenin and Krupskaya arrived in London in April to join Martov, Vera Zasulich and Potresov. Plekhanov and Axelrod, the other editors, remained in Switzerland, but came over to London for consultations. Issues 22 to 38 were edited in Clerkenwell Green, where Lenin shared an office with Henry Quelch, one of the leaders of the British Social Democratic Federation. The young Leon Trotsky, who was nicknamed the "Pen" for his fluent style, also came to London in October to join the other émigrés. As Krupskaya recalled in the first edition (1930) of her memoirs (and later expunged by the Stalinists), Lenin warmly welcomed Trotsky and insisted he become one of the contributors to *Iskra*. Within a few months, in March 1903, he proposed him for the editorial board.

At this time, preparations were soon in hand for the second congress of the RSDLP to be held in 1903. In reality it constituted the founding congress of the party and the drafting of its programme fell to Lenin. This congress met at first in Brussels, and hounded by the police, was forced to finish its proceedings in London. Out of some forty-four delegates representing twenty-six organisations,

only four were actually workers. In the end, the supporters of the *Iskra* overwhelmingly outnumbered those of the "Economists" and the separatist Jewish Bund.

National question

Ever since the first congress, the Bund had constituted itself as an autonomous section of the RSDLP. At the second congress they wanted to loosen their ties even further. As Krupskaya explained: "The issue at stake was whether the country was to have a strong united workers' Party, rallying solidly around it the workers of all nationalities living on Russian territory, or whether it was to have several workers' parties constituted separately according to nationality. It was a question of achieving international solidarity within the country. The *Iskra* editorial board stood for international consolidation of the working class. The Bund stood for national separatism and merely friendly contractual relations between the national workers' parties of Russia." (*Reminiscences of Lenin*). On this question, *Iskra* won a resounding victory for the unity of all workers within a single party.

However, late in the congress a deep split took place in the *Iskra* camp. The divi-

sion between Bolshevik (majority) led by Lenin and Menshevik (minority) led by Martov developed over one clause in the statutes and the make up of the leading bodies! The paragraph offered by Lenin proposed that only those should be considered members of the party who "recognise the programme and support the party, not only financially, but by personal participation in one of its organisations". Martov wanted to substitute for "personal participation" the more "elastic" idea of "regular co-operation with" the party, "under the control" of one of its organisations. Lenin also wanted to reduce the editorial board of *Iskra* to three: consisting of Lenin, Martov and Plekhanov. Despite winning a majority, the split left Lenin isolated within the leadership after Plekhanov later sided with Martov. In the aftermath of this failed attempt to professionalise the party, Lenin resigned from the editorial board of *Iskra* and, suffering colossal strain, was close to a nervous breakdown.

There are many myths surrounding the second congress and the famous split. Firstly, it is claimed that Bolshevism emerged fully formed from this congress, and secondly, from then onwards the monolithic Bolshevik Party marched forward under Lenin's leadership to the successful conquest of power in October 1917. In fact, nothing could be further from the truth. The split in 1903 took place not over principles or fundamentals, but on secondary organisational questions. The later differences between these two tendencies were not at all clear in 1903, but only emerged over time, under the impact of events. The crucial political difference between Bolshevism and Menshevism - the attitude to the liberal bourgeoisie - only came to the fore in 1904. It was not until the 1905 Revolution that the lines became clear.

For the Mensheviks, the revolution facing Russia was to sweep away the remnants of feudalism and bring about conditions for the development of capitalism. It was a bourgeois-democratic revolution, as had taken place long ago in the west. The conditions for the socialist revolution were completely absent in Russia and, therefore, the task of the emerging working class was to subordinate itself to the bourgeoisie as the leader of the coming bourgeois-democratic revolution.

Lenin, while recognising the bourgeois-democratic nature of the revolution in Russia, nevertheless, drew fundamentally different conclusions. For him, the Russian liberal bourgeois had arrived too late on the stage of history and was organically linked to the autocracy. Consequently, the only role it was destined to play was a counter-revolutionary one. The only force capable of leading the revolution was an alliance between the proletariat and poor peasantry, leading to the establishment of a "democratic dictatorship of proletariat and peasantry". Furthermore, the fate of the Russian revolution would be linked to the successful socialist revolution in the west, which in turn would give an impetus to the revolution in Russia itself.

The real political differences now emerged where the Mensheviks became promoters of class collaboration resting on support for the bourgeoisie as opposed to the revolutionary masses. In truth, the split of 1903 was an anticipation of future political differences. Eventually, these differences would become a division between revolutionary socialism and reformism.

Trotsky in the end voted with the Mensheviks on organisational matters. He

was later to admit his mistake honestly. He had not understood the real essence of the dispute and what Lenin was trying to build. In spite of this, on the political issues involved Trotsky agreed on all fundamentals with Lenin as opposed to the Mensheviks. In actual fact, Trotsky had an even clearer view of the social forces involved in the revolution than Lenin. Both agreed that the only revolutionary class capable of leading the revolution, a bourgeois-democratic one at that, was the proletariat in alliance with the poor peasantry. However, and this is where he differed from Lenin, having come to power, the working class would not stop at introducing bourgeois-democratic tasks, but would proceed to the socialist tasks, as part of the world socialist revolution.

Socialist revolution

Before 1917 Lenin had the perspective of the Russian revolution remaining within the confines of the bourgeois revolution. He linked the fate of the Russian revolution to the socialist revolution in the west. However, Trotsky believed the Russia proletariat could come to power before their brothers and sisters in Europe. It would be the beginning of the world socialist revolution, which is exactly what happened in 1917. This theory became known as Trotsky's Theory of Permanent Revolution. In 1917 Lenin had no problem in accepting the reality of the situation and saw from the way things had developed that perspective was indeed that of the socialist revolution.

The 9th January massacre in Petersburg provoked the 1905 revolution in Russia. The revolutionary events of that year were to confirm the count-

er-revolutionary actions of the liberal bourgeois, and firmly confirmed the independent revolutionary role of the young working class. During the course of the revolution, the workers spontaneously set up their own organs of struggle in the form of soviets, or Councils of Workers' Deputies, the embryo of workers' power. In the course of twelve months, the movement encompassed a whole spectrum of struggle: from petition to strikes, general strikes and insurrection. Such was Trotsky's role in the events that he was elected the president of the Petrograd Soviet, which led the general strike in October. However, after the defeated December Moscow uprising, the revolutionary movement went into decline as the government brutally reasserted its authority. Nevertheless, Lenin hailed the 1905 Revolution as a "dress rehearsal". Without this experience, in all probability the October Revolution of 1917 would not have been possible.

Within a few years, a bloody reaction had set in. Lenin, who had returned to Russia in November 1905, was once again forced into exile by 1907. The period of reaction brought many difficulties in its wake, where many revolutionary fighters, driven underground, lost heart and dropped out of the movement altogether. "They were difficult times", states Krupskaya. "In Russia the organisations were going to pieces." While the Mensheviks were affected by moves to "liquidate" the illegal party and concentrate all their efforts on legal open work, which under the prevailing reaction meant a rejection of revolutionary activity, the Bolsheviks were affected by ultra-left and sectarian tendencies, wishing to boycott legal avenues altogether,

which again meant an abandonment of revolutionary work. Others became mired in philosophical idealism to which Lenin responded with a brilliant defence of dialectical materialism in his book *Materialism and Empirio-Criticism* (1908), which remains a classic philosophical work.

Once again, Lenin was forced to rely upon a small handful of people in exile and to conduct a struggle against "liquidationism" from both the right and left. Even then, work seemed dominated by petty strife and the squabbles of emigrant life. Shortly after the defeat of 1905, the Bolshevik organisation within Russia was reduced to a small shell. They had no alternative but to collaborate with the Mensheviks, bringing out a joint newspaper called *Sotsial-Demokrat* with Martov as editor, but it was not to last.

"In 1910", recalls Trotsky, "in the whole country there were a few dozen people. Some were in Siberia. But they were not organised. The people whom Lenin could reach by correspondence or by agent numbered about 30 or 40 at most."

Throughout the reaction Lenin attempted to keep the Bolsheviks on the correct path by combating the various ultra-left tendencies that affected them. Such firmness inevitably led to splits, especially with the boycottists (Otzovists). Yet generally speaking, Lenin's method was always flexible on tactics and organisational questions, but firm on principles.

By the end of 1910 a new revolutionary upsurge had begun in Russia that would last until the outbreak of world war in August 1914. □

**To be continued
next issue**

WMG:

(Weapons of Mass Growth) –

will never be found

By Michael Roberts

AS WE enter 2004, the world's stock markets are booming. They rose on average 25% during 2003, reversing the previous three years which saw stock market prices fall over 50%, the biggest decline since 1929-32.

The big financial institutions and investors have become hugely optimistic about the revival of economic growth and employment. They reckon that the weapons of mass growth (WMG) will be found. Everything is looking better, according to the latest intelligence sources, Messrs Bush, Blair, Schroeder and Greenspan tell us.

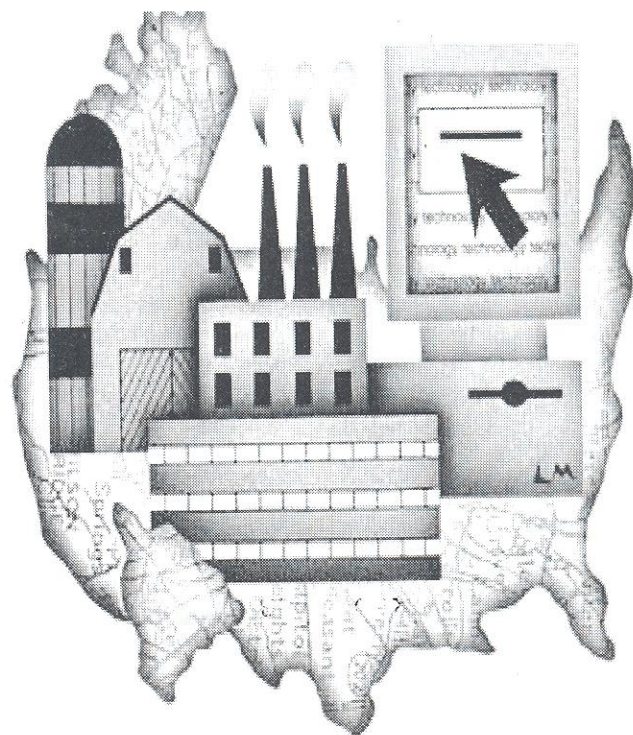
Indeed, when the US government statisticians announced that in third quarter of 2003, the US economy expanded at an 8% pace, it seems difficult to deny that things are much better than they were this time last year. This is a fake figure in itself. It represents the increase in one quarter of the year annualised, which is multiplied by 4! The underlying growth figure is closer to 3%.

But now the expert pundits are predicting 4.5% growth in 2004 for the US, 2.5% in Japan and Europe. This time last year, they said the US would grow 3%, and Europe and the UK 2.5%. Well, they were right about the US, but completely wrong about Europe, the UK and Japan. Indeed, Germany virtually stagnated in 2003, while the UK slowed down to under 2% and Japan's growth stayed under 1%.

So why did the US prediction come right? And does that mean we can trust the spin doctors that there really are WMGs in the world economy?

Artificial growth

The reality is that US growth in 2003 was artificially created and will prove to be ephemeral in 2004. It was bumped up by a massive injection of paper money into the economy by the Federal Reserve Bank. With interest rates at an all-time low of 1%, it actually paid everybody to borrow as much money as they could. In turn, most of



this was invested in buying houses, not in real production. As house prices continued to skyrocket, American families remortgaged their homes at lower interest rates, while borrowing more on their more valuable houses. They used the extra money to spend more on DVDs, cars, seating out etc.

But all this spending was not backed up by any real increases in the production of factories in the US or in the income of workers in them. Indeed, manufacturing wages hardly increased during 2003 for the average worker. Companies went on sacking more employees (at least until the last few months of 2003) and clamped down on any wage increases. They also reduced the pension and health benefits for their workers. Sure, the likes of real estate agents and financial consultants had a great year. But the average punter saw nothing of this supposed prosperity.

All this increased spending that kept the economy moving was bor-

rowed by households who have never been more indebted. And it ended up mainly in the hands of the big corporations in profits. During 2003, profits rose 30%!

Even so, profit levels are still below their peak of 1997. So the companies want more. Consequently, they are keeping their production costs down, especially as they have to compete with the likes of China and the rest of Asia who continue to flood US markets with their cheap goods. That means corporations are not going to rehire sacked workers or boost investment in machinery and plants much this year.

And here is the problem for Bush and his mates in his re-election year. The economic recovery of 2003 was based on cheap money and tax cuts. But interest rates cannot be cut any more and the effect of the tax cuts is waning. In 2003, Bush cut the taxes for the 185,000 millionaire earners by over \$70,000! But for the bottom 85% of American income earners,

the tax gain averaged just \$209. There will be some more handouts this year, but by the middle of the year they will be over. And Bush cannot contemplate another round of cuts because the combination of his handouts to the rich, plus the huge spending on invading Afghanistan and Iraq, plus the occupation of those countries and the cost of protecting American citizens from the terrorist consequences is immense.

The budget deficit that the US government is running is now over 5% of annual output and going higher – that's a record. And there is no sign that Bush, Cheney and Rumsfeld can extricate themselves from the mess in these countries. As I said in this column this time last year, before the war in Iraq was launched:

"Sure, US firepower may triumph in Iraq. But will Saddam be captured? Even if he is, will the clever, educated Iraqi people accept an American-imposed dictatorship? And will the Arab and Palestinian masses stand by while America and Israel impose a dictated peace? And won't Bush's victory deliver the exact opposite to what he claims the war is all about? Far from terrorism being defeated, the suicide bombers and attacks on American tourists and civilians will almost certainly increase." (World economy 2003: hope and reality - December 29, 2002).

All this spending by households and the government is mainly on cheaper foreign goods. That has led to another huge deficit, this time on trade with the rest of the world – again at 5% of GDP and again another record.

These twin deficits have to

be paid for. So far, they have been financed by foreigners recycling the dollars they have earned on exports to buy US stocks or corporations – or most of all to buy US government bonds. Thus, the US has financed its spending by getting ever more into debt with foreigners. The US owes the equivalent of 25% of its GDP to foreigners in debt and unless something happens, that will reach 60% of GDP by end of this decade.

But something is happening. The US is paying for its borrowing and buying in dollars. But increasingly, foreigners are getting fed up with receiving paper money for their goods. They are looking

to switch their earnings into other less plentiful currencies like the yen and or the euro.

The result is that the US dollar has dived. It is down nearly 30% against the Euro in 2003! That means in a year's time if you hold dollars you will be 25-30% worse off. No wonder there is an increasing reluctance to hold them.

And there's worse. As the Euro and the yen strengthen, that makes all their exports rise in dollar prices and so more difficult to sell. That's why growth in Europe and Japan has been so weak in the last year. The US has financed its growth by printing dollars and lowering the value

of the greenback- all at the expense of European and Japanese exporting companies.

So far, these countries have bit their tongues and taken their punishment like men, because they believe that the US has the right intelligence on WMG. But after a battery of protectionist measures such as putting tariffs on steel and quotas of Chinese clothes, and by devaluing their currency, the US is trying the patience of its trading rivals to the limit.

Interest rates cannot fall any more and tax cuts cannot be lowered again much and the dollar is already plunging, putting a limit on how far the US can screw other countries to get out of trouble.

So in 2004, the WMG must be found in order to ensure genuine economic growth. That means companies must invest more and they must start employing more workers to boost real production.

Is there any sign of it? Well, as I write, the US has just announced that employment grew in December 2003 by just 1,000 people. That's after a fall of over 2m since 9/11. It is estimated that for the growth forecasts of Bush, Greenspan and Co to be met in 2004, there must be at least an increase of 250,000 jobs every month for the next year. Well it was 1,000 in December.

So with Europe and Japan being screwed – Germany's employment levels are falling and the decline is accelerating – and with the US not growing enough to keep the world up, the prospects are not nearly as rosy. The WMG still look unlikely to be found. □



Guantánamo Bay - A Sign of Things to Come?

by Allen Robertson

Guantánamo Bay, an American army base containing 3,000 US military personnel, is located at the southern end of Cuba. It has over the past two years been used as a prison for 660 detainees from the 'War on Terror'. The US assumed possession of the base during the Spanish-American war in 1898, and signed a lease agreement for the Bay with the Cuban government in 1903. The base for all intents and purposes is US territory, as the US and Cuba signed another deal in 1934 leasing the Bay 'in perpetuity' to the US government.

The use of the base as a prison for what the US government calls 'enemy combatants' has generated a great deal of controversy. The term 'enemy combatants' is questionable in and of itself. The US government decided to call the prisoners this rather than POWs (Prisoners of War), because the term POW would guarantee the prisoners certain rights under the Geneva Convention. All this term of 'enemy combatants' really does is conceal the fact that the prisoners have no rights whatsoever and exposes the hypocrisy of the US government.

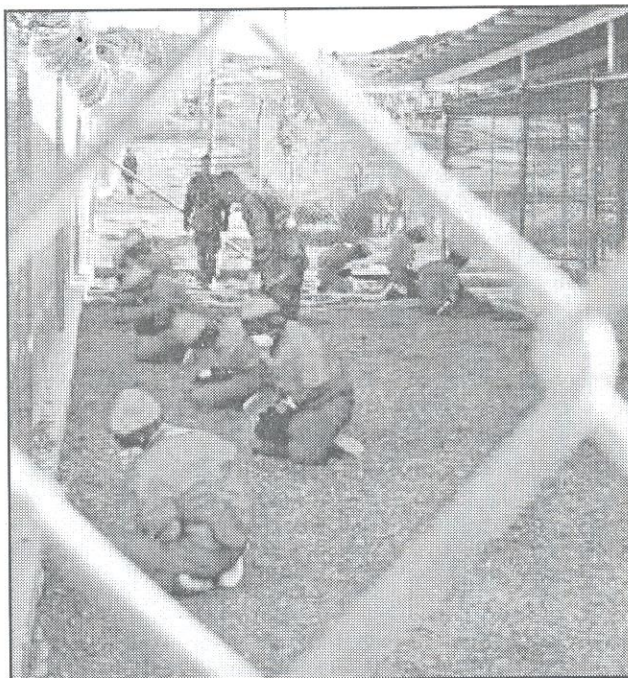
The US government raised quite a fuss during the war on Iraq, when Iraqi television showed pictures of captured US soldiers (who were considered Prisoners of War). It was

claimed that the Iraqi government was breaking the Geneva Convention by exploiting the prisoners by humiliating them on television. This reeks of hypocrisy, as the 'enemy combatants' at Guantánamo Bay, which is in reality a concentration camp, have been held in absolutely inhumane conditions - paraded around on television with bags on their heads and with their hands and legs constantly bound. They have no rights at all, including the right of legal representation, and have yet to be formally accused of anything. If anything like this had been done to US soldiers, the response of the US government would have been swift and harsh.

The case of the prisoners at Guantánamo Bay also completely exposes the hypocrisy of the so-called 'War on Terror'. The 'War on Terror' has proven absolutely ineffectual against terrorism. Rather than actually trying to solve the social and economic problems that result in terrorism, the US is trying to actually fight a war with small bands of guerillas and terrorists. The 'War on Terror' achieved absolutely nothing in curbing terrorism - in fact it has caused an increase in terrorist activity. One only has to look at the situation in Iraq, where more US soldiers have died since the official end of hostilities than during the actual war, or at the situation in the

Israel/Palestine conflict. Al-Qaeda has now also moved into Iraq in a big way, whereas they weren't present (at least they weren't a major presence) beforehand. One can obviously point to the fact that there has not been a repeat attack on the scale of September 11, but just because this hasn't happened yet does not mean that it may not come about.

George W. Bush and company have torn up the US constitution and the Bill of Rights, by introducing the Patriot Act and the introduction of the department of Homeland Security. Terrorism and the so-called war against it have only proven themselves to be the excuses needed by the US administration to strengthen the state apparatus. The 'War on Terror' is also the excuse that US imperialism needed to launch military adventures around the world. US imperialism, due to the ferocious struggle for markets worldwide, needs to conquer new markets and territories, and the attacks on September 11 played right into their hands. It is ironic that in order to defend democracy, democracy itself must be undermined. The new security measures in the US are also costing a lot of money - money that could be used to aid the ailing US economy and help the growing number of unemployed and poor in the US. Along with the



unprecedented increase in US military expenditure, the US government will find security and the domestic war on terror a very expensive adventure. President Bush wants to spend \$3.5 billion, a 1,000-percent increase, on the nation's "first responders" - police, firefighters and Emergency Medical Teams. Another \$11 billion has been allotted for border security, a \$2 billion increase. \$6 billion is to be used to defend against bioterrorism. \$700 million will be used to improve intelligence-gathering and information-sharing between agencies and throughout all levels of government. A further \$230 million will be used to create Citizen Corps to help defend communities against terrorist attacks. This money could easily be used to aid the working class and poor in the US and around the world. Pumping billions of dollars into security and imperialist adventures will not solve the problem of terrorism. The main problems are of course capitalism and imperialism. The US and its allies must endeavour to actually solve the social and economic roots of terrorism, but of course this will never happen. This must be accomplished by the working class.

International pressure has finally forced the US government to do something about the situation of the prisoners at Guantánamo Bay. The US administration has finally relented and will now put some of them on trial, or send some of them home to be dealt with, as in the case of Britain. But these will not be fair trials where one is considered innocent until proven guilty - these will be military tribunals where the 'enemy combatants' will be assigned military lawyers. They will have no right to choose their own legal representation. It seems clear that the US administration would prefer to assign the prisoners' lawyers so that they can get the convictions they want. Everything seemed to be going according to plan except that last week, five of the soldier-lawyers assigned to defend the first group of prisoners to be tried

filed a "friend of the court" brief to the Supreme Court. This brief claims that the constitution "cannot countenance an open-ended presidential power with no civilian review whatsoever." To allow this, the brief continues, would give Mr. Bush "monarchical" powers and cast the detainees into a legal "black hole". These lawyers genuinely want to defend the rights of their clients, as they were trained. What is very interesting is that these lawyers had to obtain prior permission from the Pentagon's legal department before they could submit the brief to the Supreme Court. It is a very powerful symbol given that this is the first public criticism of the US administration's policies from within the armed forces. The administration has now relented, if only a little, by claiming that a civilian review panel comprised of 4 people will be able to make recommendations on the cases against the prisoners and the sentences they receive.

The Supreme Court is now examining the legal status of the naval base at Guantánamo Bay. The administration's argument goes something like this (as it was presented by a government lawyer to a startled Federal Appeals Court in San Francisco): As the base is not part of United States sovereign territory, the detainees should have no legal rights, even if it were to mean they were tor-

tured or summarily executed by their captors.

The administration lost that case. The Court rejected the administration's claimed right to hold the Guantánamo prisoners indefinitely and to hear them only before military courts, saying also that the procedure was "counter-intuitive and undemocratic".

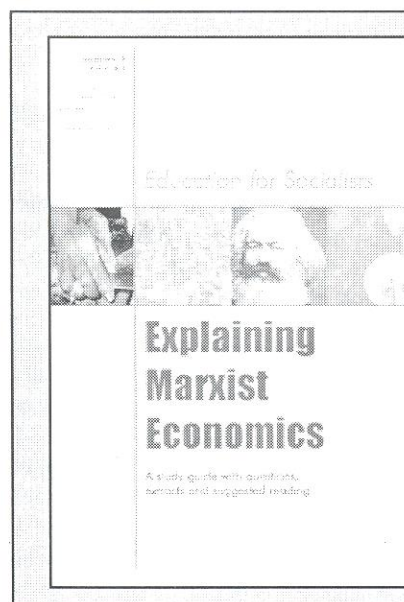
The administration has also suffered legal defeats over two Americans it has deemed to be 'enemy combatants'. Another federal appeals court in New York ruled in December of last year that the government had no authority to detain Jose Padilla, the so-called 'dirty bomber', who was arrested in Chicago in May 2002. The Supreme Court has just decided to review the case of Yaser Hamdi, who was captured in Afghanistan in late 2001. Incidentally, the administration suddenly agreed in December to allow Mr Hamdi access to a lawyer, making him the first alleged 'enemy combatant' to be given such a 'privilege'.

The Bush administration has been fighting hard to trample democratic rights. Amidst all of the recent legal defeats, they have won one battle: the Supreme Court refused to hear a case about the government's right to withhold the names and details of more than 700 foreigners who were arrested in the US in the aftermath of September 11th.

The labour movement in

the US and around the world must pay close attention to the precedents being set in the US. The Bush administration is pressuring other countries around the world, such as Canada, Britain, as well as other so-called 'democratic' countries to follow their example and pass draconian laws. Canada has passed the "Public Safety Act", and Britain has passed the "Anti-Terrorism Crime and Security Act" and is planning on passing the "Civil Contingencies Bill", a bill which is openly described as a way for the government to operate against civil disobedience and other 'enemies of the state'.

These are dangerous precedents for the future that the labour movement must fight. The bourgeois governments of the West are preparing for future battles - class battles that is. Over the past few years we have witnessed in most western countries and increase in strike activity and civil disobedience. Over the past year we have seen demonstrations in most western countries of unprecedented size, in particular against the war in Iraq. As these movements of workers and students are signs of future battles to come, against which the bourgeoisie and their representatives in western governments are trying to protect themselves, then the labour movement must see these draconian laws in the same light. □



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EU Constitution debacle The real nature of EU exposed

By Roberto Sarti and Fred Weston

The talks on the EU constitution have collapsed. The real causes are to be found in the fundamental economic contradictions that are emerging between the EU member states. And these are about to be made worse by the forthcoming enlargement of the EU. The different levels of development between the present 15 members are going to be multiplied by the addition of countries like Poland, Hungary and the Czech Republic.

The stumbling blocks this time proved to be Spain and Poland, two states who were not prepared to accept changes to the decision-making system that had been agreed at the Nice summit in 2000 by which both these countries were to be allocated 27 votes. Germany, which has twice the population of either Spain or Poland, was only allocated 29 votes at the Nice summit. This would give the German giant more or less the same say as little Poland.

Berlin and Paris are obviously not prepared to see their decision making powers curtailed and they backed the scheme of the draft constitution drawn up by Valéry Giscard d'Estaing for "double majority voting", by which decisions would require the backing of half of the EU nations, representing 60 per cent of the EU population.. Such a scheme, would allow France and Germany to have a big say in EU policy development.

The fact is that different member states are pursuing contradictory foreign policies.

Poland and Spain pursued a different foreign policy from that of France and Germany during the war on Iraq which provoked the anger of Chirac. These countries also came out against

the proposal for a new European defence force.

Growing tensions

These growing tensions eventually erupted into open conflict between the major powers, and within the EU itself.

When Germany was at the height of its boom it could tolerate an EU where it was the main contributor to central funds used to subsidise the poorer parts of the Union. Now Germany wants to curb spending, as it wishes to cut its contribution to central funds. France supported Germany in calling for a freezing of the EU budget.

This gives us an indication of how "diplomacy" will work in the future. We will no longer see the velvet glove. Rather, there will be threats and open clashes in a situation where the strongest countries will use all their strength to prevail over the others.

This state of affairs was openly revealed with the collapse of the unfortunately named "Growth and Stability Pact" a few weeks before the debacle over the constitution. When the German economy was booming and the bourgeois were full of confidence they insisted on inserting a clause into this pact that established heavy fines for any country whose budget deficit went above the limit of 3% of GDP.

Last year Portugal breached the agreed limit and was fined. The problem is that the budget deficit is growing in most EU member countries. And this year France and Germany saw their own budget deficits go well over the 3% limit reaching the figure of 4%. Chirac and Schroeder therefore decided that the rules don't apply to them. To all intents and purposes this marks

the death of the Maastricht agreement put together so meticulously over the past few years. We must remember that it was precisely Maastricht that has been used in all the EU member countries as an excuse to privatise practically everything, to attack the living standards of the working class, to dismantle the welfare state, etc, etc.

This internal tension within the EU has its parallels in the breakdown of all the international bodies that had been painstakingly built up since the Second World War. The entire world order that was put together after World War Two is cracking at the seams. The US, EU, Japan, China, Russia, etc are all striving to shape the new balance of forces that is beginning to emerge.

It is within this greater worldwide crisis that we have to view the tensions within Europe. There is massive excess capacity throughout the capitalist world. The USA desperately needs to increase its share of world trade. This can only be done at the expense of the others, which is bad news for Europe. Europe is stagnating and also desperately needs to export itself out of the present slowdown. And within the EU each country is trying to get a bigger share for itself.

Here is where we see the contradictions of Maastricht, the Growth and Stability Pact, etc. These pacts have reduced the room for manoeuvre for each member state. And the introduction of the euro has forced economies that are on completely different levels (Greece and Germany are two glaring examples) to apply the same policies. This is making the economic crisis afflicting Europe even worse. Now we have the added pressures on Europe that derive from a dollar that is steadily being devalued. This is making it more difficult for the European capitalists to export to the USA, which up until recently had played the role of engine of the world economy, sucking in exports from the rest of the world.

The introduction of the euro has meant that weaker capitalist economies can no longer use their own currency's devaluation to boost



The fact that most of the summits of these bodies in recent times have resulted in fiascos or in open rifts is not an accident. The entire world order that was put together after World War Two is cracking at the seams. The US, EU, Japan, China, Russia, etc are all striving to shape the new balance of forces that is beginning to emerge.

exports. Small businesses are being ruined because they cannot hope to compete against the bigger multinationals. The dilemma is: what was the alternative for the EU member states? We have to remember that the creation of a united economic area with a common currency was the only way for the European multinationals to strike back against the US and Japan. Although each national bourgeoisie within the EU has its own particular interests that bring it into conflict with its partners, none of them could stand up to the US, Japan, and more recently to China, if they stood alone.

Unemployment

The move towards a common currency has proven incapable of overcoming one of the fundamental contradictions of capitalism: the nation state, with the different interests of the national bourgeoisies.

When the economy was on the upturn, the EU and the Euro may have seemed a very nice idea. Now that the perspectives for a recovery seem very grim, the European Union is revealing its true face. It is a tool with which to impose attacks on living standards.

France and Germany perceive the new members of the European Union purely as markets and sources of cheap labour. Countries like Poland will get very little from joining the European Union. Most of them will not be allowed to join the Euro and their citizens for a period of three or four years will not have the full freedom to travel to other EU countries. The new member states will only receive 25% of agricultural subsidies that are presently available. Poland's industrial base is still lagging far behind that of countries like Germany and its economy is heavily dependent on agriculture.

Workers from other countries will also be badly hit by EU enlargement, as the Economist (November 22, 2003) admits:

"One shock for many people may be the discovery that EU entry does not in itself bring wealth. The countries of central Europe will take a very long time to catch up with their western neighbours. The Economist Intelligence Unit... has calculated that if the 15 countries of the current EU enjoy economic growth of 2% a year, and the countries joining in 2004 and 2007 (including Bulgaria and Romania) grow by about 4% a year, then it will take the new members, on average, more than 50 years to draw level with the old ones." We might add: will the workers of these countries be prepared to wait two or three generations before they see any benefits?

At the moment most of the countries that are preparing to join the EU are enjoying growth rates higher than the EU average. But of course, this is growth after a major collapse of these economies. To sustain this they are looking for integration into the wider EU market. But this growth will not last.

"Any central European country where the growth rate sags, on the other hand, will find that the pleasures of EU membership turn sour. That country will be saddled with the rules and expenses of a club meant for rich people, while its income per person remains far below the average and may even decline in relative terms." (*The Economist*, November 22, 2003)

Thus we can already predict what is going to be the leitmotiv of every government of these new member countries; cuts in pensions, wages and social services, privatisations and complete liberalisation of their markets.

The ruling classes in Eastern Europe are in for a big shock. Far from the "integration" of the whole of the European continent into one unified block, they are developing another line of thought. They are waking up to the fact that all these national economies, at different levels of development, cannot be

brought together to form one harmonious body.

A "two-speed" Europe?

Now they seem to be pushing for a multi-speed Europe, one that would consist of a wider loose federation (the 25 member European Union) and an inner core of stronger countries led by Germany and France. In reality it would amount to the domination of the weaker members by the more powerful. Such a solution would also prepare new conflicts.

Some of the national governments (Spain, Italy and the so-called "new Europe") have drawn the conclusion that the EU boat is not so safe after all and during the Iraq war they clearly indicated that they see the more powerful US cruiser as a sturdier vessel. So these countries are being pulled in two directions. On the one hand they want to lean on the USA as a counterweight to powerful countries at the heart of the EU, France and Germany, but on the other hand they cannot do without these two powers and so they remain indissolubly linked from an economic point of view to the rest of Europe.

Those countries that joined the euro now face a dilemma, to leave the euro now would be a disaster. It would represent an enormous step backwards and the de facto failure of the very essence of the European Union. What this means is that they are all locked in together.

One EU country after another has experienced a downturn over the last few years and a corresponding rise in the class struggle. Maastricht, the euro, and all the other agreements, have had the effect of internationalising the class struggle within the borders of the EU. Everywhere, pensions, welfare benefits, education, public transport, are under attack. And everywhere we see strikes and demonstrations against these measures

A new period is opening

before us. It will be a protracted period of conflicts between the members of the EU. We will see new alliances that will form between countries as they attempt to defend their own little patch. These same alliances will break down as their conflicting interests surface. The whole edifice of a capitalist European Union will be revealed for what it is: a reactionary adventure. It will also become clear that it is the working class of all these countries that will have to foot the bill for the crisis of European capitalism.

Throughout Europe, all governments are attacking the gains of the working class.

However, the bosses in Europe are facing an undefeated working class and one that is organised in powerful trade union organisations. If the European capitalists have managed to impose cuts, this is only due to the role of the leadership of the trade unions and the left-wing parties. They believe that by making some concessions now they can avoid a greater onslaught in the future. These so-called leaders have understood nothing. The capitalists are forced to keep up the pressure on the working class. Today they take an inch. Tomorrow they must take a mile.

Through painful experience, the working class will understand this. They will also understand the need to change these leaders and replace them with genuine class fighters. The workers will attempt to defend the gains of the past. They regard a decent pension as a right, not a charitable concession. Each attack will be met with a counter-attack. Through the struggle to defend their pensions, wages, jobs and working conditions, they will draw the conclusion that it is the system as a whole that is sick. From this they will conclude that what it is needed is the overthrow of this rotten capitalist European Union and they will replace it with the Socialist United States of Europe. □

New year drive

ONE of the problems of not having a more regular publishing schedule for Socialist Appeal is that articles often have to be written well in advance of when they are going to actually be read. So these words are being written well before both the vote on tuition fees and the publication of the Hutton inquiry report, yet the outcome of both these important events will be known by the time you are reading this. Indeed for technical reasons most of the journal you are reading will have been written by the middle of January. This is a problem of resources - or rather a lack of them.

We need a more regular journal, ideally a weekly at the very least. But to do that we need to expand our means to write, layout and print Socialist Appeal and we need to push up our sales to help finance such an endeavour. Now we are some way off from being able to do that but this aim does need to be an ambition of every seller and reader. We cannot continue to let the bosses and their supporters in the national press have it all their own way, able to print whatever lies they like without being challenged. The working class needs its own voice. So we need to build the resources of Socialist Appeal and that task needs to start now. The quicker the better.

So what can you do? Well there are a number of things every reader can do. First of all if you do not get your copy on a regular basis, for whatever reason, why not become a subscriber. This ensures that you do not miss a single copy and helps us to boost our base line for sales. Secondly why not become a seller by

taking some extra copies to sell to your mates or at your CLP or union branch. This can be just a few copies each month to start with but remember every sale helps in getting the ideas of socialism across. If you think you are able to have a go then drop us a line or give us a ring (details on the inside front cover) and we will sort something out.

The other area where your help is needed is on the financial front. Again, I am having to write these words before the end of the Xmas Fighting Fund appeal occurs. Over the next few days I am sure that areas and individuals will be sending down the donations they have collected together over the last few weeks to put towards the £7000 target. As things stand at present we have still some way to go, having only just got past the £4000 figure. By the time you read this the Xmas drive deadline will have passed, but do not worry. You can still collect and make donations. Anything which comes in after the start of February will go towards the spring target for the Fighting Fund because the task of fighting for socialist ideas is a never ending one. We will not give up until we have achieved the transformation of society and the abolition of poverty and exploitation. This is something worth fighting for - that is why the appeal for donations is called a fighting fund. Please send what you can to us at PO Box 2626, London N17SQ, cheques etc. should be made payable to Socialist Appeal.

Thank you in advance

Steve Jones

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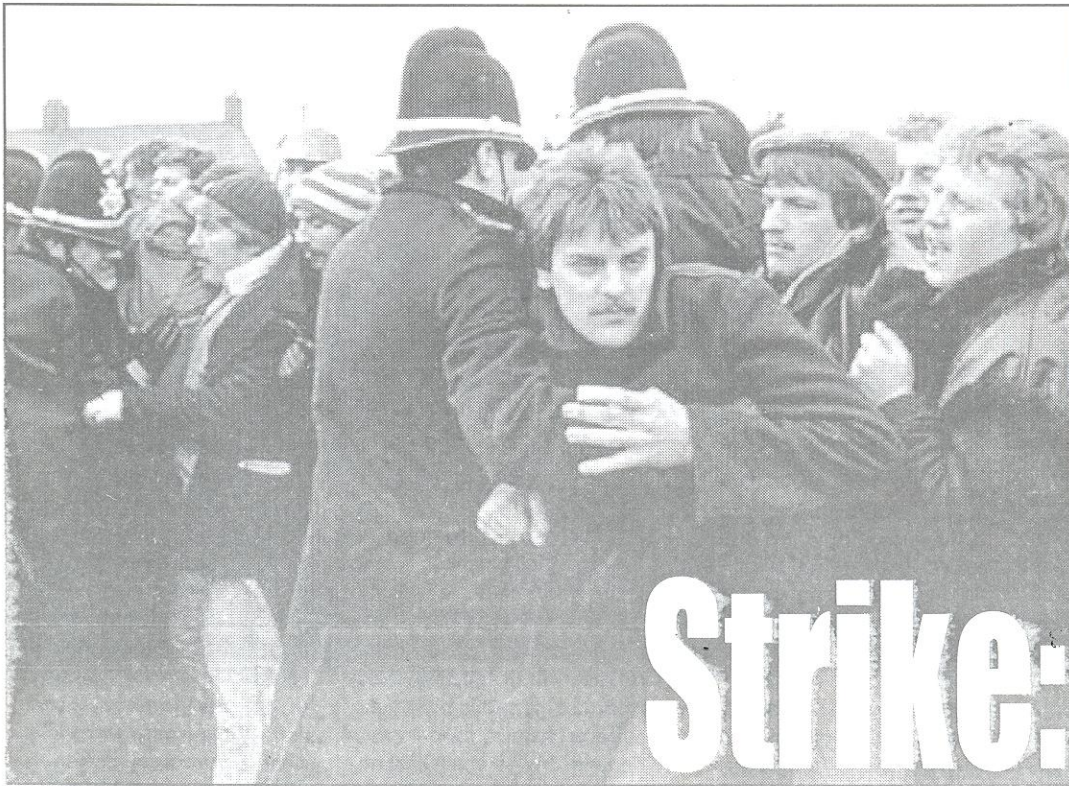
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When Britain Went to War

A review by Alan Woods

ON SATURDAY 24 January, Channel Four broadcast a documentary about the miners' strike. This channel is supposed to be the embodiment of serious TV journalism. But anyone who tuned in looking for an objective account of the strike was doomed to be disappointed. This was positively the worst example of gutter journalism one could hope to experience. The purpose of this documentary was not to clarify what happened but to blacken the memory of the striking miners and mislead the present generation by a combination of lies, falsifications and trivialisation.

The reasons for this are quite clear. It is never enough for the ruling class to defeat the working class. It is necessary to obliterate the very memory of the historical struggles of the workers, to insult their memory, to spit on their achievements, and to brainwash the new generations in the servile idea that "struggle does not pay". This is no acci-

dent. After a long period of quiet, things are beginning to stir on the industrial front in Britain. The establishment is trying to prevent the spread of militancy and is using the anniversary of the miners' strike to achieve this end. The content of the programme seems to be the past, but it is really concerned with the present and the future.

The miners' strike was an epic year long struggle that transformed the lives and psychology of thousands of working class people. But in the whole programme one would look in vain for a true representation of the astonishing heroism of the miners and their families. Only the role of the miners' wives was hinted at, and then only in a very partial and niggardly fashion.

This was indeed a war - a war between the classes that polarised the whole of British society. In this war, contrary to the one-sided and false presentation of Channel Four, all the aggression came from the

government. The miners were not the aggressors but the victims. Their "crime" - for which they can never be forgiven by the ruling class and its hired prostitutes in the media - was that they dared to fight back, and they nearly won.

A serious documentary is supposed to give equal weight to the views of both sides of the argument. This was indeed the promise made in the publicity that announced the programme. The blurb stated: "This extraordinary, feature-length documentary uses extensive archive footage and the recollections of an eclectic mix of key players from both camps." Yet in the space of two (interminable) hours, the few miners who were graciously permitted to put in a token appearance were mainly restricted to anecdotal trivia, relating to their experiences with (guess who?) the students and the middle class. This was a self-evident ploy to disguise the overwhelming and blatant bias of the programme as a

whole. No doubt these miners gave a far fuller picture of what the strike was really about, but the producers preferred to edit this out to fit in to their own agenda. Indeed, at no time did the makers of the programme make any attempt to explain the real reasons behind the strike. The voice of the miners, their families and communities, was almost completely silenced.

From the word go the commentary was heavily loaded against the miners, the working class and the trade union movement in general. The opening gambit already prepared us for what was in store:

"This is the story of the moment that an old Britain died and a new one was born," we were duly informed. "In the 1980s, Britain stood on the brink of massive change. The Thatcher revolution was well and truly underway and the era of the 'yuppy' was arriving."

And indeed this was a programme of the yuppies, by the yuppies, and 100 percent for the yuppies.

Those of us who can remember the period in question rubbed our eyes in astonished disbelief as the sleek, self-satisfied TV presenters went on to describe these years as follows:

"It was a vibrant, fluid, controversial time of change." That much cannot be denied. It was very much a change for the worse as far as the great majority of the British people were concerned: a period of massive unemployment, the closure of mines and factories, and the slashing of social spending on health, housing and education. In a word, the period when a formerly relatively civilised country turned into a free market shambles, when a small minority made fortunes from speculation while British manufacturing industry was decimated by the so-called Thatcher revolution, of which the makers of this programme are so proud.

In March 1984, the government announced plans to close 20 coal mines, with the

loss of 20,000 jobs. In response, the NUM led the workers out on strike. In other words, the strike was a defensive action to protect jobs and mining communities, and not at all a conspiracy by the NUM leaders to carry out a socialist revolution in Britain. This point was made only once in the programme (after all, even a Channel Four documentary must bear some slight resemblance to the facts), but then promptly forgotten. For the remainder of the programme, the whole emphasis was placed on the "theory" of the Red conspiracy and the evil machinations of Arthur Scargill.

The only "explanation" for the strike was that it was the work of an evil genius - the NUM leader Arthur Scargill. Here a scientific analysis of history is replaced by the conspiracy theory that is the essential characteristic of the police mentality. Scargill was portrayed as a Marxist determined to overthrow the state. The thousands of miners who followed him in this sinister enterprise were therefore - it was strongly implied - so many ignorant sheep.

According to this "analysis", Scargill deliberately engineered the strike for political purposes. Throughout the programme he, and the other NUM leaders, were subjected to a torrent of abuse, lies and venomous slander. Yet at no time was the object of this slander given the chance of defending himself.

We are by no means uncritical of the tactics pursued by Arthur Scargill in this strike. Undoubtedly, certain errors were made, which had a negative effect on the outcome. In particular, the refusal to hold a national ballot was a serious blunder. If the NUM had held a ballot and campaigned for a strike, they

would have got an overwhelming endorsement. It is highly unlikely that areas that voted against strike action would have broken the strike, as happened in Nottingham. The split in the miners' ranks undermined the strike from the beginning and was its Achilles' heel.

But the tactical mistakes made by the NUM leadership do not alter the fact that the strike itself was a hundred percent justified. The Tories merely used the split in the NUM for their own cynical purposes. They had no interest in the Nottingham miners, any more than any other section of the miners. The programme presents the Nottingham miners as the victims, but in fact, if anyone was duped and cynically used, it was them.

The miners' strike was not an aggressive act by the NUM, nor was it part of any plot to overthrow capitalism, as the documentary repeatedly implies. As a matter of fact, if the makers of the documentary had paid the slightest attention to the facts, they would know that the miners' strike was deliberately provoked by Thatcher. It was a naked act of class aggression, deliberately worked out by the Tories with the cold cruelty that has always characterised the British ruling class.

There was more than one reason for this offensive by the ruling class. In

part, it was an act of revenge on the part of the ruling class for the defeat inflicted on the Tory government of Edward Heath by the miners. Having defeated Argentina in the Falklands war, Thatcher now turned her attention to what she saw as "the enemy within". In order to crush the trade unions it was first necessary to crush the strongest and most militant section of the Labour Movement, the miners.

Long-term decline

From another point of view, the conflict between the miners and the government reflected the objective crisis of British capitalism, which suffered from a long-term decline. In the past Britain was the workshop of the world. Its industries ruled supreme in the markets of the world. No more! Over the past 20 years, British manufacturing industry has been largely destroyed. It has been reduced to the status of a parasitic rentier economy, based on services, banking, tourism and speculation. The basis of this transformation was laid under Thatcher.

This parasitism was elevated to the status of a semi-mystical creed in the Thatcher years. The wholesale slaughter of Britain's industrial base is presented as something highly desirable and progressive. In reality, in the long run it spells only disaster, decline

and decay. Those ignorant and narrow-minded elements who praise Thatcher for her work in destroying Britain (Tony Blair figures prominently in the ranks of her admirers) present this counter-revolution as a "revolution". They worship Thatcher because they have been allowed to enrich themselves - partly through that looting of the state that is known as privatisation. They dance merrily round the wreckage of Britain's former might with the same zeal with which the emperor Nero fiddled as Rome burned.

Naturally, these "yuppies" (who, as we all know represent the "real" Britain, as opposed to people who work for a living) were lavishly over-represented in this documentary. It was supposed to be about miners, but instead was all about the gold diggers of the City of London. We were treated to the profound political philosophy of the likes of (Tory) Mathew Parris and the (Tory) former editor of the Sun and the (Tory) ex-Minister Peter Walker, one after the other, as they queued up to pour their buckets of slop over the defeated miners.

Then, to balance things up, we were given the opinions of the former Labour leader (Yesterday's Man) Neil Kinnock, who, for the few people who remember him, always gave a first-rate imitation of a Tory. Scraping the barrel, the makers of the programme, who found no time to interview Arthur Scargill, found plenty of time to allow this pathetic has-been to indulge in his favourite pastime of sticking the knife into the back of the working class. He appeared no fewer than three times, dripping bile and spite, to attack Scargill and the strikers.

An inordinate amount of time was given over to the leader of the strike-





breaking so-called Union of Democratic Mineworkers, Neil Greatrex, to voice his opinions. Channel Four presented this individual as an honest miner only relating his own experience.

His explanation of his own role as a strikebreaker was given a personal, supposedly 'principled' gloss. Yet there was no mention of the now infamous Roy Link, or the other founders of the UDM, their secret meetings with top Tory and big business backers. The attempt to split the National Union of Mineworkers and the creation of the UDM was part and parcel of the Tories' strategy from the outset.

No thanks to Channel Four we know a little more about Greatrex than we would learn from his own account. Last year he received a pay package worth £151,536 according to a recent report in The Western Mail newspaper. Yet only £11,856 came from the small UDM's own national account. The rest came from a quite astonishing source. Miners all over Britain will be sickened to discover that "hundreds of ex-miners in Wales may have had their compensation claims processed by a company called Vendside, without realising it is owned by the UDM. Vendside has received millions of pounds in

fees from the Department of Trade and Industry." (The Western Mail 12/01/04) It would seem that it was not just the Met police officers whose bank balances profitted from fighting against the striking miners.

Yes, Britain was at war at that time - and the makers of the programme made no secret of which side they were on in that war. They found time to interview all manner of middle class nonentities, former students, who (surprise, surprise) in their comfortable old age, have suddenly discovered the joys of the free market economy and can permit themselves the luxury of spitting on their own radical past. This was perhaps the most nauseating aspect of a generally nauseating programme.

The glittering prize of the free market - so runs the legend - was nearly obliterated by the "dinosaurs" of the NUM

and their middle class student allies, pitted against the forces of progress, in the form of the Thatcher government. These scriptwriters really deserve an Oscar for inventiveness. Their ability to tell blatant lies without even blinking is truly admirable! The fact is that the miners had the support of the overwhelming majority of the British people, and in particular the working class and the Labour Movement. The success or failure of the strike depended on the latter. The role of the students was very welcome but quite peripheral at the time. Therefore, the opinions of a few aging ex-students 20 years later is of no interest to anyone, except other aging ex-students who produce bad documentaries for Channel Four.

Apostasy is never a particularly endearing phenomenon. But the spectacle of these middle class "lovies" sneering at the miners and their student

allies was stomach-churning stuff. Personally speaking, I never had much time for student radicals when I was at university, recognising it to be so much petty bourgeois froth. The French have a phrase for this: "jusqu'a 30 ans, revolutionnaire - depuis canaille!" (Up to 30, a revolutionary - after that, a swine). And what a parade of swine was shown to us last Saturday night!

Twenty years later, they all agree wholeheartedly that the miners' strike was a waste of time. That is the common view of former "left" students, as well as former (and current) Tory ones. As at the close of George Orwell's *Animal Farm*, one could not distinguish the humans from the pigs. "Oh yes, we are all pigs now! And very contented ones, too."

Particularly disgusting was the (mercifully brief) appearance of that clapped-out "comedian" Alexei Sayle, now sunk in a well-deserved oblivion, but who previously gave himself airs as a "left" (complete with Liverpool accent). Now he informs us that, at the time of the miners' strike, "people were fed up with workers going on strike". Having inserted their snouts firmly in the pig-sty, all these creatures are fighting to defend their vested interests, their grubstake, their meal ticket. If that means trampling underfoot the ideas and principles of a misspent youth, then so be it!

You see, the "Thatcher revolution" was all going splendidly: out of date factories were being closed, wasteful social spending on unnecessary items like schools, hospitals and unemployment benefit was being trimmed back, and



Yes, Britain was at war at that time - and the makers of the programme made no secret of which side they were on in that war. They found time to interview all manner of middle class nonentities, former students, who (surprise, surprise) in their comfortable old age, have suddenly discovered the joys of the free market economy and can permit themselves the luxury of spitting on their own radical past.

a climate was being created in which the enterprise culture could flourish, so that the new class of yuppies could spread their wings like beautiful butterflies. And then, to spoil it all "in the midst of it all came the miners' strike".

In this conflict, the ruling class mobilised the full force of the state to crush the strike. Rarely in British history has such brutality been used against the Labour Movement. The programme is compelled to show just a small part of the monstrous state terrorism used to defeat the strike, the curtailment of democratic rights that people in Britain used to regard as normal. But the aim of the programme was to minimise and trivialise the state repression. The following comment sums this up:

"Extreme tactics were adopted by each side, and the early confrontations and skirmishes soon began to escalate, culminating in the violent, pitched battles of Nottinghamshire and Yorkshire." (our emphasis)

This is the usual trick of lying hypocrites: to say that violence was used but it was used by both sides. This is cheap sophistry. The forces of the British state are vast. The whole might of this repressive apparatus was mobilized to intimidate, harass and provoke the miners. The latter, as we have said, were engaged in a defensive action to protect the livelihood of their families. In this struggle, all the cards were stacked against them. That there were some elements of violence was inevitable. But that was nothing compared to the vicious, planned and deliberate repression of the state, where whole mining villages were occupied by police drafted in from other areas like a foreign occupation force. The mass arrests, the beatings and the repression of whole communities - none of this is clearly



expressed in this programme.

The viciousness of the police - especially the hired thugs of the London Metropolitan Police (the "Met") who were sent north to fight the miners - was expressed by Scargill's former wife, who explains how the miners and their wives were surrounded by the police and pushed into a small circle from which it was impossible to escape. "They were very nasty to us," she recalled, "though we were not nasty to them."

National police force

The government could not rely on the local police, who would have been sympathetic to the miners, and so, in effect, set up a kind of British FBI - a national police force, which was illegal. One of the most revealing parts of the programme was when it showed interviews of officers of the Met, who openly displayed their arrogant attitude to the miners and their communities. They spoke with contempt of the North, as if it was a foreign country they had been sent to occupy. The attitude of these latter-day Praetorian guards was instructive. One of them - a sergeant - gloated about the

huge amounts of money he earned for this dirty work: he was able to buy a flat, "a better car", and holidays in Spain - and all for cracking a few heads up north - money for old rope!

From a Marxist point of view, the real value of a strike lies in the lessons the workers draw from it. The miners were defeated, but for those who passed through this gigantic school of the class struggler, the lessons will be forever burnt on their consciousness. Those workers will never forget the cold ruthlessness of the ruling class and the Tories. They will regard with disgust the admiration of Thatcher expressed by Tony Blair. They will remember the conduct of the police, the judiciary, the press and the other supposedly "impartial" agents of the capitalist state that stood exposed so glaringly in the light of the struggle.

After 20 years the lessons of the miners strike have still to be fully digested by the British Labour Movement. As time goes on, memories fade and lessons forgotten. It is therefore all the more necessary to remind ourselves - and remind others - of the real lessons of this titanic class battle. In war, and in the

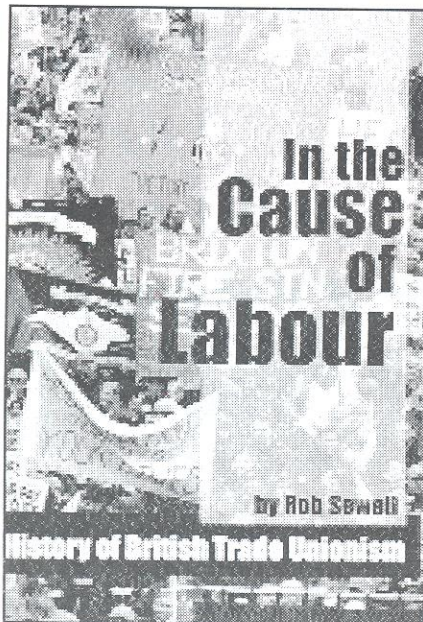
class struggle, it is better to fight and be defeated than to slink away from the struggle and surrender ignominiously. The miners fought with the greatest heroism. They lost, but that was not their fault. In the moment of truth they were left in the lurch by the leaders of the TUC and Labour Party. The whole working class paid a heavy price for that betrayal.

Now, 20 years later, the likes of Neil Kinnock crawl out of the woodwork to spread their little bit of poison over the memory of the miners strike and thus cover up their own betrayal. The British working class has no time for people whose only interest in the Labour Movement is as a vehicle of personal advancement and lucrative jobs in Brussels while the entire South Wales coalfield - like the other coalfields of Britain - has been shut down throwing thousands onto the scrapheap. Neil Kinnock ought to hang his head in shame, but we doubt if he even knows the meaning of the word.

For our part, we celebrate the memory of this extraordinary class battle, which is a shining example to the new generation of workers. Yes, Britain was at war, and the war has not ended. The miners' strike was just another battle in this war. There will be other - even more decisive - battles in the future. The enemies of the working class wish to bury the memory of the miners' strike so that the new generation will not learn anything from it. The Marxists - who played an active part in the miners' strike - will not allow this to happen. Against all the lies, distortion and venom, we will defend the memory of this epic struggle and pass on the great lessons to the new generation that is destined to carry on the fight to a victorious conclusion. □

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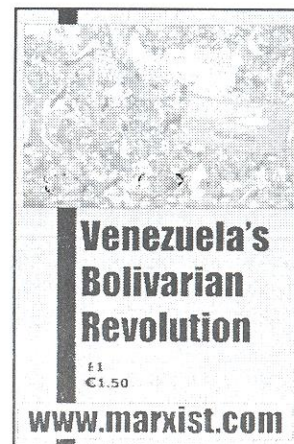
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- ✚ **Full employment!** No redundancies. The right to a job or decent benefits. For a 32 hour week without loss of pay. No compulsory overtime. For voluntary retirement at 55 with a decent full pension for all.
- ✚ **No more sell offs.** Reverse the Tories privatisation scandal. Renationalise all the privatised industries and utilities under democratic workers control and management. No compensation for the fat cats, only those in genuine need.
- ✚ **The repeal of all Tory anti-union laws.** Full employment rights for all from day one. For the right to strike, the right to union representation and collective bargaining. Election of all trade union officials with the right of recall. No official to receive more than the wage of a skilled worker.
- ✚ **Action to protect our environment.** Only public ownership of the land, and major industries, petro-chemical enterprises, food companies, energy and transport, can form the basis of a genuine socialist approach to the environment.
- ✚ **A fully funded and fully comprehensive education system under local democratic control.** Keep big business out of our schools and colleges. Free access for all to further and higher education. Scrap tuition fees. No to student loans. For a living grant for all over 16 in education or training.
- ✚ **The outlawing of all forms of discrimination.** Equal pay

- for equal work. Invest in quality childcare facilities available to all. Scrap all racist immigration and asylum controls. Abolish the Criminal Justice Act.
- ✚ **The reversal of the Tories' cuts in the health service.** Abolish private health care. For a National Health Service, free to all at the point of need, based on the nationalisation of the big drug companies that squeeze their profits out of the health of working people.
- ✚ **Reclaim the Labour Party!** Defeat Blairism! Fight for Party democracy and socialist policies. For workers' MPs on workers' wages.
- ✚ **The abolition of the monarchy and the House of Lords.** Full economic powers for the Scottish Parliament and the Welsh Assembly, enabling them to introduce socialist measures in the interests of working people.
- ✚ **No to sectarianism.** For a Socialist United Ireland linked by a voluntary federation to a Socialist Britain.
- ✚ **Break with the anarchy of the capitalist free market.** Labour to immediately take over the "commanding heights of the economy." Nationalise the big monopolies, banks and financial institutions that dominate our lives. Compensation to be paid only on the basis of need. All nationalised enterprises to be run under workers control and management and integrated through a democratic socialist plan of production.
- ✚ **Socialist internationalism.** No to the bosses European Union. Yes to a socialist united states of Europe, as part of a world socialist federation.



Socialist Appeal

Marxist voice of the labour movement

Unions must fight Blair

ON FEBRUARY 6th RMT delegates will meet in Glasgow to decide the fate of the union's affiliation to the Labour Party. The decision was taken at last year's conference to allow RMT branches to support other political organisations. In line with this five branches in Scotland have decided to affiliate to the Scottish Socialist Party. This has brought the union into conflict with the rules of Labour Party and if upheld by the union EC will lead to the union's expulsion from the party. This disaffiliation by the backdoor would be a disaster for RMT members and the labour movement.

The RMT was one of the original unions to found the Labour Party; it was an ASRS (a forerunner of the RMT) delegate who put forward the original motion to the TUC in 1899. The unions created the Labour Party and they remain two wings of the same movement.

From the 1980s until very recently the leadership of the labour movement was in the hands of the extreme right-wing. Using their block votes at conference and through their positions on the Labour Party NEC they pushed through the 'pragmatic' policies that Blair has come to represent: class-collaboration, partnership and privatisations of

public services. Blairism began at the tops of the unions before Blair was even heard of.

In spite of this the majority of activists did not split away but stayed in the unions in order to fight their corner and this is now beginning to bear fruit. This has been expressed in the rise in ballots for industrial action, and the election of left-wingers in a whole series of trade union elections.

The Labour win in 1997 was a victory for the working class and the millions of trade unionist who voted and campaigned for it. The overwhelming majority of the population decisively rejected Tory policies - but what we chucked out the front door sneaked in again through the back. Since coming to power the Blairite leadership of the party has continued the Tory attacks. Over the past few years there has been an increasing build up of anger and frustration among the working class with the Labour government.

A number of left activists are now raising the question of whether the unions should begin supporting other political parties. This is an understandable reaction to the years of attacks from the Labour government.

The current proposal by

several branches to affiliate to the Scottish Socialist Party is dangerous because it will play into the hands of the right-wing in the Labour Party. They will have the perfect opportunity to expel the RMT and leave the vast majority of members without any political voice whether they like it or not. On such an important and decisive question the decision should go to a national ballot of RMT members.

Support for the SSP can also have a divisive role in reinforcing nationalist aspirations when the main task before English, Welsh, Irish and Scottish workers together is the fight against the British bosses who are not split on national lines.

It has been said that the union would consider supporting other groups like the Liberals, the Greens, and even Plaid Cymru in Wales. This would be turning the clock back 100 years, supporting any dribs and drabs who claim to support us one minute and turn on us the next.

It would be a mistake to support any party in which we have no democratic control. The mechanisms exist within the labour movement for the unions to reassert control over the party, we should not be

silent partners, neither should we walk away without a fight.

Now is the time to get stuck in. There has been talk for a long time about reclaiming the party but not a lot of action on the part of the unions. The RMT could champion this cause, raising the need to reassert a political voice and pointing out practically how it can be done.

Last years Labour Party conference was a demonstration of what the unions can do when they coordinate their activities. The big 4 unions in Britain made conference hell for the party leadership. Not only did they set the agenda but they also had the clout to get all their motions through without much opposition wielding 40% of the vote between them.

The changes taking place in the movement are clearing out the old rubbish. This process has become quite advanced in the unions that have been steadily moving to the left for the last years. We are beginning to make members interests heard again industrially, the task now is to take our struggle and policies back into the Labour Party. Only a Labour government with socialist policies can solve the problems of the British working class.

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