

Militant International Review

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Is socialism relevant to lesbian & gay

liberation?

***Labour after Clause 4; Mexico;
South Africa; Miners' Strike***

Militant International Review

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Blair's 'New Labour'

The 29 April conference which abolished the old Clause 4 marks a turning point in the evolution of the Labour Party. Will it end up as a capitalist party like the US Democrats, and how should socialists respond? Page 8.

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Big Sister still haunts Major.

Tory meltdown threatens splits

THE WIDELY PREDICTED Tory meltdown in the local elections duly occurred, with the Conservatives nearly completely expelled from power in local government. The repercussions of this, and the disaster of the Perth and Kinross by-election, threaten to tear the party apart; almost daily there are new rebellions, scandals and rows.

The tensions inside the Tory Party now resemble a bar room scene in a Western, where one punch could instantly trigger a brawl. According to the *Financial Times* (May 6): "On the Conservative backbenches at Westminster faction fighting has become a way of life. The militant mindset is as much in evidence on the right of the Tory Party... as it was on the left of the Labour Party in the early 1980s. It may be too late to apply the rules of

rational behaviour to the Conservative Party".

The flag of insurrection has been raised in Scotland. Five senior Scottish Tories from Cathcart have launched a ten-point survival plan which includes repudiating most Tory policies. They call for a cabinet reshuffle, a referendum on the 'constitutional question', and for the Scottish Conservative Party to have a more independent relationship with the English and Welsh Tories, possibly even akin to that enjoyed by the Ulster Unionists.

This is an extremely important development. It shows that the Scottish national question divides every establishment party. For defence secretary Malcolm Rifkind to say he sees 'nothing wrong in principle' with devolution shows how this issue could further divide the Tories' ranks.

Anatole Kaletsky, deputy editor of *The Times*, believes that after a Tory defeat at the next election, the sup-

porters of treasury secretary Michael Portillo will take over and shift the party to the right. He speculates that this could lead to a split (like the SDP split from Labour in the early 1980s) and the emergence of a 'CDP', a Christian Democratic Party, with Ken Clarke as its leader. Such speculation is no longer wild fantasy.

Tory ideological divisions are reflected in the quandary of the party's MEPs about which European parliamentary group to join. They are currently associate members of the European People's Party group - dominated by the German Christian Democratic Union. Alternatively they could go over to a more Eurosceptical group, involving Jacques Chirac's Gaullists, Berlusconi's Forza Italia group and up to 19 independent anti-Maastricht MEPs. Or they may not all join the same group!

Back at Westminster, the return of the Euro-rebels who had the whip withdrawn was hardly a harmonious reunion. One of their number,

Nicholas Budgen, said he was prepared to go back with some penance, "as a prelude to a period of silence". But he observed that most of his co-thinkers "marched back in full uniform, with bayonets at the ready and with a round up the spout".

Why are the Tories in such a mess, when the economy appears to be enjoying at least slow growth?

Despite the 1992 election victory, the Tories have never recovered from Thatcher's legacy. Her rise to ascendancy in the Tory Party was itself a reflection of the long-term crisis of British capitalism and the consequent divisions in the ruling class, which she only temporarily succeeded in papering over. But in doing so she accumulated such presidential-style powers that she threatened to get totally out of control.

Consequently, as her memoirs make clear, as early as April 1990 she was approached by the 'men in grey suits' (in the form of Lord Carrington) to stand down. She refused and therefore had to be removed in a public showdown seven months later. This brought the different tendencies in the Tory Party into the open as never before - where they have remained.

On the one hand former Times editor William Rees-Mogg, arguing for Peter Lilley to be Chancellor, advances the US Republican leader Newt Gingrich as the model for the right. A number of Tory MPs are rushing into print with their own right-wing agendas, looking to a Gingrich-type recovery after Tony Blair - Britain's Clinton - is elected. Others worry that right-wing populism could pave the way for left-wing populism.

The Times has reported on one right-wing document currently doing the rounds among Tory MPs. Its proposals include: cutting income tax to 10% by slashing public spending; ending capital gains taxes; compelling those unemployed for more than six months to take jobs provided by charities at just above benefit level; abolishing the motorway police so more resources can be concentrated on 'fighting crime'; and education to emphasise British culture "with an avowed aim to 'Briticise' immigrant communities".

A populist, nationalist movement

could still emerge, based on these ravings, out of the wreckage of the Tories after the general election.

However, a radically different realignment among the Tories could also take place. Ex-minister John Patten's book *Things to Come* applauds "the benefits of regulated capitalism". He also argues that, "if we have electoral reform, it's very hard to imagine a Conservative government for the next 20-30 years". Patten is clearly addressing the situation that may come to exist under Labour, with Tony Blair promising a referendum on electoral reform.

Lord Gilmour, once a key Tory thinker, gave a remarkable interview in the *New Statesman* (May 12) which goes much further. Asking what happened to the 'One-Nation Tory Party', he argues that "in the Conservative Party at present it seems to be largely dormant. But I hope it's going to be resurrected in New Labour... we do need a 'One-Nation Tory Party', and if the Conservative Party isn't going to be it, let's have the Labour Party as it... The idea that the two main parties should be far apart is complete nonsense in my view. And the notion that the Conservative response to Blair should be a move further to the right is quite mad".

These are the terms of the on-going Tory civil war. An open Tory split has become a real possibility, with a Scottish split highest on the agenda. The most significant and far-reaching moves, however, are likely after an election, with popes and anti-popes competing for the mantle.

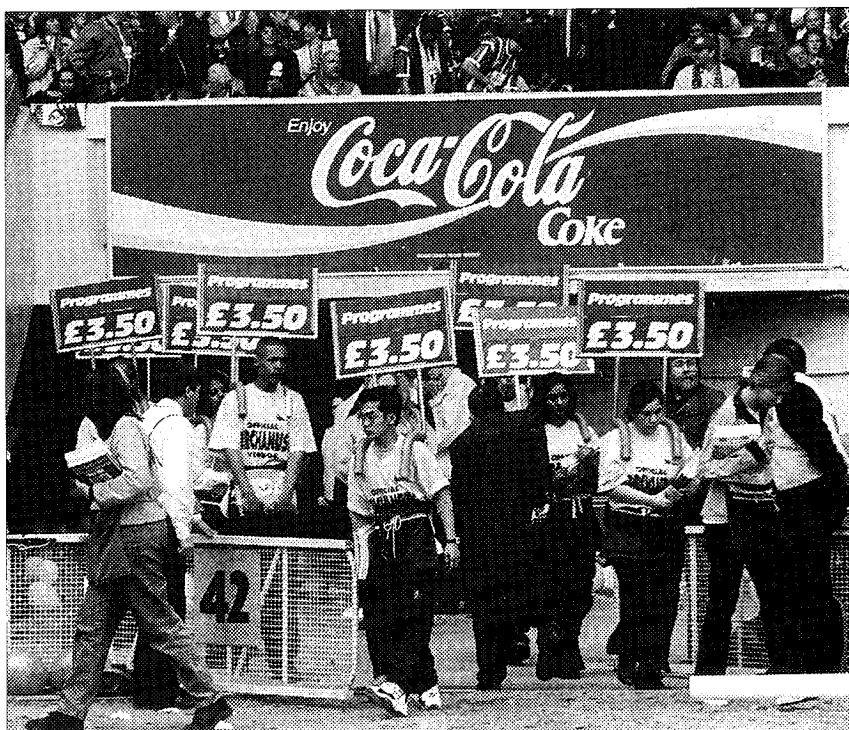
A fundamental re-alignment of the party system is no longer a remote possibility; future conditions of severe economic crisis could bring a '1931' in reverse with a section of the Tories coming over to a 'national' government.

An earthquake, that will effect the political landscape of all parties, has begun to rumble.

Mike Waddington

Whose game is it anyway?

THE 1994-95 FOOTBALL season will go down as one punctuated by constant scandals about sleaze and backhanders, 'bungs' to managers, the bizarrely over-hyped Cantona affair and the infiltration of fascists into football 'firms' - culminating with the Dublin riot, orchestrated by Combat 18 and the BNP.



Merchandising fortunes made by clubs.

While Tory ministers and moralists of every stripe, most of whom know little or nothing of the game, were quick to sermonise about Eric Cantona, there are two real issues facing the millions of fans. First, the structure of the game and its increasing subordination to the interests of big business at the expense of the fans; and second, racism on the terraces and its use by the fascist hooligans.

The Dublin riot was an organised affair, pre-planned by Combat 18, the National Front and the BNP. yet, while there are dangers in their influence in certain clubs, the vast majority of fans reject them. Leafletters from Youth Against Racism in Europe (YRE) outside the Uruguay international at Wembley, just three weeks after the Dublin match, got an excellent response. In 1996 fascist groups may try to use the European championships in England to raise their heads again: they will get a hot reception from YRE and other anti-fascists.

But the main story in British football is how it is being transformed, like other major sports, by big business interests. This, like the drama overtaking Rugby League, is intimately connected with the growing multi-billion world media empires owned by the likes of Rupert Murdoch. 'Bungs' and sleaze are the inevitable consequence of the millions now slushing around the major clubs, in part from the huge fees paid by the media magnates.

As explained in the Militant Labour pamphlet *Reclaim the Game*, at the turn of the century soccer was a cheap form of entertainment accessible to the working class, and generally regarded with indifference by the ruling class - unless they thought it was a harmless way for workers to let off steam. Today it is big business, for two groups of people.

First for the clubs, and the rich businessmen behind them. With all-seater grounds, admission prices have gone through the roof. Cheapest seats are around £10-15. Thousands of school students, low-paid, pensioners and unemployed have been priced out of football. Large parts of the stadiums - as in cricket - are given over to hospitality boxes for firms and the super-rich. The working class are

being cleansed from the grounds. Merchandising is another money spinner, with club shirts (most have three different strips) costing up to £40.

With many poorer people unable to afford the live game, TV is the way to see their favourite teams. Except, of course, that to watch the Premier League, you need the Sky sports channel (about £20 a month in addition to what you've paid for your dish, rental for standard channels etc). Murdoch's empire incidentally now controls much of televised cricket: as *The Independent's* Matthew de Lyle recently pointed out, only Sky viewers have ever had the chance to see Brian Lara, the world's best batsman, on TV. Rugby League and Union are well on the way to similar deals.

So the money pours into Sky and similar channels, and part of that money pours into major clubs - to add to the inflated gate receipts and merchandising sales. Now the game is increasingly dominated by sharks at the expense of the fans. And not unnaturally, the slush funds evade the Inland Revenue.

The key question is whether the fans will fight back, as they did against identity cards. Militant Labour will be keeping you informed.

John Reid

Swedish Blairism

THE FIRST EIGHT months of the Swedish Social Democratic government, elected in September 1994, provide a living example of what can be expected from a Blair-led Labour government.

The September elections produced the biggest swing to the left since the 1930s. The vote for the Social Democrats (SAP) rose from 37.7% in 1991 to 45.3% and the Left Party, the former Communist Party, achieved its best result for 40 years. Yet, with the latest round of cuts announced in April, the Social Democrats have now gone further than the previous conservative coalition government in dismantling the Swedish welfare state.

Before the election the Social Democratic leaders made it clear that there was no way back to the SAP's old policy of social reforms and job

security - the 'Swedish model' held up in the past by Labour and Social Democratic leaders internationally as the 'third way' between unrestrained free-market capitalism and Marxism. A detailed package of £5.15bn cuts and tax increases was 'promised', while the prospective finance minister announced the clear intent of a SAP government to put the capitalists' interests first when he dismissed trade unions as "one interest group amongst others" - in a country where nearly 90% of the workforce are unionised!

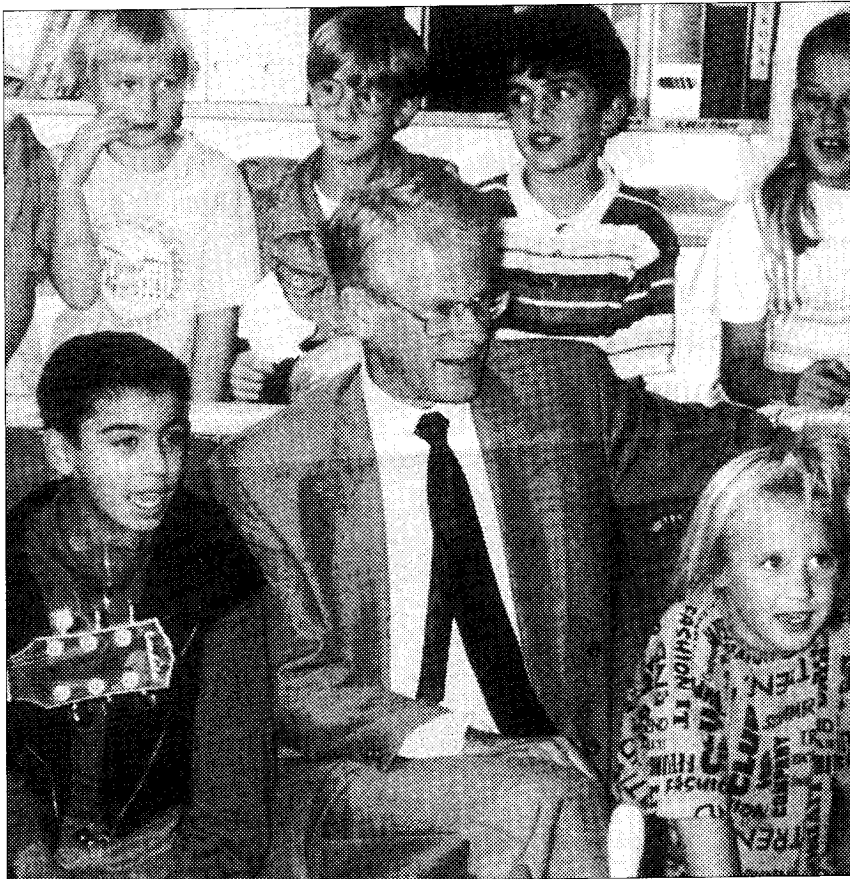
However, the election result had to be seen against the background of three years of devastating cuts and rising unemployment. During the economic crisis of 1991-93 unemployment rose from 2% to 13%. GDP fell by 5% and industrial output by 13%. This underpinned the revolt against the right.

The Social Democrats' victory did not, however, bring any respite. On taking office they immediately launched a package of cuts and tax increases - the same policy as their conservative forerunners of squeezing the workers and reducing public spending to restore profits and make industry 'competitive'.

This was followed by a campaign by the whole establishment for a Yes vote in the European Union (EU) referendum in November 1994. With the help of the Social Democrats the ruling class was able to secure a narrow victory for entry into the EU. However, the 'No' campaign got its biggest support in traditional Social Democratic strongholds, in the north and in industrial areas such as the middle of Sweden. This was a clear indication of a growing scepticism towards the government, just two months after the election.

The EU referendum together with the January budget and the April cuts package, the fourth round of cuts and tax increases since September, marked a historic turning point for the Swedish labour movement. Child allowances and student grants have been reduced for the first time ever. Sick pay, paternity leave, unemployment benefit and work injuries pay have been cut. Using Thatcher as an example the Social Democrats have

NUS grants fight



Swedish prime minister Ingvar Carlsson.

passed legislation setting annual cash limits for the entire public sector and a new law forbids local councils from borrowing to finance daily running expenses.

The SAP's manifesto 'promised' £5.15bn cuts. In fact, the government has outlined spending cuts of £11.1bn (around 8% of GDP) up to 1998 - "the biggest cleaning-up programme ever mounted in Europe", according to the Swedish finance minister.

But even this, equivalent to cuts of £48bn in Britain, will not satisfy the 'market'. The capitalists want more cuts and, if necessary, a coalition 'strong' government that can implement 'tougher measures'. If a new run against Sweden's currency (the Krona) takes place before Summer and long-term interest rates do not fall, there will certainly be new cuts and new steps towards a coalition, probably with the Centre Party.

This will be another twist in the deepening divide between union activists and the SAP leadership.

On May Day workers in the northern town of Lulea, for example,

refused to march with the Social Democrats, organising instead their own march which was much bigger than the 'official' demonstration.

One Metal Workers' Union leader there commented: "The relation of forces has changed in the party... it is not possible for us to have a decisive influence anymore".

Middle class elements now dominate the SAP on all levels after the abolition of collective affiliation from the unions in 1990. Some union activists are discussing the need for a new party, just eight months into the new government.

The Social Democrats are now down to 34% in the opinion polls as their pro-market policies hit home. Overall, the austerity measures will cause a 5% drop in living standards and cut more than 50,000 jobs in the public sector. The battle lines are being drawn - workers are prepared to defend the welfare state and secure jobs and the rest of the '90s in Sweden will be shaped by this struggle.

Per Olsson

THE NATIONAL UNION of Students (NUS) could be on the verge of abandoning the fight for a living grant and adopting support for tuition fees and graduate tax. The Labour-led executive has called a special conference on 30 May to force through the change. The rapidity of the shift away from a policy demanding a free education with a living grant for all students has surprised many student activists.

That any group except for the Tories would have openly supported a graduate tax would have been unthinkable as little as a year ago. Previous debates inside NUS have always revolved around the question of the tactics required to win increased grants for students. The present Labour leaders of NUS were themselves elected on a platform of opposition to tuition fees and graduate tax. One of their leaflets for the 1994 executive elections opposed fees as "no more than an educational poll tax which will slam the door of access firmly in our face".

The prospect of NUS abandoning the fight for a free education is in sharp contrast to France, Sweden and other European countries where students have taken to the streets to oppose government attacks. The question has to be asked why British students have not reacted in a similar way as other European students?

One reason has been the absence of sustained moves by the trade unions to confront the Tories, which has had a knock-on affect among students. They have not felt confident of being able to defeat the government over issues such as student poverty and education cuts.

Another reason has been the role of the NUS leadership. The move to the right of the Labour and trade union leaders has been reflected in NUS. Increasingly the Labour leadership of NUS have acted as an obstacle to any movement of students against the Tories.

The most stark example took place in the winter of 1993 when chancellor Kenneth Clarke announced plans to cut student grants by 30% over three

years. The NUS leadership condemned the cuts but refused to organise any national action. When a group of student unions organised an unofficial demonstration in London they were attacked by the NUS leaders. They sent letters to every college warning students not to take part, claiming that the march would end in a riot because one of the organisers had a public order conviction.

Such actions have reinforced the lack of confidence among students in their ability to take on the Tories. However locally students have fought against attacks from college management on issues such as course cuts and timetable changes and, in the past year, there have been successful rent strikes at Leeds and Bradford universities. Students have also been part of the general radicalisation of youth, reflected in their involvement in single-issue campaigns such as road protests and the anti-CJA campaign, as well as in membership of groups like Greenpeace and Friends of the Earth. If NUS was to give a national lead on the issue of student poverty they could overcome the lack of confidence that does exist and spark a movement against the Tories education policies. But also the prospect of the Tories being removed from office within the next 18 months or so will increase the combativity of students.

That is why the present Labour leaders of NUS are now trying to make the union 'safe' for a future Blair government. An incoming Labour government will face the same dilemma on higher education as the Tories: how to provide the educated workers needed by industry when both big business and the state are unwilling to foot the bill. Labour's solution is the same as the Tories' - make students pay. Their proposals, set out in last year's Commission on Social Justice report, include the replacement of grants with increased loans, tuition fees and graduate tax. The NUS leaders want to try and make sure that students don't oppose these plans.

In doing so, they have adopted the arguments of the Tories and the capitalist press: education must expand but the government cannot possibly afford to pay for all those who want to

go to university, so students should pay their share. But if you accept that students should make up the shortfall in university funding then why shouldn't parents do the same for school budgets? Indeed, the Tories are already going down this road with

donment by the Labour Party leaders and their echos in NUS is a historic sell out - another example of what Tony Blair's open adoption of the capitalist 'market economy' means.

Rebecca Gray, Labour Students' national secretary, spoke at the

Labour Party's special conference in praise of Tony Blair's 'radicalism' in dumping Clause Four. Similarly, NUS president Jim Murphy, has also tried to dress up the sell-out over grants with radical language. "The education system remains under-populated by those from lower socio-economic backgrounds" (ie the working class) he argued in *The Guardian*. NUS, therefore, "must have as its core motivation the creation of an educational world which educates citizens regardless of their financial background" (18 April). But the experience of Scandinavia and Australia shows that tuition fees and graduate tax will have the opposite effect and exclude working class people from university. NUS used these very examples to oppose student loans in 1988!

The NUS executive's sell-out will be a green light for the forthcoming government review of higher education funding to recommend another attack on student grants. We now have a situation where sooner or later either the Tories or an incoming Labour government will abolish free univer-



their proposals for vouchers for pre-school education.

The ideal of free education has been fought for by the labour movement from when the Chartists first took up the demand in 1851. Its aban-

sity education and bring in fees and a graduate tax. But while the leaders of NUS may be prepared to accept this without a fight, it is unlikely that ordinary students will do the same.

Martin Milne

Militant Labour launches new magazine -

Socialism Today

THIS WILL be the last issue of *Militant International Review* after 26 years of publication. *MIR* will be replaced in September with a new monthly magazine, *Socialism Today* - an important step forward for Militant Labour, allowing us to deepen discussion on the theoretical, analytical and strategic questions facing socialists today.

This is a vital and urgent task. The past decade has been a period of accelerating social and political change worldwide. The collapse of Stalinism - 'explained' by capitalist politicians and their echos in the labour movement as the 'end of socialism' - opened up a new historical era. The world order which emerged from the second world war has been radically transformed. Yet events in the first half of the '90s have shown that the ideas of genuine socialism - not its Stalinist caricature - are more relevant than ever.

While the restoration of capitalism in the ex-USSR and eastern Europe has brought with it new wars, mass poverty and ethnic conflicts, the advanced capitalist countries have miserably failed to emerge from their long-term crisis - dragging huge sections of the 'third world' into anarchy and collapse. Working people internationally have been the victims of successive waves of attack, bringing in their wake not just major changes to capitalist institutions, but also recomposing the working class itself.

These changes have shaken up the labour movement in country after country. The Stalinist parties have either collapsed or been gravely weakened, while the Labour and Social Democratic parties internationally have prostrated themselves before free market ideology - none more so than Tony Blair's 'New Labour'. On the other hand, significant new formations have emerged internationally: in Europe, for example, the Party of Democratic Socialism in Germany; the United Left in Spain and the Party of Communist Refoundation in Italy.

In such circumstances the ideological defence of Marxism, of genuine socialism, could not be more urgent: not just the defence of fundamentals like social ownership, but also an analysis of new developments, social, economic and political, cultural and scientific. The name of our new magazine, *Socialism Today*, summarises this task - to apply socialist ideas afresh to today's new world.

Many workers and young people who are disgusted and outraged by Tory Britain and have no confidence in Tony Blair's New Labour, can be won to the socialist alternative in this period. The tens of thousands of people who voted for Militant Labour and Scottish Militant Labour in the recent local elections are proof of that. Our newspaper *Militant*, sold weekly in workplaces, the labour movement, council estates and on the streets, is the indispensable tool

for reaching out to these new forces. A monthly magazine, alongside the *Militant*, will be able to go into more detail and deepen the analysis contained in our paper.

In an era of sweeping global change, developing socialist theory is not a simple matter. It means debate, serious research and an openness to new ideas. We want a magazine which is useful to all those who continue to stand up for socialism. Our readers can help by sending us their ideas and comments, and of course by helping us to extend our circulation.

Most of all our supporters and sympathisers can help us by taking out a subscription to *Socialism Today*, to meet the launch costs of the new magazine. A subscription will also be the best way to get your copy of *Socialism Today*. Subscribers will be sent their copy as soon as the magazine comes off the press, with dispatch priority, and will save money - the cover price of *Socialism Today* will be £1.50 while a yearly subscription (10 issues) costs just £13. So please write to us today and help us get off to a flying start.

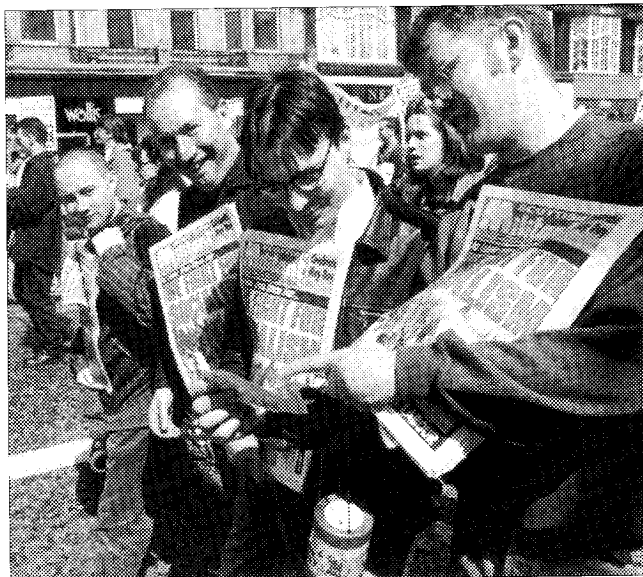
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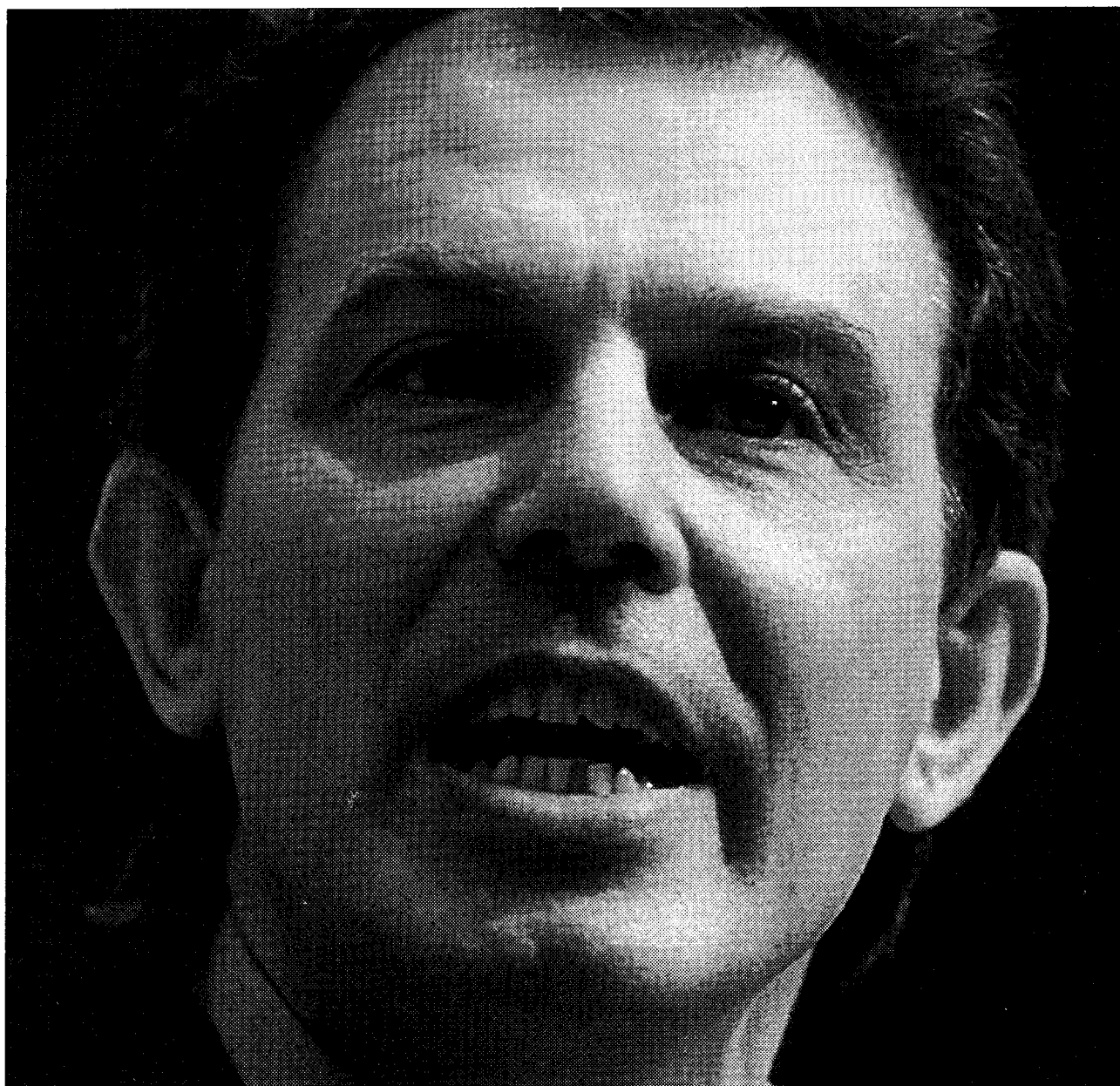
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Will Blair create an openly capitalist party?

Labour after Clause Four

*Has the abandonment of Clause Four fundamentally altered the character of the Labour Party as the mass 'political expression' of the British working class? If a qualitative change has not yet taken place, will this not inevitably be the case in the future? Moreover, if such a development should come to pass, does this not pose the need in Britain for the creation of a new mass socialist force, the ground for which must be prepared now? **Peter Taaffe** examines the questions posed by the outcome of the Labour Party special conference.*

IN ADVANCE OF the conference some commentators were clear about what was happening: "What we shall see this afternoon is the collapse of Labour as the party of organised labour" (Martin Kettle, *The Guardian*, 29 April 1995). Not just at the conference itself, with the crushing majorities for the right wing, but in the days that followed, the Labour leadership did everything to prove Martin Kettle right.

Blair indicated that the union vote at party conferences would probably be reduced to 50% before the general election. In fact this has already been agreed in principle. Privately Blair and his entourage of 'gilded youth' have flagged their intention of eliminating completely organised trade union influence in the party.

Alongside of this is the open embrace of the 'market', of capitalism. This was brazenly expressed by shadow chancellor Gordon Brown in the *Evening Standard* on the eve of the special conference. In language worthy of any Tory leader, Brown wrote: "The Labour Party is now the party of law and order in Britain... The Labour Party is now the party of modern business and industry in Britain... For the first time... the Labour Party has set down its commitment to a market economy, to living with the rigours of competition, and to nurture enterprise... now with our clear statement of aims, no-one can ever again question our commitment to a healthy and successful private sector, or to competition and enterprise".

Brown went further after the abandonment of Clause Four: "A Labour government will be very tough on public spending... takeovers can be very healthy for the economy, they can be a spur to inefficient management". It's no wonder then that the *Financial Times* jeeringly comments about "Labour's love of the market... Even a year ago, it would have been unthinkable for Gordon Brown, the shadow chancellor, to give the speech he delivered yesterday".

This has to be taken together with Blair's opposition to such a basic question as the re-nationalisation of utilities. On this issue the Labour leadership are more conservative than some on the right in France. One of Chirac's leading advisors, prior to the presidential elections, supported in an interview in the *Financial Times* the re-nationalisation of water. The timorous Labour leadership are not even prepared to promise re-nationalisation of the railways, if the government should proceed with privatisation.

The present evolution of the Labour right in Britain is a guarantee of corruption on the scale of Spain or France in the event of them coming to power.

The terror of promising anything before coming to power is taken to absurd lengths. When the recent financial crisis involving derivatives broke, so terrified were Labour's economic spokespersons of seeming to threaten action against the 'market', that they refused to appear on television to discuss the issue. This resulted in Dave Nellist, ex-Labour MP and Militant Labour spokesperson, appearing on a *Newsnight* programme and very effectively presenting the socialist case on the issue.

Notwithstanding this, Labour's membership, according to Blair, has increased by 100,000 over the last twelve months, standing now at something like 320,000. Half of the present membership, according to Gordon Brown in the *Evening Standard*, has joined since 1992. This actually shows the rapid turnover in Labour Party membership, with workers leaving in disgust at the policies of the right and being replaced by a largely petit-bourgeois 'Blair levy'. These new members, overwhelmingly middle class in origin, manipulated by loaded postal ballots, have been the raw mass used to still the voice of the few socialist workers left in the Labour Party.

LABOUR ENJOYS A 50% to 30% lead over the Tories amongst the so-called A-B groups. This general support is paralleled by a layer of petit-bourgeois joining the party. A high proportion of careerists will have been drawn in, attracted by the lure of office, which would follow on the heels of a Labour victory. Similar developments have taken place in Labour and Socialist parties in Europe.

In Spain, for instance, the 'membership' of PSOE includes 40,000 state office holders, who have benefited from an extended period of PSOE government. With this has come inevitable corruption which has plagued not just PSOE, but the French, Belgian, Italian and other Socialist Parties.

The party leaders, and a big part of the ranks also, once having abandoned the great historical aim of socialism, have adapted themselves completely to capitalism. It was therefore only a matter of time before the leadership of these organisations drew the conclusion that they also, alongside the bourgeois politicians, should poke their snouts into the state feeding trough. If you accept capitalism, why not accept the moral code of that system, or the lack of it, and look after 'number one'?

The tendency towards careerism, inherent in all reformist organisations, was given a finished expression in the past in the phrase of a former left Labour MP: "I believe in the emancipation of the working class one by one, beginning with myself". If now the 'emancipation of the working class' is abandoned, the shackles will come off and then it is a scramble for each individual minister and party member to look after themselves first.

The present evolution of the Labour right in Britain is a guarantee of corruption on the scale of Spain or France in the event of them coming to power. Such a tendency will be reinforced by the determination of the leadership to free themselves even more from the irksome control of a conscious and organised rank and file in the trade unions.

It is true, as Lenin argued, that the Labour Party through its pro-capitalist leadership has always been a 'bourgeois' party. This has been pointed to in the past by every stripe of ultra-left sectarian in Britain as evidence that the Labour Party was a 'write-off'. However Lenin also emphasised that this was just one side of the Labour Party: through its trade union base in particular, it was also a working class party. From this source would come a limitless supply of workers who would move in and transform the party. *Militant* in the past based itself on this perspective.

Up to a point the British Labour Party was 'unique' in its

origins and in its relationship to the trade unions. The French and German parties had different origins without the same organic link between the unions and the mass party. The British Labour Party from its inception was to all intents and purposes a 'trade union' party. This proved to be a powerful impediment to the capitalists exercising decisive influence over the direction of the party. In office it was subject to the pressure of the unions and therefore could potentially endanger the interests of capitalism. It is for this reason that from its inception the bourgeoisie have attempted to break the link with the unions as well as remorselessly attacking Clause Four.

In 1931 the Labour government was broken because the trade unions refused to accept the draconian retrenchment policy of MacDonald. The bourgeoisie therefore opted to split the Labour Party with the formation of MacDonald's 'National Government'. In 1969 the Wilson government's attempt to introduce anti-trade union legislation, In Place of Strife, was defeated by colossal trade union pressure exerted on the Labour cabinet.

Both the capitalists and their right-wing echoes in the labour movement learn from history, as do Marxists. What if a left Labour government, led by the likes of Tony Benn, had come to power in Britain? Then the pressure of the working class through the unions could have pushed that government in the direction of challenging capitalism, as with Allende in Chile from 1970-73. It is for this reason that the ruling class have ceaselessly campaigned to break the Labour Party officially from the long-term aim of 'socialism' and to destroy the trade union link with Labour. They wish to establish a version of the US Democratic Party in Britain. Now they have succeeded in removing Clause Four.

THE DEFEAT OF Clause Four is a setback for the general struggle for socialism. Developments in Britain and internationally, as well as the internal decomposition of the Labour Party, have allowed the Labour right to succeed. The collapse of Stalinism and the ideological campaign against socialism which followed from this, the world economic upswing of the 1980s, the purging of *Militant* and others on the left from the Labour Party, have all contributed to the right's victory.

Jack Straw, writing in *The Independent*, gives a glimpse of some of the reasons why Gaitskell's attempt to eliminate Clause Four failed in 1959: "Partly he failed because many party members were still mesmerised by the alleged economic success of the Soviet Union. Speaking against Gaitskell's project, Aneurin Bevan said, 'I am a socialist. I believe in public ownership. The challenge is going to come from Russia... not from the United States, West Germany, (or) France'." The collapse of the planned economies, due to the crimes of the Stalinist elite, was utilised by the capitalist class to conduct its ideological offensive against socialism. This in turn has allowed the right to conduct its offensive against Clause Four and the trade union link.

Blair is quite conscious of the fact that his government will face opposition from the unions. This is why he must proceed quickly to further weaken their voice within the Labour Party, at the national conference and through changes in the composition of the National Executive

Committee, by stuffing it with right-wing local government representatives.

Will the union leaders accept further attacks on their influence? Will they swallow a fundamental alteration in the structures of the Labour Party? Some of the union leaders complained in the aftermath of April 29 about the 'Blair juggernaut' which rolled over them and the left at the special conference. However, it is likely that, while still complaining loudly about the methods of the right, they will accede to the right's proposals.

It can be objected that Britain is 'different'. But to emphasise at this stage the 'uniqueness' of the British Labour Party, given the developments of the past period, is an expression of 'British exceptionalism'.

Is it possible, in the light of these developments, that the Labour Party could end up in the same position as PSOE in Spain? Here is a party that was reborn in the 1970s as a 'Marxist' party. However, the Gonzales leadership has gone so far to the right that the socialist trade union federation, the UGT, some time ago detached itself and even refused to advocate a vote for PSOE in recent elections. PSOE still retains a residual electoral support particularly among older workers, although even that must have been severely shaken by the revelations of Gonzales's involvement with the state death squads against the Basque ETA terrorist organisation.

PSOE is probably already a 'bourgeois' party. It is not excluded that it could suffer the fate of the Italian Socialist Party which collapsed under the stench of corruption scandals. One thing is clear: it is unlikely that the movement of the working class, particularly in the initial phases, would be channelled through PSOE in the future. It is possible that the United Left (IU) will grow, developing into the main workers' party. It is also possible that the UGT could fuse into this organisation or on the other hand move in the direction of creating another socialist party.

Similar developments are possible in other countries. In Belgium the Socialist Party (SP) in Flanders, because of the corruption involving SP ministers, has lost some ground to the racist Vlaams Blok. Similar trends showing the increasing 'bourgeoisification' of the social democracy, and the consequent desertion of significant layers of workers and youth, are evident elsewhere.

In the French presidential elections most workers will have voted for the Socialist Party candidate, Jospin, 'holding their noses'. However, there was a significant section, reflected in the 1.6m votes for Lutte Ouvrière and the 2.6m votes for the Communist Party in the first round of the elections, who were looking for a socialist and revolutionary alternative. Many of these workers consciously abstained in the second round, unable to bring themselves to vote for a candidate, Jospin, who personified the betrayals of the Socialist Party in the period from 1981 until the right's victory in 1993.

Throughout Europe there is now a significant section of

workers and youth alienated from 'all politicians', but with a big layer looking for a socialist alternative. This has been reflected in Italy in the fortunes of the Refoundation Communist party (RC) with a 6% vote in the 1994 general election and 8.4% in this year's regional elections.

It can be objected that Britain is 'different'. Of course there are differences, in origins, traditions and in the rhythm of the movement, between the workers' movement in different countries in Europe. But to emphasise at this

stage the 'uniqueness' of the British Labour Party, given the developments of the past period, is an expression of 'British exceptionalism'.

This philosophy, much in vogue amongst bourgeois strategists in the past, could have a certain credibility at a time when British capitalism was a pre-eminent world economic power. But the shattering of British capitalism's previously privileged position means that Britain now displays all the same tensions, only in a more aggravated form, as the other countries of Western Europe. So also the labour movement in Britain is affected by the same trends evident throughout the workers' movement of Europe.

The 1980s saw a certain layering of the proletariat as well as a marked shift towards the right of the leadership of the main workers' organisation. This went hand in hand with the weakening of the left within these organisations. Changes are taking place, or rather are now in the process of doing so, which raise questions about the character of the Labour Party. All indications show that the Labour leadership is pushing in the direction of creating an openly 'liberal' bourgeois party.

THE FACT THAT Labour enjoys considerable electoral support is not the only, or even the decisive factor, in determining its relationship with the working class. Marxism has nothing in common with impressionism - a superficial view of temporary and empirical facts - but takes an all-rounded, dialectical view of processes. The abandonment of Clause Four and the weakening of the links with the unions are not developments of secondary importance. Yet even more decisive is the consciousness of the working class, or significant layers of the working class, towards the 'traditional' organisations.

The links with the unions could be broken in the future but this and the abandonment of Clause Four would not in and of themselves signify a decisive break in the link between the party and its working class base. After all the Socialist Party in France or the Social Democracy in Germany do not have these features. Yet Marxists still characterised these organisations at bottom as workers' organisations, because of their working class base and the consciousness of the working class. However, workers in both France and Germany are beginning to undergo a transformation in how they view these organisations.

In Britain significant layers of workers, particularly amongst the youth and in the inner-city areas, no longer automatically look towards the Labour Party as 'their' party. They perceive the Labour Party leaders, both nationally and particularly on a local level, as merely 'another party', incapable of offering any solution to their problems. This has gone to such an extent that bourgeois commentators, like Andrew Marr in *The Independent*, have warned the Labour leaders of going too far. He approves of the direction which Blair has taken: "Labour's internal polling confirms that its new supporters remain seriously worried about a revival of union militancy in the future. Therefore it is essential for New Labour to be unequivocally on the side of users and taxpayers - more consumers' association than workers' party".

At the same time, he warns, "Blair can dump the unions but not the poor... Labour cannot, should not, must not break with the millions of lower-paid and unemployed people



Blair has even dumped Kinnock's red rose.

ple who have partly looked to the trade union movement for their salvation. Someone must speak for them. Labour is not simply the party of Middle England and cannot ever be. There is another country, lower Britain, and it is a frightened and angry place". Significantly he adds that: "If Labour in power fails to offer it leadership and hope then... lower Britain would eventually turn elsewhere, perhaps to a period of militant syndicalism, perhaps to political dissent of a different kind".

By 'militant syndicalism' and 'political dissent' Marr is hinting that 'lower Britain' can be attracted by left and Marxist ideas. Yet a Blair Labour government is bound to disappoint the millions of poor, in the inner-cities in particular, if it remains within the framework of capitalism. And the fact that it will do so and therefore expects opposition is shown precisely in the fear by the right that trade union opposition will materialise very quickly after the coming to power of a Labour government.

It is for this reason that Blair is supporting Dromey in the Transport and General Workers Union general secretary elections against Bill Morris ('industrial de-selection'). This is a bid for that union to be placed in 'safe' hands, whose leadership will not articulate the future opposition to a right-wing Labour government.

NOTWITHSTANDING EVERYTHING ABOVE is it still not possible for the trade unions to enter the Labour Party and transform it in a leftward direction under the next Labour government? One could not rule out such a development. But there are powerful obstacles now set in place by the right wing which make such a process difficult, if not unlikely. The idea, mechanically repeated by some, that following a Blair-led Labour government the revolt of the working class will be automatically translated into a mass left current within the Labour Party, ignores the changes in the structures of the party and its relationship to the working class.

It also flies in face of recent historical experience. Left oppositions have grown usually as a reflex to the defeat of Labour in a general election. This was the case in the 1970-74 period which saw the emergence of Benn as a left leader for the first time following the Upper Clyde Shipbuilders occupation. Of course there had been signs of an emerging left-wing during the Labour government of 1964-70 but this only took on a significant form in the period of 1970-74. There was also some left opposition, although of a muted character, throughout the period of the 1974-79 Labour government. But a huge left-wing opposition only developed following the defeat of 1979.

In addition the channels which previously existed to change the Labour Party in a leftward direction have been dammed up by the right-wing's 'reforms'. In the past a resolution from a local Labour Party could become, through a conference discussion and debate, the policy of the party nationally. Indeed a resolution initiated from a ward in the Liverpool Wavertree constituency which opposed the five per cent limit on wages, was accepted at the 1978 Labour Party conference. This resolution, moved by a *Militant* supporter, gave the signal to Ford and other workers which in turn led to strikes and the 'Winter of Discontent'.

In other words the initiative at a ward in a local Labour Party helped to break the wages policy of the Labour gov-

ernment at that time and open the floodgates of industrial discontent.

Would working class opposition, inevitable under a Blair-led Labour government, now be channelled through the Labour Party? Or is it more likely to result in a split from the Labour Party? Militant Labour supports the coming to power of a Labour government, not because there will be a fundamental change in the policies pursued by that government compared to the Tories, but because it would lift the yoke of 16 years of Tory rule off the backs of the working class. It would release the pent-up frustrations which have built-up over this period. Moreover it would test out in action, and thus expose, Blair and the right-wing, which in turn would prepare the ground for the acceptance of genuine socialist and Marxist ideas in a mass form.

Would working class opposition, inevitable under a Blair-led Labour government, now be channelled through the Labour Party?

Most politically advanced workers entertain few illusions as to what a Labour government will mean. At best they hope for a more favourable, less hostile, framework within which to struggle. But they are already conscious, or half-conscious, of the fact that it will be down to the strength and combativity of workers in action, and not the actions of a Labour government, if the Tory attacks of the past are to be reversed and new conquests made. The issue of the minimum wage and the shorter working week, as well as the general issues of low pay, trade union rights etc, will quickly surface with pressure on Labour to take action. However, a Blair-led government will be like the present Social Democratic government in Sweden which from day one of its election victory last year has carried through vicious counter-reforms.

This could bring a Labour government into rapid conflict with the trade unions and the working class generally. But is it likely that workers will move into and begin to transform the party? It is more likely that the growing opposition will be reflected in demands for the unions to break with the increasingly bourgeois Labour Party leaders. While a certain movement back can not be ruled out completely, it is unlikely that a mass left wing will crystallise in the Labour Party following a Labour victory. It is more likely that some unions, under the pressure of their members, will demand disaffiliation from the Labour Party. This could be the precursor to a split.

THE PRESENT LABOUR left leadership, who more and more rely on a policy of inertia, will not take the initiative in such a development. A mass movement from below will have to develop before they will be pushed into action. Tony Benn and Arthur Scargill have both indicated that it is necessary to 'continue the struggle for socialism' within the Labour Party, despite the overwhelming victories for the right. Rodney Bickerstaff has also complained loudly about the 'treatment' dished out to trade union leaders, protesting that they can hardly keep up with the 'rear lights of the Blair juggernaut' as it rush-

es to the right. And yet none of these leaders have called on, or are capable of organising, the tens and hundreds of thousands of workers from the unions to flood in and reclaim the Labour Party.

It is doubtful whether at this stage there are a significant layer of leftward-moving workers within the unions who would respond to this call, given the quiescence of left reformism in the whole preceding period. However, on the basis of big events, a radical, socialist mass wave will develop in the unions. Then the question will be posed point blank: either to use the trade unions to enter the Labour Party and brutally push out the bourgeois elements, or to put a minus against the present organisation of the Labour Party and commence to create a new mass socialist political party.

Already *The Economist* has commented that while Blair was claiming overwhelming support for his ditching of Clause Four, in January a Gallup poll showed that 37% were "broadly in agreement" with the words of Clause Four. They went onto say that this showed that there was a space, quite a significant one, for a new socialist party in Britain.

The triumph of the right on all fronts within the Labour Party poses stark choices for the left within the unions and within the labour movement generally. For the foreseeable future the Labour Party on a day-to-day basis will not be a viable weapon for the British working class. When it comes to an election the mass of workers will polarise behind Labour, hoping against hope that a Blair-led Labour government would begin to change the situation. But while a few minimal measures may be introduced, these will be outweighed by counter-reforms, with the likelihood of increased attacks on workers in the public sector in particular.

The whole position of British and world capitalism deems that any government in power must take back the conquests of the past. In this situation Militant Labour

appeals to all those who continue to struggle for socialism to consider joining its ranks. It will continue to offer a socialist, fighting alternative on all fronts in which working people struggle. At the same time, unlike the sects who, in the words of Marx, "emphasise their own shibboleth rather than what they have in common with the movement", Militant Labour will fight for the creation of the widest possible mass socialist force in Britain. If the trade unions conclude that it is necessary to fill out the Labour Party at a future date in an attempt to transform it, Militant Labour would give the maximum possible support. However, as suggested earlier, the channels for pursuing this no longer exist, at least in the form that they did in the past. It therefore can not be ruled out that the demand will grow for a new mass socialist force in Britain. Militant Labour is interested in the widest possible organisation of the British working class and would support all steps in this direction.

One thing is clear: April 29 marks a turning point in the history of the labour movement. Sometimes history raises a party to its full height, the better to concentrate the forces of disintegration and opposition to this same party. In 1906 the Liberal Party scored its greatest electoral triumph, but this was the high water mark of Liberalism. Tested in action it began to disintegrate, never again to recapture the position it then held. Blair's Labour Party could be swept into power with a huge electoral majority on the tide of bitter class hatred of the Tory government. However, the inevitable disappointment of the hopes of millions, by a government which remains within the framework of diseased British capitalism, will conjure up forces which will shatter the grip of the right wing on the labour movement in Britain. Militant Labour is destined to grow as a big pole of attraction for leftward-moving workers. We will also participate in any movement which can create a mass socialist force in Britain and begin to transform the lives of the British working class. □



Militant Labour's press launch. Left to right: Tommy Sheridan, Hannah Sell, Frances Curran and Peter Taaffe.

What's socialism got to do with it?

*More than 100,000 people will participate in Lesbian and Gay Pride in June. This reflects the huge confidence that has been built within the lesbian, gay and bisexual community over the past two decades. Here **Helen Redwood** looks at some of the strategic issues facing lesbian and gay activists, and especially the views of leading OutRage! spokesperson Peter Tatchell.*

ON THE SURFACE it seems that we've 'never had it so good': increased media coverage from TV soaps, relatively sympathetic reporting of newspapers like *The Guardian*, the higher profile of lesbian, gay and bisexual celebrities, a massive expansion of the gay scene, the lesbian and gay press, businesses and services, all testify to this new confidence and changed public attitudes. This has even been reflected in the courts. Leading OutRage! spokesperson Peter Tatchell reports a reduction in convictions of gay men for consensual homosexual acts by 75% in the past few years.

What lies behind these advances? Where will the struggle for lesbian, gay and bisexual equality go now? How can we achieve real and lasting liberation?

When 4,000 of New York's lesbian, gay and bisexual community took to the streets in 1969 and fought back in a running street battle against police harassment that lasted several days, they probably didn't realise they were making history. This action, the famous Stonewall uprising, broke the mould of years of silently borne repression, of the closet, of shame and self-hatred. But the timing, one year after the momentous events of 1968, wasn't accidental. It was born of a revolutionary wave which was sweeping the world from wars of liberation in Africa and Latin America, to workers' uprisings in France and Czechoslovakia, to the black civil rights movement in the USA and 'black power', to the women's liberation movement.

This revolutionary mood inspired the lesbian, gay and bisexual community no less: a new consciousness was born, of 'gay pride' and 'coming out'. And vitally this new movement began to re-draw the links between the movements for socialism and sexual liberation, identifying the roots of gay oppression in the class system itself, for example in the *Manifesto* of the Gay Liberation Front.

This continued and developed throughout the 1970s and in the first half of the 1980s. Lesbian and gay issues were



Gay Liberation Front, 1970.

forced onto the agenda of the left-wing movement which developed within the Labour Party and trade unions, many of which adopted policies in favour of gay rights and developed self-organised groups.

Paradoxically however there have since been major changes in the way that lesbian and gay activists relate to the left and the labour movement, and how much they see any perspective in those movements for advancing their interests. This is connected with the shift to the right in the leadership of the labour movement, with the ideological effects of events like the collapse of Stalinism on the credibility of socialism and, so far as the lesbian and gay communities are concerned, with major differences in how lesbian and gay oppression is experienced by middle class and working class people.

These factors in turn have propelled to the forefront lesbian and gay campaigning groups like OutRage! and Stonewall; the first concentrating on direct action and dramatic stunts, the other focusing on lobbying across the party spectrum.

Lesbians and gays of course have no reason to have the slightest confidence in Tony Blair's 'New' Labour to advance their interests. Tony Blair proclaims himself 'gay friendly' but allows Labour MPs to vote against an equal age of consent for gay sex, including front bench spokesperson David Blunkett. (If these MPs had just abstained then the vote would have been won). His enthusiasm for competing with the Tories to be 'the party of the family' and his trenchant defence of the two-parent heterosexual family is hardly 'gay friendly'.

But if the Labour Party has abdicated from the struggle then so too have the trade union leaders. What campaign was carried out to win an equal age of consent? What was done about trade union sponsored MPs who voted against an equal age of consent? What has been done to seriously tackle discriminatory employers? Nothing whatever.

This abdication from struggle has therefore left a vacuum, into which have stepped the direct actionists of groups like OutRage! and Lesbian Avengers, and the respectable lobbyists of Stonewall.

Lesbians and gays of course have no reason to have the slightest confidence in Tony Blair's 'New' Labour to advance their interests.

Leading OutRage! spokesperson Peter Tatchell spells out the frustration with 'straight' organisations, including the official labour movement: "We have got virtually nowhere in terms of getting the straight establishment institutions to address the question of lesbians and gay men. Nearly all the improvements in the lives of homosexual men and women have been due to institutions that we have created for ourselves such as lesbian and gay switchboards, social centres, employment and legal advice centres, AIDS and bereavement helplines. Faced with the intransigence of many straight social institutions the lesbian and gay community should welcome heterosexual allies but never be dependent upon them... we have to rely first and foremost on our own self-help efforts".

On the other hand, the more 'respectable' lobbying organisation Stonewall enjoys the support particularly of the rich and famous, but also sections of the community who believe that 'winning and dining' those in positions of power and influence provides at least some way forward.

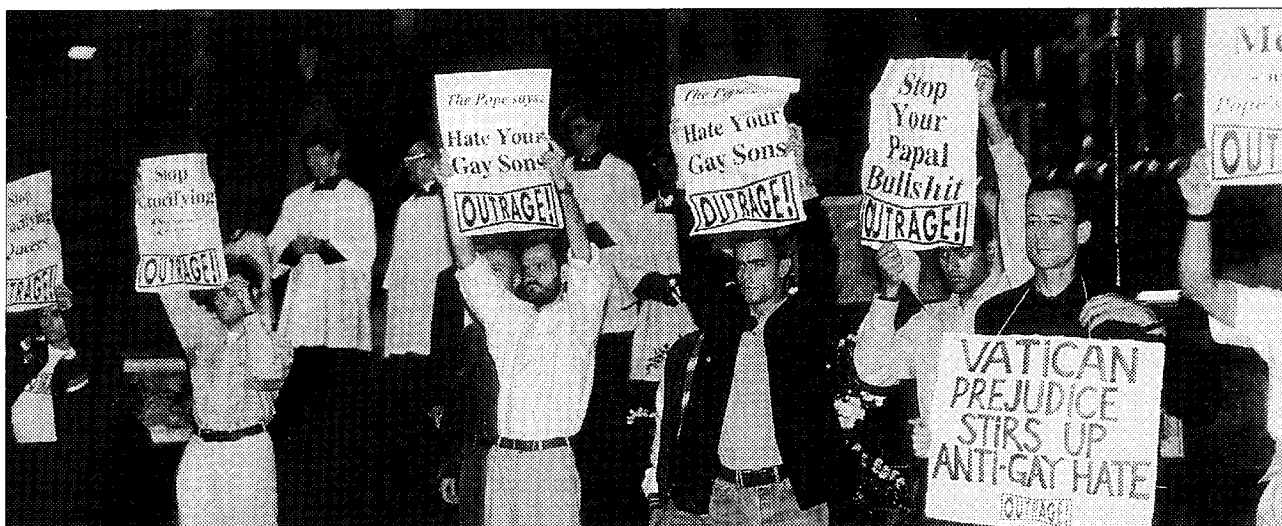
In a recent newsletter Stonewall claims considerable progress on a number of small legal reforms. But when it comes to key issues like the age of consent, their lobbying and cross-party campaign failed, in part because it relied on the opportunistic support of Tory MPs like Edwina Currie, who had previously been happy to vote for the homophobic Section 28. And what's really changed in the day-to-day lives of lesbians, gay men and bisexuals as a result of all this? The gay-bashing continues. Headteacher Jane Brown is still being pursued by Hackney Council over a matter which has been linked to her sexuality. Lesbian and gay workers still face the sack if they come out; and gay teenagers are still made to feel like criminals and deviants because of the discriminatory age of consent. Respectable lobbying and petitioning of those in power doesn't shift the social and political relationship of forces in society - the very forces which underpin sexual oppression.

MOREOVER, A GULF of class-interests lies between rich and working class lesbian, gay and bisexual people. Rich lesbians and gay men do suffer the general repression of sexuality, but they have much more ability to escape it's brutal reality than do working class lesbians, gay men and bisexuals. They do not have the same worry of losing their livelihood because of their sexuality, they can escape into the world of cafe bars, exclusive clubs and a wealthy lesbian and gay social circle. They do not live on estates where you have to be careful about your sexuality not becoming common knowledge to avoid the insults from kids as you walk through, to avoid the bricks through your windows, and the painting on your walls, to avoid your children being victimised at school.

The idea of a uniformity of interests between all lesbians, gay men and bisexuals also lies behind the idea of the 'pink pound'. In the last few years, spotting a new 'niche market', small and big businesses have suddenly become 'gay friendly'. This will undoubtedly have a knock-on effect on attitudes generally. But the extent to which the exploitation of what Peter Tatchell calls "queer spending power to pressure business to adopt pro-gay policies" is highly debatable given that the majority of lesbian, gays and bisexuals are working class and suffering the same mass unemployment and falling living standards affecting other workers.

Even supposing Stonewall were successful in persuading enough MPs to vote through anti-discriminatory legislation, would that really stop prejudice and discrimination? Has the Race Relations Act stopped racism? Has the Equal Pay and Sex Discrimination Acts wiped out sexism and the oppression of women? Far more than legislation is needed.

This is where the direct action groups step in. Their agenda is not just legal reform, but as Peter Tatchell says: "Change in the law is not the same as ending homophobia - that's why OutRage!'s central focus is a cultural revolution in social attitudes towards homosexuality... the end goal for OutRage! is not equality; we want queer emancipation". And their strategy is to "put homophobics on the spot by publicly exposing and embarrassing them".



OutRage! activists take to the streets.

But just how far has the 'in your face' campaign of OutRage! been the motive force behind a quite marked shift towards more acceptance of homosexuality? Will these shifts in attitudes continue and be permanent?

According to Peter Tatchell "nearly all our advances have been won through extra parliamentary protest and grass roots community activism". The change in attitudes is "largely due to a combination of individual lesbians and gay men coming out and challenging prejudice of those they come into contact with.

"The other big impetus for change has been the growing public visibility of lesbian and gay issues which have been brought about partly through media reportage of lesbian and gay social events and political protests. In the longer term even negative coverage helps soften public opinion - the more people hear about and discuss gay issues, the more they get used to them; that makes them less unusual and threatening".

But is this sufficient explanation? Would it have been possible to make the progress referred to above to the same extent if not for wider social factors?

THESE CHANGES IN public attitudes towards homosexuality have not been forced by an obvious mass movement, but because of a massive shift to the left in social attitudes in the 1980s on abortion, on trade unions, on divorce, on women's rights and so on.

That's not the whole story of course. Prejudice and discrimination don't evaporate without being challenged - no gains would have been made but for the self-organisation of the lesbian, gay and bisexual community, but the biggest opportunities come at times of mass upheaval. The most positive and comprehensive resolution in support of lesbian and gay rights was passed at the 1985 Labour Party conference against the background of the miners strike. Significantly this resolution went through with the backing of the NUM, not least because of the concrete solidarity built during the miners strike through 'Lesbians and gays support the miners'.

But we need to go further than this. We need to look at what underpins prejudice in society and consider under what conditions prejudice rises and falls. Tory attacks on the gay community over the last 15 years are not out of the

blue, but are directly linked to the war of ideas they have been conducting to justify the dismantling of the welfare state and all the other attacks on working class living standards.

Part of this campaign has been to promote the traditional nuclear family as being the bedrock of society without which life as we know it will disintegrate. In promoting the ideology of the family, they have attacked other ways of living, including single parents and same sex relationships. Little surprise then that alongside this campaign the Tories attempted to issue guidelines banning lesbians and gay men from fostering and adoption, and enacted legislation which re-classified everyday contact between consenting gay men as serious sex offences.

But beyond the fight for immediate reforms, and to throw back Tory attacks, we need to debate out a long-term strategy for lesbian, gay and bisexual liberation. In doing so, it is necessary to analyse the basic social structures of sexual oppression, in particular the family as it exists under capitalism. Can we achieve lesbian, gay and bisexual liberation without changing the system?

Peter Tatchell's view is that: "Capitalism does rest very heavily on the model of the heterosexual family. However, though it would be very difficult, it would not be impossible for capitalist society to restructure itself around an alternative model.

"One of the remarkable features of capitalism has been it's adaptability - instead of refusing to change and therefore risk revolutionary insurrection, capitalism has usually and somewhat reluctantly preferred to make concessions rather than oppose social reform and risk provoking it's overthrow".

Peter is forthright in setting out the strategic consequences of his views. "Although socialists ought to be committed to lesbian and gay liberation because of their general commitment to end social injustice, there's no necessary correlation between the goal of socialism and queer emancipation. There's no automatic link between the economic basis of society and it's ideological and cultural institutions; if state ownership of the means of production automatically ended homophobia then all those countries which abolished private property should have been the most pro-gay - in fact they tended to be most violently anti-gay". He

therefore concludes that the struggle for lesbian, gay and bisexual liberation "does not need to be linked to the struggle for socialism".

WHY IS THE fight for lesbian, gay and bisexual liberation intimately linked to the fight for socialism? How should we reply to Peter Tatchell's correct point that societies in which capitalist rule was overthrown, ie in Stalinist states like Russia, eastern Europe and China, did not uproot homophobia and sexual repression?

First, as Peter Tatchell points out, the oppression of lesbians, gays and bisexuals is linked to the existing family system, and thus to women's oppression. The existing family form has a vital function under capitalism, as the site for every aspect of the reproduction of labour power - from rearing children to the mundane tasks of 'domestic labour' such as preparing food, washing clothes etc. It also has a central ideological and cultural role as an instrument of repression and social control. In theory, capitalist social relations - the profit system - could exist without this family structure. But it would mean an enormous upheaval: it implies a transformation of relations between the sexes, it would mean a socialisation of existing domestic labour.

In other words, if the existing bedrock of the nuclear family were destroyed, it would imply an enormous transfer of economic resources to working people and away from profits, as more of the tasks of child care and the other functions of the family were provided by society as a whole. Peter Tatchell is surely one-sided to describe the family as an 'ideological and cultural institution' separate and apart from capitalism's economic base. Of course it is an ideological and cultural institution, but it is not simply that.

Now, there are indeed contemporary complications to the bare bones of this argument. While relying on the nuclear family, modern capitalism has, through the massive entry of women in the workforce, partially undermined it. More and more children are brought up by single parents and lesbian and gay couples, more people live in one-person households and there is dramatically more space for sexual relations outside marriage. These changes have not, of course, brought about the kind of socialisation of child-care and domestic labour which could radically change the overall structure of the existing family system - indeed such provision, especially for single mothers, is fiercely contested by capitalist political forces.

In other words, it is far too simple to say that capitalism could dispense with the present family setup: it would require social and economic changes of literally revolutionary proportions. A capitalism which revolutionised the family structure would be a capitalism which liberated women: the logic of Peter's argument is that not only lesbian and gay liberation has no necessary connection with the overthrow of capitalism, but neither does women's liberation. We come back to this argument below.

There is another factor which has to enter any reasonable calculations about capitalism and the family. We are talking not about capitalism as an abstraction, but the real crisis-ridden system which exists. If capitalism were able to develop harmoniously for the next 50 years, developing a massive welfare state and universal prosperity, then maybe major transformations in the family system, including the

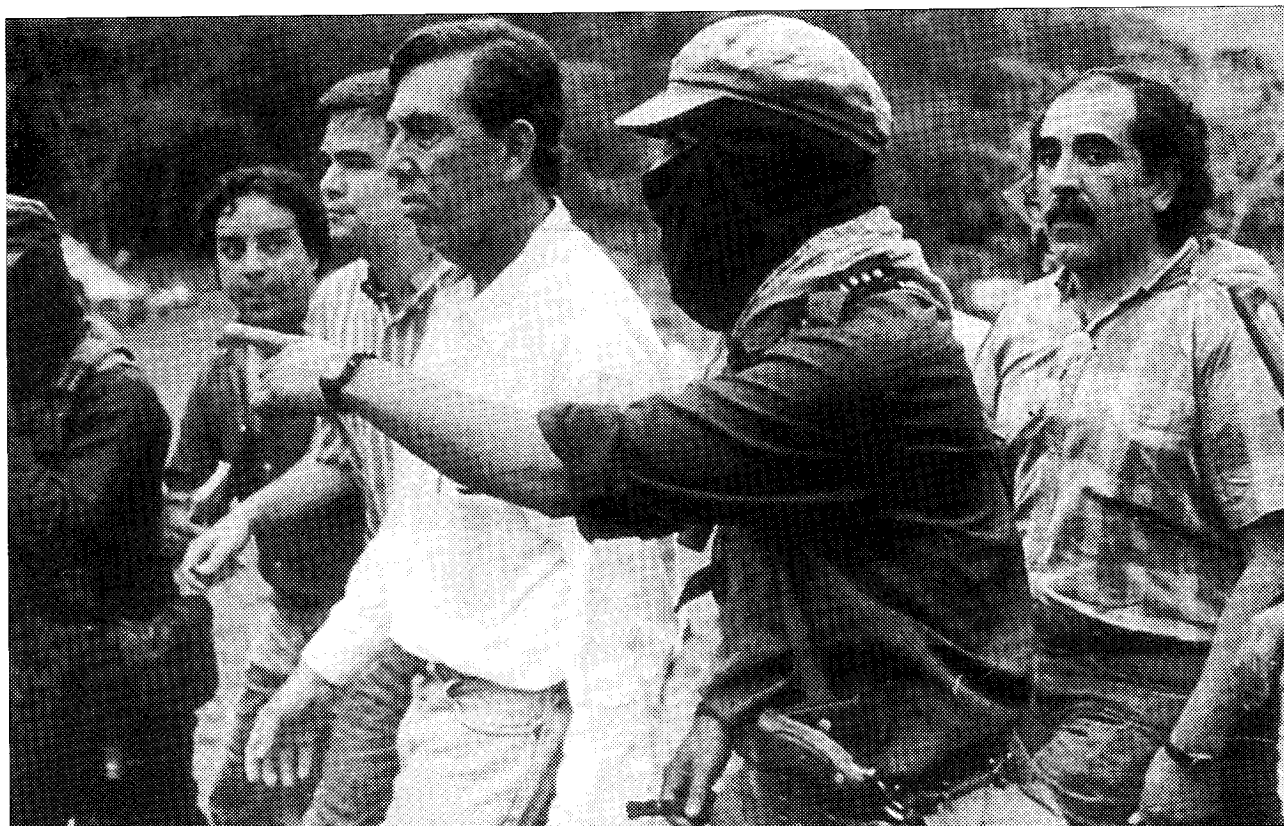
socialisation of domestic labour and childcare, could occur. Such an imaginary prosperous capitalism could solve many other social conflicts, and indeed a good part of the historical justification for socialism would disappear. But it won't happen: capitalism will remain crisis-ridden, conflict-ridden and repressive. It will not create the social and economic space for ending lesbian and gay oppression, any more than it will create the space for ending racism.

The second aspect of the interconnection of socialist struggle with the fight for sexual liberation is the simple strategic one. Peter argues that socialists should support the fight for lesbian and gay liberation because of their commitment to human emancipation and social justice. And, with the exception of a few Neanderthals, so they will. But where will the forces necessary for earth-shaking changes of revolutionary proportions come from? Who has the social weight? Only the working class, the overwhelming majority in society, can make such a decisive breakthrough.

After 1917 capitalist rule was overthrown in a series of countries, and with the exception of some progressive measures taken during the early Bolshevik regime, they did not liberate lesbians and gays - far from it. At one level of course we can point out that these were not socialist societies, but Stalinist, repressive caricatures of socialism. That is true, but doesn't deal with a crucial point. A democratic socialist system would create a society based on social solidarity and egalitarianism: it would unleash tremendous creative energies in every walk of life. But to imagine that it would immediately transform all social relations and attitudes is utopian and unmateri- alist. Uprooting sexism and homophobia would be a prolonged task, but one made more straightforward by the destruction of sexual oppression's material roots. Democratic socialism is a necessary precondition for the destruction of sexual oppression, precisely because, as we have argued, it would break the economic and ideological constraints which reinforce the nuclear family as the 'normal' form of family organisation, creating a new diversity and range of choices for how people develop their sexual and kinship relations.

Peter Tatchell's argument could be extended on a series of issues, even if he personally does not accept such an extension. Is racism connected with capitalism? Reactionary nationalism and ethnic conflicts? The destruction of the environment? And is it just a coincidence that all these things exist within a system based on individual greed, privilege and hierarchy?

Lesbians, gays and bisexuals need to link our battles against day-to-day discrimination with the battles facing the working class as a whole. Direct action can highlight prejudice but cannot substitute for the main task of taking our campaigns into the unions, workplaces and communities, showing how prejudice and discrimination breaks the unity we need to combat the attacks on living standards by the bosses and their government, and is therefore against the interests of all working class people. It means that we need to link the struggle for real sexual liberation to the task, as we argue in our pamphlet *Out, Proud and Militant*, of "rebuilding a strong labour movement, which will unite the struggles of all oppressed sections into one struggle - to take power away from the rich and to give it to ordinary working class people". □



Subcommandante Marcos (masked) with PRD leader Cuauhtemoc Cardenas.

Mexican crisis, Subcommandante Marcos and the Zapatistas

Sixty thousand Mexican troops, together with US and Argentinian 'advisors', are besieging the guerrillas of the Zapatista National Liberation Front (EZLN) in the Mexican state of Chiapas. Unable to hunt down and crush the guerrillas, they are wrecking the peasants' villages, destroying their tools and poisoning water supplies - all part of a strategy to break the peasants from the Zapatistas.

Tony Saunois looks at this historic rebellion.

WHEN FORMER MEXICAN President Carlos Salinas attended the 1993 ceremony to sign the NAFTA free trade agreement, he joked - in a reference to neighbouring countries like El Salvador and Nicaragua - that, in Mexico, 'there are no guerrillas'. A few months later on 1 January 1994, to the surprise of Salinas and the world, a peasant guerrilla uprising broke out in the southern state of Chiapas.

When the young peasant fighters took over the town of San Cristobal, to the stunned bemusement of American tourists, they sarcastically daubed 'hay no guerrillas' (there are no guerrillas) on the walls. The peasant uprising was even a shock to the Mexican left which had no clue that for ten years radical activists, with the help of the local Catholic church, had been preparing armed struggle.

So why did revolt, in the form of an armed struggle, break out in Chiapas? The Mayan Indians who live in Chiapas are the poorest section of Mexican society - a country where 66% of the population live below the poverty line. In Chiapas 33% of households have no electricity, 59% no sewers and 41% no running water. According to EZLN leader Subcommandante Marcos, Mexico is divided into three: the penthouse (the upper class), the ground floor

(the mass of poor workers and peasants) and the basement (the Mayan Indians). The Mayan peasants want land, clean water and decent prices for their agricultural produce. But with Mexico joining NAFTA, small producers will be crushed by US-dominated agri-business. Marcos calls NAFTA a 'death certificate' for the Mayan peasants.

When Salinas came to power in the 1980s with his free trade and privatisation policies, there were just two Mexican billionaires. By the time he left office 26 more had made their fortunes. At the same time the average wage for industrial workers in real terms fell by 40%, and minimum wage levels by a staggering 58%. Overall wage labour costs as a percentage of GDP fell from 36% to 22%, an enormous reduction in national wealth going to the workers and peasants.

Launching their armed struggle, the Zapatistas faced grave difficulties. Limited to one corner of the country, the EZLN has no illusions about a military overthrow of the state. Marcos says: "The balance on the battlefield is not a good guide: if it was, then the events of January 1994 would not have taken place... from a military point of view the EZLN is absurd. What makes it tangible is the claims it upholds".

The Zapatistas rising did however detonate a nationwide political crisis. While the ruling party, the Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI), was re-elected in fraudulent elections in August 1994, with a new president Ernesto Zedillo, his party and government have staggered from crisis to crisis - in large part because of the effects of the Zapatistas.

'Telenovelas' - TV soap operas - are very popular in Mexico. None of them however could depict more outrageous melodrama than has engulfed Mexico's ruling elite in real life, tearing back the veil on massive ruling class corruption and in-fighting. Since the beginning of 1994 the PRI has been shaken by an extraordinary series of events. These included the assassination of the PRI's presidential candidate Luis Colosio in March 1994; the murder of the PRI's general secretary Jose Ruis Massieu; the gunning down of a Roman Catholic cardinal and the killing of PRI officials in Chiapas. Following these bizarre events, open warfare broke out in the leadership of the PRI with claim and counter-claim of murder and corruption, culminating with the outgoing president Salinas going into exile.

NOTHING COULD BE more symbolic than Salinas' exile. He was hotly tipped to be the first chair of the new World Trade Organisation - as a 'thank you' from international capitalism for his privatisation and free market policies, and also symbolic of Mexico's new-found international status. Instead it has all ended in ignominy and collapse.

The gangsterism among the PRI's rulers originates in the near terminal crisis of that party's rule. The PRI has ruled Mexico since 1929, with a political base running all the way from big business to the trade union bureaucracy. Now economic collapse has shattered the PRI's unity.

Mexico was at the forefront of the 1980s Latin American economic 'reform' programme. Trade barriers were brought down and privatisation mania broke out. Foreign capital poured in, much of it to Mexico, to buy up state industries at knock-down prices and to carry out specula-

tion on the booming stock markets. Of \$55bn going into Latin America in 1993, \$25bn (45%) was destined for Mexico.

However, far from economically transforming Mexico into a 'first world' nation, the capital influx was speculative - aimed at making a quick kill. Just as such speculative capital could flood in, it could just as spectacularly flood out, which is exactly what happened in December 1994 when the peso collapsed.

The source of this collapse was the anti-inflation policy of the Salinas government. The peso was kept at an artificially high rate to keep down the price of imports. However, this built up an enormous balance of payments deficit - \$28bn in 1994 - which in turn undermined the currency.

But the economic collapse of December 1994 was also caused by the government's failure to deal with the Zapatistas' uprising.

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The initial fighting lasted 12 days; on 12 January 1994, after some savage fighting during which Mexican government troops assassinated guerrilla prisoners, a ceasefire was signed. The ceasefire was a first victory for the EZLN: the mass outpouring of popular protest against the savagery of government troops prevented the Salinas government from going in for the kill. The guerrillas were able to stabilise their political and military base: to survive as a permanent challenge to the legitimacy of the PRI government.

Marcos was absolutely forthright: Mexico needed the Zapatistas because the Mexican opposition had failed: "I am talking about the whole spectrum - the far left, the left and those sections of the centre who declare themselves in favour of democratic change". The EZLN took the initiative to help form the CND (the National Democratic Convention), uniting opposition bodies from all over the country. Mass demonstrations throughout Mexico rallied support for the EZLN.

On-again, off-again negotiations continued throughout 1994. However after the August elections which brought Zedillo to power, the EZLN leaders decided that the government was not serious about negotiations. They gave a November deadline for substantial concessions to be made, and when it passed resumed armed actions. This led directly to the collapse of the peso last December: the government of a country which claims it is going 'from the third world to the first' cannot be seen to permit the existence of armed guerrillas for nearly a year.

Mexico's stock market has been temporarily stabilised by the injection of a \$50bn US loan. But the loan conditions are draconian. Interest payments will take a huge part of the Mexican government's annual budget.

In addition a massive austerity package has been introduced. Prices of basic commodities - food, transport, fuel, rents - are going through the roof. Hundreds of factories have closed; hundreds of thousands have been made redundant as the economy collapses into a dire slump. The



PRI President Zedillo.

Business Coordinating Council says that 200-250,000 workers were made redundant in the two months after the crisis erupted, equivalent to one per cent of the total workforce of 26 million. More is to follow with an estimated further 750,000 jobs to be lost by the end of 1995.

THERE WAS OBVIOUSLY a further, unannounced, 'condition' in the package: the US insisted that the Zapatistas be crushed. The government strategy is a variant of the 'strategic hamlet' approach. Some peasants have fled with the guerrillas into the forest. Those who haven't have their villages economically wrecked by government soldiers, with their US advisors. With tools destroyed and water supplies poisoned, they are forced to rely on government handouts: this helps to break their independence and break down their links with the guerrillas. Some villagers have been bribed or coerced into forming village 'defence' brigades, with arms supplied by the army. The Mexican government is digging in for a long fight, with the aim of exterminating the guerrillas.

However, as the Vietnam war and other guerrilla struggles have shown, trying to crush rural guerrilla insurgency solely with military means has little chance of working where political conditions favour the insurgents. The Zapatistas are not a foreign army, they are political insurgents with deep roots in the local community and mass support throughout Mexico and beyond. As we went to press, it was announced that after three days of new negotiations, the Mexican government had actually agreed to the EZLN re-occupying some of the ground it evacuated after the government's offensive!

Since January 1994, world media attention has been focused on Subcommandante Marcos himself. The Mexican government devised a series of ludicrous stories about who Marcos really was, until, finally they hit on one which is probably true, and the most mundane of the lot: Marcos is 37-year old Rafael Sebastian Guillen Vincente, a university lecturer from the city of Tampico. Like thousands of his generation, Marcos grew up in the period of guerrilla struggle in Nicaragua, El Salvador and Guatemala. By the early 1990s, with the election defeat of the Sandinistas, the near-crushing of the Guatemalan guerrillas and the peace deal in El Salvador, it looked as if the region had been 'stabilised' in the interests of the US and

their NAFTA deal. The Zapatistas have changed all that.

It is possible that the Mexican government may now just be able to slow the recession and avoid a total collapse. This will in part depend on developments in the world economy. It is however a far cry from Mexico 'joining the first world'.

The rise in base interest rates to nearly 90%, with mortgage and credit rates reaching an incredible 150%, has particularly hit the middle class. During the boom years middle class Mexicans accumulated massive debt with the banks, repayment of which at the new interest rates is proving impossible. Thousands are facing evictions and repossession of houses and goods.

Confronted with this crisis an explosion is currently taking place amongst the middle class. A new protest organisation has flourished called El Barzon (The Yoke). It claims 500,000 members throughout Mexico. Thousands have participated in its demonstrations. Lawyers, accountants, shopkeepers, businessmen - large and small - reportedly joined its protests in Mexico City against the high interest rates. On one day 100 anti-government demonstrations took place in Mexico City.

El Barzon has even organised the occupation of banks by customers. On one day 800 banks were taken over around the country. Protestors called on customers to refuse to pay mortgages and credit card bills. Significantly they also demanded that the government should do the same and not pay the foreign debt.

SUBCOMMANDANTE MARCOS, a revolutionary but not a Marxist, has like Che Guevara become a symbol of the struggle in the minds of workers, peasants and especially young people. The EZLN, and especially Marcos, have articulated the feelings of the masses and the demand for change.

To secure the overthrow of capitalism and replace it with a socialist alternative, the working class in the cities has the decisive and the leading role in the revolution. Its strength and cohesion as a class, because of its position in industry and the workplace, means that through it a system of workers' democracy can be established as the alternative to capitalist rule. This, as the experience of the Russian revolution demonstrated, is even the case where the proletariat is in a minority in society. With a correct programme and astute tactics it can win big layers of the urban middle class and the majority of poor peasants behind its banner.

In Mexico the working class has the decisive role to play in the future development of the revolution. Seventy three per cent of the Mexican population lives in the cities. Of the total workforce 31% are employed in industry, 47% in the service sector and 22% in the agricultural sector.

While defending the leading role of the working class Marxists also support the conducting of peasant war in the countryside. The method of struggle for the peasants will not be exactly the same as the industrial workers in the cities. Land seizures and the throwing up of a peasant army are part of the methods of peasant struggle. While the working class and the movement in the cities is decisive, this does not mean the revolution will necessarily start with them. The struggles of the peasantry and land workers in the countryside can give an important impetus to the

movement in the cities, in the absence of a fighting leadership at the head of the workers movement.

Contained within the uprising in Chiapas are the economic and social demands for land and 'democracy', but also for an end to the oppression of the indigenous peoples. This is a factor present in many upheavals in Latin America, especially Peru, Bolivia and the central American states. In the state of Oaxaca 4,000 Indians occupied government buildings demanding more land, public works projects and suspension of all debts to the banks. As *Time* magazine commented in February 1994: "Here and there in central and southern Mexico, tens of thousands of people, mostly poor peasants and Indians, went on strike and protested in other ways, in almost every case citing the Zapatista National Liberation Army's surprise rising last month as their inspiration. 'We are not Zapatistas, but the poverty is the same. The land must be for the peasants, not the caciques (landowners)' said Juan Garcia, one of the men who took over Teopisca town hall".

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The struggle of the Zapatistas in Chiapas, and the struggles of other groups in other states in Mexico, are likely to continue, with inevitable defeats as well as advances, both militarily and socially. The decisive question, however, which has developed during 1995, is the sweep and scale of the movement in the cities, especially Mexico City. On May Day this year four million people, including one million in the capital itself, participated in anti-government demonstrations - just as the government announced that it had agreed in negotiations with the EZLN to let them re-occupy part of that land from which the army had driven them.

Reflecting the movement of workers which has begun, opposition groupings are developing in many of the official unions. Some independent unions have also been established. It is a measure of the pressure building up that the electricians union, the SME, refused to sign the national agreements which the government has recently put together.

For the ruling class an historical point of departure has opened in Mexico. Lying behind the scandals and murders of representatives of the PRI is a major division and split. Zedillo represents a 'reformist' wing which understands that it is not possible to continue to rule in the same old way. At the same time the 'Dinosaurs' have a strong presence in the PRI and are fighting to maintain their position.

It is quite possible that this will eventually result in an open split in the PRI. Zedillo and the 'reformist' wing have already taken the unprecedented step of holding talks with the populist opposition party, the PRD (Democratic Revolutionary Party) led by Cuauhtemoc Cardenas. In the congress the PRD, in return, does not demand the resignation of the president and fresh elections.

They justify this by saying the removal of Zedillo would mean a strengthening of the right wing. Despite the hesitancy of the PRD leadership, however, new elections could be called, especially if the mass movement develops further in the next period. A tentative framework is being

prepared for a coalition government which could include the PRD. This unprecedented step in Mexico's post-revolutionary history may be forced upon the ruling class as a means of trying to hold back the mass movement.

The first steps in a new mass movement inevitably focus on the demand for democracy. In a country like Mexico, ruled as a virtual one-party state for so long, democratic aspirations are of decisive importance. However to end the misery and poverty of the masses and ensure a lasting democracy poses the need for the overthrow of capitalism. The EZLN at this stage is clearly reflecting the aspirations and demands of the masses. It is, however, not advocating a clear alternative. Its specific demands are limited and it is mistakenly advocating a 'national government of transition' - a proposal which would entail alliances with sections of the ruling class.

Such a policy, as has been seen throughout Latin America, cannot lead to a lasting victory for the exploited masses. For this the overthrow of capitalism and its replacement with a socialist regime of workers' democracy is necessary. The capitalist class cannot be relied upon to conduct a real struggle against imperialism nor play any progressive role.

Alliances with them in government will only be used to derail the mass movement.

The recent upheavals mark the beginning of a new process of the Mexican revolution. It is part of a new wave of struggle which is currently unfolding throughout Latin America. The free market model lies shattered on the floor. It is up to the working class and exploited layers of Mexican society to build a new 'model' which can encompass the whole Latin American continent. □

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South Africa -

A nation still in waiting



High hopes at Mandela's inauguration have been dashed.

*Following its overwhelming victory in the elections of 27 April 1994, the ANC leadership has consolidated its dominant position in the Government of National Unity (GNU) - and is currently basking in the prestige of the world's most popular president, enjoying the long after-glow of victory. MIR editor, **Lynn Walsh**, recently returned from a visit to South Africa, looks beneath the euphoria.*

AMONG THE BLACK majority there is immense pride that Mandela is president and satisfaction that the scaffolding and customary practices of Apartheid are at last being swept away. There is relief that the transition was achieved without civil war and that the violent conflict of the long pre-election period has largely subsided (apart from areas of Natal). The ultra-right organisations of white reaction, who were smashed by the workers of Bophuthaswana when they intervened to exploit Mangope's attempted putsch in March 1994, have been marginalised, for the time being at least.

Among the ANC cadres, the layer of activists and intellectuals who have been rapidly drawn into parliament and

government jobs, there is an all-pervasive illusion that they have carried out, through negotiation and compromise, "the world's most remarkable and successful evolution". (1) This political euphoria clearly has a material base - the fabulous salaries and privileges (official cars, residences, expenses, etc) now enjoyed by these upwardly-mobile strata.

The illusion of a 'negotiated revolution' is encouraged, of course, by the South African bourgeoisie, not to mention the adulatory support of international capitalist leaders. For the more far-sighted representatives of capital, the transition represents a strategic success which undoubtedly surpasses all their expectations.

Shaken by wave after wave of revolutionary struggle of

the workers and youth during the 1970s and 1980s, the ruling class was compelled to recognise that it could not decisively defeat the movement through continuous, systematic repression and therefore changed its strategy. Under De Klerk, the ruling class began to explore the option of relying on the ANC leadership to avert revolution - of abandoning white minority rule and conceding a substantial share of political control to the nationalist leadership, on condition that they successfully reined in the mass struggle and committed the ANC to the preservation of capitalism. Reforms in the interests of the black majority would be accepted as the necessary price of compromise, but control of the economy and key elements of the state machine would remain firmly in the hands of the white ruling class.

Such a fundamental switch in the capitalists' strategy was possible only following the profound change in the international balance of forces which resulted from the collapse of the non-capitalist, Stalinist regimes in the former Soviet Union and eastern Europe. The collapse removed the strategic threat - or perceived threat - to capitalism in Southern Africa, in particular undermining the Stalinist-type regimes in Angola and Mozambique and severely curtailing the room-for-manoeuver of other 'front-line' states like Zimbabwe and Zambia. As early as 1988, the retreat of the Soviet bureaucracy under Gorbachev opened the way for a negotiated hand-over of political control to Swapo in Namibia - a political compromise between apartheid rulers and African nationalists which paved the way for negotiations in South Africa itself.

The collapse of the Stalinist regimes also brought about a political shift within the leadership of the ANC. While they were proscribed and persecuted by the Apartheid regime, the bourgeois nationalist wing of the ANC leadership (Tambo, Mandela, Mbeki, etc) remained close to the leadership of the Communist Party wing (Slovo, Kasrils, etc) of the ANC-SACP alliance. With the collapse of Stalinism and after overtures from the National Party leadership, the ANC leadership rapidly moved towards an open capitalist position. Ironically, the former Stalinists - notably Joe Slovo - obligingly provided the ideological rationalisation for this shift. They had long defended the idea of a 'democratic' stage of national liberation, with socialism postponed until the distant future, but they at least paid lip service to the commitment to nationalisation embodied in the ANC's Freedom Charter.

After 1990, however, Joe Slovo, "armed with impeccable credentials... became a conciliator... Slovo took the lead... in calling for a government of national unity, stressing the importance of reassuring the white-dominated civil service and security forces". (2) Such 'pragmatism' - gratefully praised by the capitalist press when Slovo died last January - means unequivocally accepting the continuation of capitalism. "Socialism can come later," he is reported to have said, "when I have discovered what it is". (3) It is the SACP leaders who have most rigorously promoted the claim that, on the basis of the ANC-dominated GNU and the implementation of the ANC's Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP), there will be a 'structural reform' - a rapid, radical change which will redress the deep apartheid-inequalities and eradicate mass unemployment, poverty and homelessness.

ON THIS BASIS, the ANC-SACP leaders steered the mass movement into purely electoral channels, curbing the spontaneous combativity of the workers and youth, demobilising the ANC's rank-and-file organisations, and using their influence over the Cosatu leaders to restrain industrial struggles. Before the elections, for instance, the South African Defence Force (SADF) was sent into Natal, with Mandela's blessing, not so much to curb Inkatha, which was unleashing ferocious violence against ANC supporters, but to curb the growing mass revolutionary resistance to Inkatha forces. When the workers and youth in Bophuthaswana rose to defeat Mangope's coup and the attempt of right-wing white groups to secure a counter-revolutionary base in Bop, Mandela merely denounced the 'excesses' of the spontaneous resistance.

When it came to the elections, the ANC leaders - perhaps uniquely in history - rigged the results to avoid a two-thirds majority (which would have given them a free hand to frame a new constitution) and engineered a higher vote for Buthelezi's Inkatha Freedom Party, to act as a self-imposed check on the ANC's freedom of action within the GNU. Both these moves aimed to reassure the National Party leaders that the ANC would not break the pre-election constitutional deal and claim an 'excessive' share of government.

The capitalists can scarcely believe their luck. Welcoming the budget in March, the chair of Liberty Life insurance company admitted: "Their performance is beyond our wildest dreams".

Since its electoral victory, the ANC's agenda has been to establish a decisive presence in existing state structures (while conciliating military and police chiefs and amply compensating retiring senior officials), rather than any transformation of the state apparatus. While the ANC cadres have been absorbed into government, the ANC branches, youth leagues, etc, have emptied out. Change, it is made clear, will be directed from above, through official channels - and Mandela has denounced any groups taking direct action: black students demanding changes in old apartheid university bureaucracies; low-paid policemen demanding overtime pay; squatters seizing land for houses; and striking workers, whose action the president blamed on 'anarchists'. He has also demanded that township residents end their rent and service charge boycotts, despite the fact that there have been few, if any, improvements.

One symptom of the demobilisation - and of a growing disappointment with the lack of change - is the extremely low level of registration for the local elections due to be held in September: around 25% nationally, and much lower in areas like Northern Transvaal.

Collaboration with the parties within the GNU means, above all, co-operation with the tiny group of financial, manufacturing and industrial corporations which dominate the South African economy (seven companies control about 60% of the share capital issued on the Johannesburg stock exchange). (4) Unavoidably, this means accepting the

narrow limits imposed by a relatively weak, highly distorted economy, the legacy of the apartheid social structure and very one-sided integration in the world capitalist economy.

The capitalists can scarcely believe their luck. "We are relieved," commented Clem Sunter, MD of Anglo American mining corruption: "None of the concerns that some of us felt have been fulfilled... Nowadays the word nationalisation does not even enter the conversation. Whenever we have spoken to the government we have had a pragmatic response". (5) Welcoming the budget in March, the chair of Liberty Life insurance company admitted: "Their performance is beyond our wildest dreams". (6)

Cosatu, however, issued a statement severely criticising the budget, the main aim of which was to reduce the current budget deficit from 6.4% of GDP to 5.5%. Income tax was increased on middle and higher salary earners (which will hardly boost their support for the ANC), while the tax levy on big business remained unchanged, with new concessions to foreign investors. The remaining element in this equation is inevitably a severe restriction of spending. Given the attempted regional redistribution, moreover, there will be severe cuts in services and jobs in Gauteng ('Place of Gold' - ie Greater Johannesburg) and Western Cape. This underlines the limitations of the RDP, which heavily depends on the reallocation of departmental budgets to RDP projects aimed at raising living standards in the townships and rural areas.

But the counterpart of big business satisfaction is a deep, increasingly bitter disappointment among wide layers of the population, especially the poorly paid workers, the unemployed and the homeless of the townships, shanty towns, and villages. RDP project proposals are piling up in government offices, but apart from free medical benefits for pregnant women and infants and the school feeding scheme, there has been no significant change.

'Perhaps we are too hasty, perhaps the government needs time,' reflect some workers. ANC ministers constantly reiterate that they cannot reverse 47 years of NP rule in a year or so. Lack of time, however, does not answer the fundamental objection to the ANC's approach: notwithstanding the negotiated political settlement which has ended the apartheid superstructure (in itself a step forward), there is no room within the framework of capitalism for a 'structural reform' that will achieve a massive shift of wealth and income to the black majority, even over a period of years. The 'negotiated revolution', in fact, is no revolution at all - it is not even genuine majority rule, merely a substantial sharing of political power with the black nationalist/capitalist leadership, with important levers of state power retained in the hands of the white ruling class and with the economy still firmly under the control of the same big business elements who upheld the Apartheid regime until it outlived its usefulness for them.

WITHIN A DYNAMIC, expanding SA capitalism - and given international trends favouring the SA economy - there might be room for significant reforms over a period of years. Any claim, however, that the recent growth-spurt (from about 2.3% growth of GDP in 1994 to an expected 3-4% this year) marks the beginning of a sustained upswing is pure fantasy. This quite limited growth - accompanied by inflation of over 10% and with no

fall in unemployment - is the result of the ending of international investment sanctions and a post-election consumer spending-spree.

The last year has seen the first net inflow of investment capital since 1984 - but the consequential demand for imported capital goods, which cannot be supplied from within SA, also produced the first visible trade deficit since 1984. However, despite the ANC's 'investor-friendly' economic policies, "there has been little sign of any big new investment by foreigners... Mandela can be forgiven a little bewilderment and frustration with the apparent fickleness of international investors". (7)

There are several factors behind this: (a) There are currently much more profitable fields of investment in the 'emerging markets' of Asia; (b) International investors are not yet sufficiently convinced that there will be a prolonged period of social peace, political stability and economic growth; (c) Although SA is the most developed economy in Africa, much of its industry is outdated and inefficient; and (d) While wages are relatively low, they are not as low as in China, Thailand, Malaysia, etc, and SA workers have a history of militant trade union organisation and combative struggle.

The first conditions of increased investment now being demanded by big business are 'labour discipline', reduced staffing levels and wage restraint.

A recent survey, conducted by the Monitor Company for Nedlac (National Economic Development and Labour Council) and financed by the Japanese government, commented: "We must not be fooled by the existence of new factories and offices and shopping malls into thinking that the underlying industries are globally competitive. Underneath the attractive painted body panels the engine is rusted and out of date".

While South African labour costs in the car industry, for instance, are on a par with Mexico's (\$5.6 p/hr compared with \$6 p/hr), lower productivity means that it requires 63.5 hours to produce a car in South Africa compared with only 24.3 in Mexico. As a result, the labour cost per car is \$355 in SA compared with \$145 in Mexico. Low productivity in the car, textiles and other sectors reflects long-term under-investment during the period of UN sanctions and disinvestment by multi-nationals, when many producers survived only because they were protected from international competition by import controls and government subsidies.

The Monitor report concludes that South African capitalism requires an economic 'transformation'. To catch up with Taiwan, for instance, in terms of per capita income, South Africa would require growth of 7% to 8% - sustained for 20 years. This would require an unprecedented level of investment, which big business will undertake only if they are convinced of sustained profitability, under conditions of intense international competition. There are no signs of this happening. Instead, foreign and South African investors are eager to pick the juicy cherries - highly profitable, expanding state industries, like Eskom (electricity),

Telkom and South African Airlines, for which the government are now discussing privatisation plans (though carefully eschewing the word privatisation). Privatisation, however, though in line with the policies demanded by international capitalism, would relinquish the very elements of state intervention which laid the basis for the rapid industrialisation of Japan, Taiwan and South Korea in the 1970s.

The first conditions of increased investment now being demanded by big business are 'labour discipline', reduced staffing levels and wage restraint. In the view of capitalist economists, a section of the 4.7m jobless workers (around 30% of the labour force according to official figures) will get jobs only if they are ready to "price themselves into the labour market" - that is, accept much lower pay levels. "The ANC has to seek to persuade its political ally, the Congress of South African Trade Unions (Cosatu), to restrain those of its members who are expecting to reap some, if only modest, reward for the political struggle of the past three decades".

Faced with a wave of strikes following the elections (eg car industry, truckers, Pick 'n' Pay supermarkets, etc), Mandela condemned strikers and "warned that the government would not tolerate criminal activity during strikes and criticised 'anarchists' in the labour movement". (8) Cosatu president, John Gomo, angrily rejected this attack, saying the unions would not accept a witch-hunt against militants.

Key unions, such as the NUM, SACTWU (textiles and clothing), NUMSA (metal workers) and the chemical workers are currently pushing for claims of 15% to 30%, well above the rate of inflation, to improve living standards and begin to remove apartheid inequalities. While the government in principle supports affirmative action to remove pay inequalities, however, in this year's budget it allowed for only a 3.5% public-sector wage increase - which given the current inflation rate would mean a cut in real wages of 6% to 7%.

Municipal workers are in no mood to accept this. SAMWU is demanding substantial increases in minimum wage levels, and its general-secretary, Roger Ronnie, said recently that "large authorities (like Gauteng and Cape Town) could face negotiations on a 20% increase... with emphasis on narrowing the wage gap". (9)

IN THEIR RECENT Collective Bargaining Survey, consultants Gavin Brown and Associates warn that the 1995 collective bargaining season has only just begun and "will probably be characterised by the same conditions which led to largely spontaneous and undisciplined strikes between April and July last year". They warn that, given the level of discontent among the rank and file, "union leadership will be hard-pressed to exercise influence", and "union members will be increasingly less receptive to union guidance or instruction". (10)

The ANC-led government is clearly heading for a major conflict with the trade unions and industrial workers generally. While the draft Labour Relations Act embodies a number of crucial trade union rights, it also contains measures which, if implemented, can only serve the interests of big business. The right to strike is guaranteed, but so is the bosses' right to lock workers out! Moreover, strike action would be outlawed in essential public services or if

they threaten the economic infrastructure - and in any case are subject to the exhaustion of arbitration procedures enforceable by a new labour court. Nedlac and workplace forums, representing the government, bosses, and unions, would be given legal powers - and clearly the attempt to introduce an incomes policy is high on the government's agenda. Is this the 'New South Africa' for which several generations of workers and youth fought and made such heroic sacrifices?

Beneath the after-glow of the ANC's electoral victory a cauldron of discontent is accumulating. Even while congratulating the government on its economic rectitude, capitalist commentators are beginning to warn of 'social instability' unless the government delivers improvements for the majority. As yet the mood of disappointment, discontent and growing anger at the lack of change is inchoate - there is nobody to crystallise the mood, give it political expression and channel it into class action. Winnie Mandela's criticisms get a strong echo from the poor but, closely tied to the traditional chiefs organised in Contraleza, she offers no alternative. Within the SACP, as its recent Congress showed, there is a strong trend of criticism of the ANC government's direction, but even those who oppose the right-wing policies of CP ministers do not question the political basis of the ANC-SACP Alliance. In the townships, the youth are tending to turn away from politics, some to education, some - unfortunately - to crime.

In the coming months there will be increasing clashes between sections taking direct action to improve their situation and the government. The main opposition, however, will undoubtedly come from within the trade unions, where organised workers come under the direct pressure of the bosses or the state. Already there is a widespread questioning of the terms of the ANC-Cosatu alliance, a rejection of ministers' assumption that they decide policy and Cosatu carries it out. Rank and file leaders are beginning to put forward demands and policies to improve living standards and speed up the eradication of inequalities. More fundamentally, a section of militants are questioning whether the ANC, despite its historic role, can serve as the vehicle of working-class struggle - and particularly whether it will ever pursue socialist aims. This discussion, on the need for a workers' party based on Coastu and a socialist programme, will come to the fore in coming months.

Through popularising a clear analysis of the ANC leaders' capitalist course, advancing fighting policies on the immediate issues facing workers and youth, and elaborating a clear perspective and socialist programme, our comrades in the Marxist Workers' Tendency - which publishes *Congress Militant* - have a crucial role to play. □

Notes

1. *Financial Times* supplement: 'Investing in SA', 2 May 1995.
2. *Financial Times*, 2 May 1995.
3. *Financial Times*, 7 January 1995.
4. Martin Murray, *Revolution Deferred*, Verso, 1994, p32.
5. *Weekly Journal*, (UK) 4 May 1995.
6. *Financial Times*, 2 May 1995.
7. *Financial Times*, 2 May 1995.
8. *Business Day*, 27 March 1995.
9. *Business Day*, 4 April 1995.
10. *Mercury*, 7 April 1995.

Revisiting the miners' strike

*The tenth anniversary of the end of the miners' strike produced a flurry of media commentary on how close the miners came to winning and why, eventually, they lost. **Ken Smith** reviews the arguments and looks at the lasting effects of the struggle.*

THE GREAT MINERS' strike of 1984-85 was the most significant post-war industrial dispute, leaving an indelible mark on virtually every subsequent industrial and political development.

The Tories later admitted that it cost nearly £6bn to win the dispute, which they saw as a political attempt to break the power of the NUM. Since 1985 the Tories' continued war against the miners has cost £26bn in redundancy and benefit payments, keeping pits mothballed and lost revenue from coal.

Thatcher and her cabinet were desperate for victory and prepared to go to any lengths. For the first time in a post-war national strike the police were openly used as a political weapon. Agents provocateurs and spies were deployed and the state benefits system used to try and starve the miners back. Former Tory chancellor Nigel Lawson recently admitted that preparation for the strike was "just like rearming to face the threat of Hitler in the 1930s". New evidence has emerged about the role of MI5, MI6, the CIA and ultra-right wingers like David Hart and Tim Bell, who advised Thatcher during the dispute.

Yet despite the extraordinary lengths the Tories went to, by October 1984, six months into the strike, the future of Thatcher's government hung in the balance. The proposed strike by the pit supervisors' union NACODS threatened to close down all working pits in the Midlands - when there were less than six weeks' coal stocks.

Former chairman of the Central Electricity Generating Board (CEGB), Sir Walter Marshall, spelt out what this meant on a Channel Four *Dispatches* programme: "Our predictions showed on paper that Scargill would win certainly before Christmas. Margaret Thatcher got very worried about that... I felt she was wobbly and she was actually inclined to bring the troops in to move coal. All my guys (CEGB workers) would have gone on strike immediately". Ian MacGregor, the Thatcher-appointed boss of the National Coal Board, was summoned to Downing Street. He recalls Thatcher's comments in his memoirs: "I'm very worried about it. You have to realise that the fate of this

government is in your hands Mr MacGregor. You have got to solve this problem".

But, scandalously, the NACODS leaders did not implement their 80%-plus mandate for strike action and accepted a revised pit-closure review procedure, which predictably was never implemented. As a result, despite their heroism, the miners were left isolated and returned to work - defeated.

The miners' defeat, along with the economic upswing of the late 1980s, set in motion a complex and difficult period in Britain which resulted in a massive shift to the right at the top of the labour movement. Labour and trade union leaders meekly accepted anti-union legislation and generally abandoned any pretence of struggle against industrial run-down and privatisation.

The victors of the miners' dispute and their apologists in the labour movement attempted to portray the strike as a doomed, futile attempt to preserve a dying industry led by a tactically inept Arthur Scargill. Others on the left said that the strike showed that the Tory government and state forces were too strong to be taken on and defeated. Ten years on, new evidence reveals a different, more complex picture.

THE MINING industry sharply contracted after world war two. From 800-plus pits and 750,000 miners in 1947, the industry had declined to 190 pits and 240,000 miners by 1983. In the 1960s this decline was partly due to the emergence of gas and nuclear power and also the acceptance of pit closures by miners' leaders. In the boom years many miners were keen to get out of the pits into the ready supply of new jobs then available.

In the early 1970s this began to change. Heath took on the miners, but their 1974 victory brought down his government. The Tories, smarting from defeat, carefully planned their revenge with the *Ridley Report*, prepared by leading Thatcherite Nicholas Ridley, which came to light in *The Economist* in 1978. The report proposed a shift from dependence on coal, outlined how coal should be stock-

piled for a long strike, and how enhanced police powers and anti-union laws should be introduced to shackle the unions - especially the NUM.

Following the defeat of the steelworkers' strike in 1980, attempts were made to close a number of pits, including Lewis Merthyr pit in South Wales. The South Wales miners immediately walked out and sent flying pickets to other coalfields. Within a day a national coal strike was threatened, which the Tories would have certainly lost. Thatcher urged caution on her cabinet and the Tories backed down, but over the next three years they built up coal stocks at the pit heads and power stations.

Former Tory chancellor Nigel Lawson recently admitted that preparation for the strike was "just like rearming to face the threat of Hitler in the 1930s".

In November 1983, after a secret closure hit-list of 49 pits was leaked, the miners implemented an overtime ban to reduce coal stocks, to make future industrial action more effective. But battle lines were being drawn in a way which indicated that the Tories would move sooner rather than later.

After the 1983 election, the Tories believed the balance of forces were moving in their favour. Two NUM ballots for action against pit closures had been defeated and the TUC failed to mount effective resistance to the anti-union laws during the Stockport Messenger dispute at the end of 1983.

This battle between Eddie Shah and the NGA printers' union occurred at Shah's Warrington printworks when he introduced new technology. Big business backed Shah's attempts to break union power and funded his use of the new anti-union laws to take the NGA to court for organis-

ing 'secondary action'. The TUC had previously taken a Congress decision to organise general strike action if any union was threatened with sequestration under the Tory laws. But when this first test came the TUC crumbled.

This, probably more than anything else, gave the Tories the green light to attack the miners. As it turned out, the single most decisive factor in the miners' defeat was their complete abandonment by the Labour and TUC leaders, who refused to organise effective solidarity with the NUM.

Another factor, however, was developments within the NUM. Although Arthur Scargill had been elected as NUM president in 1981, two subsequent ballots for industrial action against pit closures had been defeated. It is an irony of history that until March 1993 there had never been a successful NUM ballot for industrial action against pit closures. All successful ballots had been on pay. One reason for this lay in the NUM's structure, which gave enormous power to Area union officials. On issues like pay there was a national agreement, but pit closures affected some areas more than others. In the 1982 strike ballot over threatened Welsh pits, the Yorkshire area, which came out first in 1984, voted against. This caused some confusion and bitterness among South Wales miners at the start of the 1984-85 strike.

Ian Isaac, a Militant member who was Lodge Secretary of St John's NUM and a member of the South Wales NUM executive from 1983-87, has summed up (in an unpublished article) the unpreparedness of some of the left NUM leaders for struggle. Ian notes that when the closure of Cortonwood colliery was announced, which sparked the 1984-85 strike, there "was a hesitancy on the part of South Wales miners to be seen yet again as the ones to come out first. They also remembered the lukewarm reception they had the previous year when attempting to convince Yorkshire and other traditionally militant areas to join them on strike against pit closures".

These ballot defeats and lack of action in the previous



Key figures in the strike - Arthur Scargill, Jack Collins (extreme right), Tony Benn, Mick McGahey and Joan Maynard MP.

year caused some left NUM leaders to lack confidence in organising strike action. The South Wales NUM leadership was traditionally one of the most militant. But Ian Isaac remembers that at the start of the strike he attended a meeting of the South Wales Area Executive where he and another left-winger argued, in the light of all pits and surface lodges now respecting picket lines after a shaky start, that "we should hold further mass meetings to vote on supporting those on strike and consolidate the mandate expressed by miners not crossing picket lines."

"This was argued against by a number of executive members including the president, Emlyn Williams, general secretary George Rees and vice-president Terry Thomas. They argued that it was too risky and what would happen if they voted against again? This was the expression of the kind of confidence that some leaders had in their members and this type of thinking would surface again over the arguments about a national ballot".

Notwithstanding the courage and determination that was shown by the NUM national leaders Arthur Scargill and Peter Heathfield, the beginning of the strike saw them caught off guard. Peter Heathfield had said only a few months before that he didn't think young miners would strike over pit closures. Many NUM leaders had the perspective of the overtime ban continuing until the winter of 1984 and then taking strike action.

Although both ballots for industrial action against pit closures had been defeated, there had been an increasing vote for action in all areas on the second ballot. Taking all these factors into consideration the Tories, through their henchman MacGregor, probably thought that the time was right for a pre-emptive strike in March 1984.

There is some dispute among right-wing commentators about whether the Tories wanted the strike or not. Former chancellor Lawson has said that the cabinet didn't think that the miners would strike then given that it was approaching the end of winter and all the contingency plans the Tories had made. However, whether or not the Tories thought the miners would strike in response to their provocative list of pit closures, they obviously felt they were ready to face them down. Thatcher, unlike some of her ministers, had a clear political perspective about the strike and its implications for the ruling class. For her this was an industrial version of the Falklands War which had to be pursued to the bitter end - no matter what the cost.

THATCHER MADE A political calculation that if the miners could be beaten it would clear the way for further attacks on the working class. This proved to be generally correct although the long-term legacy of the strike, the increasing social division and bitterness against the Tories which saw a massive shift to the left on many social issues - even if this wasn't immediately reflected in industrial or political struggles - was something Thatcher and the Tories did not anticipate.

Since the strike every industrial struggle, from Wapping to Timex, and every political struggle like the anti-poll tax movement and the anti-CJA campaign, have been increasingly bitter; and seen an increasing police brutality and legal repression which has undermined public support for the institutions of the state. Also, the economic arguments surrounding the campaign against pit closures have been

historically justified. This was shown in October 1992 by the millions of people (including large sections of the middle class) who supported the miners' fight against pit closures.

People's long-term view of the miners' strike has been a big factor in increasing distrust and hatred of the Tories. The overwhelmingly held view now is that Scargill and the miners were right. But it is not now just a case of agreeing that the miners' arguments were right; more and more are concluding that the miners were right to struggle in the way they did.

Given what was thrown at them, could the miners have won? Right-wing critics, and some on the left, argue that the NUM's key mistake was not calling a ballot, which allowed the majority of miners in Nottingham and Leicester to continue working. The NUM had a long tradition of democracy and balloting but it wasn't always the case that ballots were held for industrial action. Particularly on the issue of pit closures, with some areas more affected than others, there was a genuine feeling among many miners that 'secure' areas like Nottingham shouldn't be allowed to vote down strike action in other areas like Wales, Scotland and Yorkshire.

A mistake was made by the NUM leadership in 1984 in not calling for a one-day general strike when the funds of the South Wales NUM, and later the national NUM, were sequestered by the courts. This mistake was unfortunately repeated in 1992 when the call for a 24-hour general strike to support the miners was left too late.

Militant maintained a united front with the miners during this period, since the lack of a ballot was being used by the right-wing to undermine the strike. But after the strike we pointed out that, because of the way the issue was used in the movement to cut across the miners' struggle, a ballot should have been called, especially after the rule change which allowed a 50% majority for strike action (instead of the previous 55%). A ballot then, six weeks into the strike, would have seen a clear national mandate for strike action.

This would have cut across all the arguments of the right wing and Kinnock. It could have cut off the Tory lifeline of coal supplies from the Midlands which was to prove crucial at a later stage of the strike. Despite this, the lack of a ballot did not defeat the miners. The main reason they lost was the role of the Labour and trade union leaders in not organising effective solidarity action - where the lack of a ballot was used as a 'get-out' clause.

A mistake was made by the NUM leadership in 1984 in not calling for a one-day general strike when the funds of the South Wales NUM, and later the national NUM, were sequestered by the courts. This mistake was unfortunately repeated in 1992 when the call for a 24-hour general strike to support the miners was left too late.

As the strike progressed other issues were raised about the effectiveness of mass picketing and the question of solidarity action being organised from below with other groups of workers.

The miners' strike in 1972 saw the first use of flying pickets and mass pickets. The mass picket at Saltley Gate coke depot in Birmingham, led by Arthur Scargill, was decisive in winning the strike. At that time the British ruling class was unprepared for such tactics. But by the 1984-85 strike the bourgeoisie had prepared thoroughly on how to render the mass picketing tactics of the 1970s ineffective through the use of the police.

This was always a risky strategy. The *Guardian* in January 1995 reported that police officers felt "betrayed by the Thatcher government and badly led by some senior officers during the 1984-85 miners' strike, according to an official history of the Police Federation". The report goes on to say that "the Federation leaders and probably the great majority of chief officers would have been shocked had they discovered that there had been secret political collusion between MacGregor, Thatcher and others". It points out that the police National Reporting Centre, which co-ordinated police action during the strike, was set up on the instructions of central government and not at senior officers' request as was claimed at the time.

On organising solidarity action, the incapacity of the union leaders showed the need to build genuine Broad Lefts capable of transforming the unions. Even in the NUM, many of the left leaders, with a few exceptions, were found wanting. Had there been an open rank-and-file based Broad Left in the NUM before the strike started, especially involving people in Nottingham, then many aspects of the strike would have been markedly different and in the miners' favour.

Building Broad Lefts in the unions, especially the power workers, would have made solidarity action from below - bypassing the obstruction of the national union leaders - much easier to build. This would have had a crucial effect, as was shown in the few cases where it was achieved, in cutting off coal supplies to power stations and steelworks.

HAD THE MINERS won then the whole course of history would have changed. Thatcher and her government would have resigned and most likely a Labour government would have come to power. The pit-closure plan would have been dropped and, under pressure from a confident working class, even a Kinnock Labour government would have had to carry through some measures in favour of the working class, perhaps being compelled to abolish the Tory anti-union laws. One of the principal reasons for Kinnock's attacks on the miners was his fear of a rising tide of militancy in the event of a miners' victory - he didn't want to see militancy pay.

That is not to say, however, that pessimistic conclusions should be drawn from the events of the strike. The miners' defeat was undoubtedly a setback for the whole labour movement but the fact that they fought so valiantly and the subsequent historical vindication of their stand shows they were right to struggle in the way they did.

The miners' strike politicised a generation of young socialists and produced a massive shift to the left on many issues in society. Had the miners not struggled as they did

under Arthur Scargill then the Tory pit-closure programme would have proceeded much more speedily and many other anti-working class measures would have been introduced earlier than they were.

But most importantly the miners' strike brought out the willingness of working-class people to struggle to change society. That willingness has intensified in the struggles since. New generations will return to the lessons of the strike to ensure they are better equipped to win their own industrial battles and succeed in the socialist struggle to change society. □

Chronology

November 1983

NCB confirm 49 pits will close due to 'exhausted reserves'.

March 1984

5 - Yorkshire miners stop work at proposed accelerated closure of Cortonwood and Bulcliffe Wood. Yorkshire NUM calls total stoppage from 12 March.

6 - Scottish Area NUM calls strike from 9 March.

8 - NUM national executive declares strikes in Yorkshire and Scotland official and any other area "which takes similar action".

April 1984

19 - NUM special delegate conference supports action in all British coalfields. Resolutions for a ballot overwhelmingly rejected.

May 1984

29 - 5,000 pickets at Orgreave. Riot police deployed for first time.

June 1984

4 - Scargill arrested at Orgreave.

6 - 10,000 pickets at Orgreave, 93 arrests, 73 police and hundreds of pickets injured.

July

South Wales NUM, fined £50,000 for contempt of court, refuse to pay.

August

1 - Mass demonstration outside South Wales NUM in Pontypridd against threat of sequestrators.

16 - £707,000 seized by sequestrators direct from South Wales NUM accounts.

October

1-5 - Labour Party conference



backs the miners.

4 - NUM fined £200,000 for contempt.

25 - Proposed NACODS strike over colliery closure review procedure called off.

25 - Sequestrators appointed to seize NUM funds.

November

13 - TUC secretary Norman Willis confronted by hangman's noose at miners' rally in South Wales.

December

14 - Energy minister Peter Walker rejects further talks.

February

20 - NUM accepts review procedure as agreed by NACODS and asks for talks with no preconditions.

March

3 - NUM special delegate conference votes by 98-91 to return to work without an agreement or amnesty.

5 - Miners return behind brass bands with their supporters. 700 sacked miners not reinstated into former jobs.

Wagnermania



Wagner: "A great mind imprisoned by reaction".

Following Channel Four's series on the composer Richard Wagner, **John Bulaitis** looks at the life and art of this controversial 19th century figure.

THE CENTERPIECE OF Channel Four's *Wagnermania* series was an interesting documentary entitled *Wagner vs Wagner* featuring the composer's great-grandson, Gottfried Wagner. The documentary was an important statement dealing with the relationship between Wagner's work and Nazism.

Wagner's biographers - and his other descendants - have nearly always attempted to play down his reactionary ideas. But here was his great-grandson making an unanswerable case, exposing the racism in his works and, moreover, describing and attacking the links between his own family and Adolf Hitler.

Against images of Nazi stormtroopers marching to Wagner's themes, Gottfried described how his grandmother Winifred Wagner, had joined the Nazis in 1923 - ten years before they came to power - and how she had played a major role in opening up links between Hitler and big business. Under her directorship, the yearly music festival at Bayreuth - a theatre built by the composer - became a Nazi gala.

Of course, there are countless examples where an artist's work has been utilised by others in a way that they themselves would not have endorsed; the British composer, Edward Elgar, wrote the *Pomp and Circumstances* marches but always detested the jingoistic ditty, *Land of Hope and Glory*, attached to one of them.

But, while one cannot say that Wagner would definitely have approved of Nazism, it cannot be denied that he ended his days a virulent nationalist and racist and that these ideas are clearly expressed in his later works.

It does not take much stretch of the imagination to interpret his last opera, *Parsifal*, as the story of a community (the Aryan Race) in decay due

to interbreeding with racial inferiors (the Jews) and redeemed by adopting a new racial religion and the principle of racial exclusivity. Hitler once described *Parsifal* as the "ultimate experience... the only thing that anticipates what I have to do".

The case is further strengthened by the fact that Wagner not only wrote operas, but churned out a series of tedious essays and 'philosophical' writings. The crudest of these were written between 1878 and his death in 1883 and include the notorious *Know Thyself*, which talks about the "great and noble character" of "pure-bred races" like the Germans and looks forward to a time when there will be an "absence of Jews". All this has sometimes led to calls for his music to be banned - and indeed it is still forbidden to perform Wagner in Israel.

But the Channel Four season left a big question unanswered: how was it that Richard Wagner, who ended his days as one of the biggest reactionary egotists of all time (1), was in 1848 a revolutionary democrat, fighting on the Dresden barricades, helping to manufacture hand-grenades in his back garden and - after the revolution's defeat - only escaping arrest, imprisonment and a possible death sentence by the skin of his teeth? After that he was exiled from Germany for eleven years and invariably trailed by the secret police.

In fact it is only by exploring this contradiction that we can gain a real understanding of the development of Wagner's ideas, and their connection with, and influence on, the development of his art.

IN TERMS OF the Western tradition of classical music, Wagner was a true revolutionary - the most influential figure in the second half of the 19th century. As well as redefining the relationship between music and drama, he stretched what musicians call tonal harmony to its limits. Without getting too technical, this device can create for the listener a feeling of unresolved tension in music and so act as an emotional trigger.

Even on a superficial level Wagner has had a lasting effect: it is hard to get by a day without one of his themes popping up in a TV advert, documentary, film, brass band concert or wed-

ding.

Trotsky argued that a work of art should, "in the first place, be judged by its own law, that is, by the law of art".

And there can be no doubt that from the point of view of his art, Wagner was a giant. But the argument of some that, as he wrote great music, that's all that matters and his political views are irrelevant, is wrong.

Art is not produced in a vacuum but is connected to the development of society and influenced by the struggles between the different social forces in society, reflecting the ideas that arise on the basis of those struggles.

And Wagner certainly dealt with, what we may call, the big themes in human society - life, death, love, fate, power and conflict. It is this, as well as his musical genius, that helps to explain the lasting impact, and power of his music. Even Trotsky describes

*While one cannot say
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Inspired by Wagner?

in his *Diary in Exile* how he stayed up to midnight to listen to a performance of *Die Walkure* (The Valkyrie) on the radio.

The decisive influence on Richard Wagner was revolution - and counter-revolution. Beethoven, the colossus who revolutionised Western music in the first half of the 19th century, was inspired by the spirit of a revolutionary age generated by the Great French revolution of 1789. His music is imbued with optimism and revolutionary fervour.

In Beethoven's day the bourgeoisie was generally still playing a progressive role, although many artists very quickly began to rebel against its destructive impact on communities and human relationships.

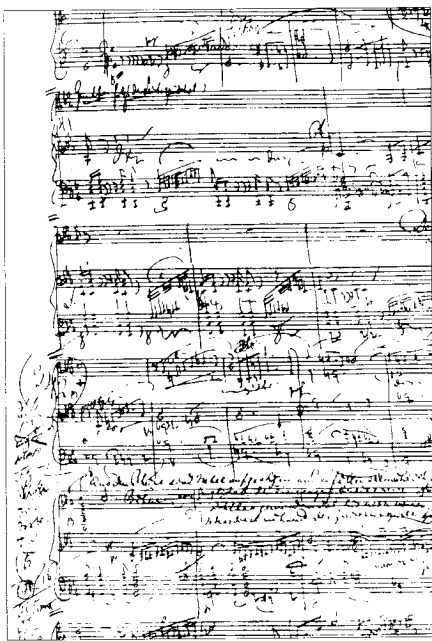
The young Richard Wagner mixed in the same radical milieu as the young Marx and Engels (2). For a time he even followed a vaguely parallel political evolution as the founders of scientific socialism - influenced first by the philosophical ideas of the young Hegelians and latter by those of Ludwig Feuerbach.

He was politically influenced by the ideas of anarchism. He worked closely with Bakunin (3) in the Dresden uprising and was a personal friend of Georg Herwegh (4) who in 1844 was on the editorial board of the radical paper *Vorwärts* together with Marx and Bakunin.

About 1848 Wagner wrote: "I (revolution) will destroy every wrong which has power over men. I will destroy the domination of one over the other... I will shatter the power of the mighty, of the law of property. Let there be an end to the wrong that gives one man power over millions".

Around the same time, he penned ideas about art in total contradiction to his later chauvinism: "Art of the future world would embrace the spirit of newly-liberated humanity. Nationality would be no more than an ornament - art would be taken out of the world of profit-making and capitalist speculation".

But the 1848 revolutions were betrayed by the bourgeoisie. It had ceased to be a revolutionary class - terrified that a revolution would not stop at the demolition of feudal rule but spill over into a workers' revolution. In particular the German capitalist class - because, historically, it had



"...tonal harmony to its limits".

developed weak and fragmented - had from the outset been thoroughly reactionary. Marx and Engels, by now, were basing their work completely on the understanding that the revolution could only be carried out, not by the bourgeoisie, but against it. 1848 confirmed that the task now fell on the shoulders of the German working class.

But middle-class intellectuals, including writers, poets and musicians - and including Richard Wagner - while being repelled by the social conditions created by capitalism, and the system's rotten values, were unable to see in the small, relatively young German working class the decisive force for political change.

IN COMMON WITH most intellectuals, Wagner - despite his courage and self-sacrifice displayed in Dresden - had a haughty contempt for the working class.

Even after the brutal crushing of the Dresden insurrection by Prussian troops, he remained optimistic about the revolution's victory for a further three years. But - and this is the decisive point - without the perspective of a workers' revolution, it was inevitable that he would increasingly draw pessimistic and reactionary conclusions from the revolution's defeat.

Wagner's evolution was part of a tendency in German art: writers, poets and philosophers reflected a contradiction between, on one hand, a

hatred of capitalism and its values and, on the other - because of their lack of confidence in the working class struggling for a socialist future - a looking back to a mystical feudal past or to mythology in a hunt for the values destroyed by capitalism.

Part of this trend was an appeal to the Volk (people) with its denial of class division. This Volkisch ideology, which originally developed with the rise of German national consciousness in the 18th century, contained the roots of the anti-semitism that was to become an integral part of capitalist reaction in Germany; the Jew was contrasted, as an outsider tied to commerce, to the mythology of pure German-blooded peasants living in a true community.

So although the bulk of German intellectuals - in contrast to the German bourgeoisie - had welcomed and were inspired by the great French revolution - the collapse of 'bourgeois liberalism' in 1848 and their failure to base themselves on the struggle of the working class meant that an entire generation took the road to extreme reaction. Wagner's journey from revolution to reaction can be traced in his epic work, *The Ring* cycle. He conceived the idea in the revolutionary days of 1848 and began work shortly after. The story, although based in myth, is a depiction of class conflict: an old world corrupted by power, tyranny and greed for control over a gold ring whose possession gives man economic control and power to exploit his fellow man. This old order is contrasted to a struggle for a new order based on freedom and love.

The young Richard Wagner was politically influenced by the ideas of anarchism.

The idea is a Feuerbachian rather than a Marxist one but there is undoubtedly also a socialist element in *The Ring*. One writer has described the hammering music in *Das Rheingeld* as "the most vivid evocation of the dark, harsh world of early industrial capitalism in nineteenth century music" (5).

The work's socialist element was illustrated magnificently in the acclaimed 'Marxist' interpretation of

the cycle by French director Patrice Chereau - complete with pit-wheels and hydro-electric dam and an optimistic conclusion that the masses, not individual 'heroes', would build a new society.

But *The Ring* was not completed until 1874 and in its later parts the analogies with class disappear and, of course, the whole thing ends with the doom, pessimism and destruction of *Gotterdammerung* (The Twilight of the Gods).

Between its start and completion Wagner had ditched Feuerbach and embraced the idealist philosophy of Schopenhauer; the reactionary 'philosopher of pessimism', who provided the philosophical cover for the German bourgeoisie's support for the Bismark Junker dictatorship. Wagner was to become a representative of German bourgeois reaction at a particular stage in that country's capitalist development.

Nazism and fascism - "the distilled essence of imperialism" as Trotsky described it - represented a different later stage of the same capitalist reaction. As always, reaction ransacks the past and Hitler stirred into his reactionary pot, amongst other trends, Volkism, Schopenhauer and... Richard Wagner. In the words of the Marxist philosopher Georg Lukacs, Wagner's was truly a "a great mind trapped by reaction". □

Notes

1. Engels wrote that many people have thought themselves "the only true philosopher of today and the 'foreseeable' future" but Wagner was "probably the first who has calmly blurted it out". (Anti-Duhring, p35).

2. In a remarkable coincidence the 20-year-old Frederick Engels wrote in 1840-41 a libretto for an opera called *Cola di Rienzi* - a story of a fourteenth century Roman politician and general who led a popular revolt only to end up a tyrant himself. In 1842 Wagner's own version of *Rienzi* was premiered in Dresden.

3. George Bernard Shaw argued that Bakunin was the model for the Siegfried character in *The Ring*.

4. In 1848 Herwegh attempted to invade Germany with a guerrilla band to spur on the revolution; an adventure that finished in a bloody shambles.

5. Anthony Arblaster, *Viva la Liberta, Politics in Opera*.

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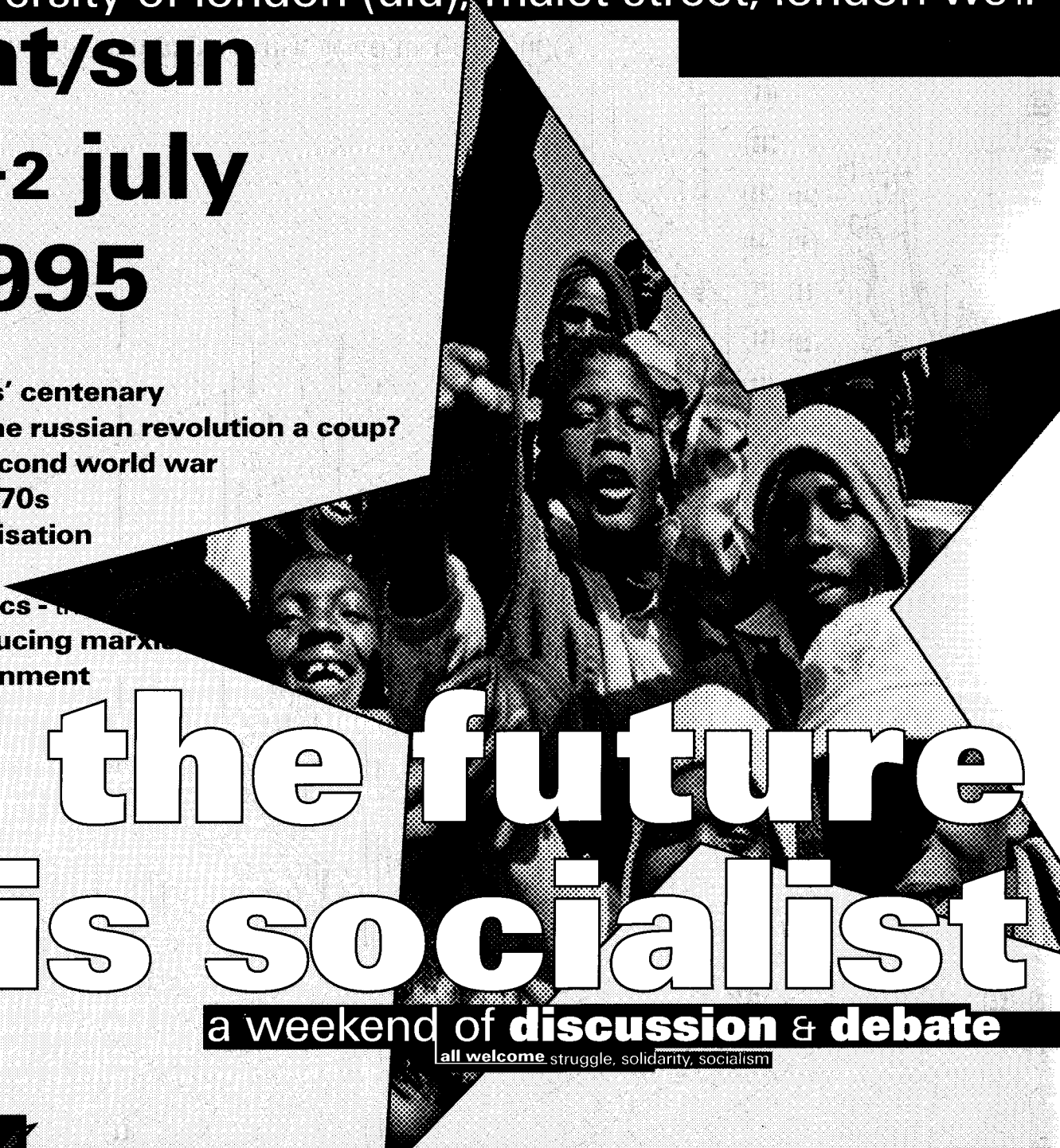
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