



# A Socialist Programme

for ***AMICUS***

50 p

*A Socialist Appeal* pamphlet

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# A New Beginning

IN OUR pamphlet *A Socialist Programme for the AEEU* published in June 1998, we attempted to describe the process through which right wing bureaucracies had been defeated in the trade union movement in the past, and concluded:

"No matter how invincible the current leadership of the AEEU appear the same fate awaits them. But this is neither automatic or inevitable. It has to be organised and worked for. The task for left wing activists is to organise to transform the union. To do this we have to learn from past failures and to place our faith in the membership by campaigning for their support for genuine socialist policies and a militant industrial strategy."

The election of Derek Simpson as General Secretary, and the defeat of Sir Ken Jackson, marks a decisive turning point in the history of our union. In fact, it represents an earthquake in the labour movement as a whole. Thanks to the efforts of many committed activists during that election campaign - and for years before in the workplaces, the branches, and the union's conferences - the membership now has the opportunity to reclaim the union.

At the same time the merger with the MSF to form AMICUS will create an immensely powerful industrial trade union. In the hands of its members, breaking the

deceit of 'social partnership' (ie class collaboration with the bosses), returning to the great militant traditions of all the unions concerned, our new union can play a vital role in defending members jobs, terms and conditions. More than that, it can play a central part in the struggle of the whole working class against the incessant attacks of management; and in the struggle to reclaim the Labour Party, the fight for socialist policies throughout the movement.

However, it would be a terrible mistake to believe that the election of Derek Simpson is the end of the story. The defeat of Jackson was an outstanding achievement but it is only the first page of a new chapter.

Now control of the union must be returned to the membership. AMICUS must become renowned throughout the movement for defending and improving the position of its members. It must become a name which strikes fear into boardrooms and cabinet offices wherever bosses or governments seek to attack workers. In that struggle a clear industrial and political programme is essential. Through the pages of this pamphlet Socialist Appeal supporters will seek to make a contribution to the working out of that programme.

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# Introduction

## 2002- An Earthquake in the British Labour Movement

TO THE expert analysts and commentators in the media the election of Derek Simpson to the post of General Secretary of the AEEU was inexplicable. Before the recount of the ballot, many of them had confidently reported the victory of Sir Ken Jackson. That was the result they were expecting. Essentially for two decades they had become used to the domination of the leadership of the unions - with one or two exceptions - by the right wing.

In fact there was a lot going on at the time that they could not understand. The one million strong national strike by members of UNISON, the T&G, and GMB on July 17, 2002 was, they claimed, a bolt from a clear blue sky. The magnificent firefighters' strike for a 40% pay rise which began a few months later in November was also beyond their comprehension. With a handful of honourable exceptions like the heroic stand of the Cooks workers (and such struggles rarely featured in the pages of the daily papers) industrial action had apparently become a rarity. Certainly national strikes were few and far between. Statistics were regularly reeled off to demonstrate just how few strikes were taking place. Indeed the myth began to settle, at least amongst these 'experts', that the class struggle was over, the unions were finished as militant workers' organisations and so on. In 2002 all that began to change.

Page after page of newsprint, and broadcast after broadcast on the TV, has been devoted to convincing us that each new example of militant action is an aberration, a one-off. By definition a 'one-off' can only occur once. There have been too many of these so-called 'one-offs' to continue to believe they are accidents. The fact that London Underground was also brought to a standstill by a strike in July 2002 was unconnected, the media assured everyone, and caused by the hothead, left-wing leadership of the RMT. There is no connection either, they try to tell us, with the shift to the left in a whole series of unions which coincided with these events. None of these developments, we are asked to believe, have any connection with the firefighters' strike - their nine to one vote should be ignored, they were led out by another hothead, Andy Gilchrist, the General Secretary of the FBU.

There will be no return to the 'bad old days' of the 1970s we have been

repeatedly told, after all the trade unions are now social partners not militant workers organisations, aren't they? Simon Jenkins in the London Evening Standard (18/7/02) for example, "I doubt if London is in for a run of industrial disputes. Too much has changed. The public sector is not the monopoly it was. Union leaders may be more left wing but few other than Mr Crow, wield much power and he is only an occasional pain in the neck." Or even the editorial of The Guardian (19/07/02), "It is a bit premature, to say the least, to extract a lasting trend from events as disparate as a strike over safety at London Transport, a dispute over a trade union leader trying to hang on to his job too long and a strike by low paid council workers."

If this were the case in just one union, or just one strike, then it could be an accident, an isolated development, a question of personalities or special circumstances. However, the election victories of the left are not confined to one union but spread across every single union to hold such a ballot. The claim that an increase in industrial action has been caused by left wing leaders fails to explain how the members of these unions came to elect left leaders, not once but time and time again.

A couple of years ago a secret committee was allegedly established at TUC headquarters to organise the election campaigns of right wing candidates in various unions. This must be the most unsuccessful campaign team of all time. The right wing has not won an election since! Instead whenever an election has been held in order to secure the votes of the members, candidates have had to put forward increasingly militant and left wing policies.

### No-one admits to being right wing any more

NOT SO long ago, some on the left in the trade union movement spent hours discussing which out of two right wing candidates was the "lesser of two evils", which was the least right wing, in order to decide who to endorse, one or the other. How times have changed. Nowadays it is difficult to find a bona fide right wing candidate - at least one

that will admit to it. Certainly few will admit to supporting Blair. In the recent T&G General Secretary election even (blatantly obvious) right winger Jack Dromey claimed to be in opposition to the Blairites.



In the election for a new General Secretary of the 700,000 strong GMB the press tried to take solace in the claim that the victor Kevin Curran is 'slightly less left wing' than his opponent Paul Kenny. In reality there was no obvious right wing candidate, with both candidates attacking the Blair leadership of the Labour Party. Curran specifically made a point of calling for the repeal of all anti-trade union legislation in his election campaign. Former regional secretary for the north-east, Curran won around 67% of the vote in a low turnout.

Evidently spurred on by this further step to the left at the top of Britain's major unions, a blast from the past, right wing, dinosaur days came in the form of comments from government minister Alan Johnson. In a carefully-timed attack in the Financial Times, Johnson said some leaders were indulging in the kind of militancy which has largely disappeared from British labour relations over the last two decades. In other words precisely the kind of militancy which led him to scurry from his own leading position in the CWU to the more comfortable post of a government ministry.

Mr Johnson said: "The TUC left planet Zog 20-odd years ago ... but a few union leaders go back for the occasional day trip."

One point made by Johnson was telling, however, when he pointed to what he saw as an "endemic problem

in this country where the candidates for high office in trade unions think that they constantly have to outdo each other for rhetoric". In other words they have to move to the left if they want the support of the rank and file who have finished with right wing aliens like Johnson, Jackson and Reamsbottom. Why is this?

## New Mood of Militancy

THE LOCAL government strike in July 2002 may seem like an odd place to begin a pamphlet concerned with the future of Amicus. Yet that strike marked an important turning point in the labour movement in Britain, no less than the election of Derek Simpson did, in fact both events were part of the same process.

This was not just a strike for a certain percentage pay rise - though every penny gained is worth fighting for. The concessions that were wrung out of the government - the £5 an hour minimum rate for example - were won by militant action. The union leaders claimed that this was achieved by their negotiating skill. Before the strike took place the employers announced that there was no more money, no matter what. Brian Baldwin, chairman of the employers negotiating team announced the day before the strike, "There is no good reason for the employers to improve their reasonable offer." The action of a million workers gave them the necessary "good reason" that they were looking for.

Militancy achieved more in 24 hours than five years of consultations between union leaders and the fat cats who sit on the Low Pay Commission had done. In reality, five pounds an hour is still poverty pay, and incidentally is it not a scandal that after five years of Labour government there were still workers in local government earning less than a fiver an hour?

After years of apparent industrial peace here was a major national strike, a million workers from three unions announcing that they had had enough. It was the first national strike of its kind in twenty years, the biggest strike by women workers in British history, and, according to the London Evening Standard, the biggest industrial action 'since the 1926 General Strike.'

Of course, in the first place this strike was caused by the scandalous level of wages in local government. The Labour Research Department has produced figures showing that local government workers earn less as a percentage of the average wage than they did in 1979. If you are struggling by on this money of course, you hardly need statistics to tell you how badly off you are.

The real question is why did the

strike take place when it did? Local government workers pay was bad last year and for years before that. Finally their patience had worn thin. In the second term of a Labour government nothing was getting better. Another insulting pay offer represented a line in the sand, and a million workers said 'this far and no further'. Their action brought immediate results. That lesson will not be lost on the strikers themselves nor on other sections of workers. The union leaders settled for too little too early, and the mood of the rank and file in these unions, as Socialist Appeal predicted at the time, has been reflected in their internal elections. Recently both the GMB and the T&G held elections for new General Secretaries and the inevitable result, the consequence both of the experience of the local government strike, and of a changing mood in society, was a continuation of the shift to the left.

In the election to replace retiring John Edmonds as General Secretary of the GMB, London Regional Secretary Paul Kenny will have been seen by many as the left candidate. Yet if one reads the campaign material of his opponent, and the eventual victor, Kevin Curran, one could only conclude that in fact the election was a run off between two left candidates.

In the T&G the election of Tony Woodley to the post of Assistant General Secretary was already a part of this process. It was therefore quite easy to predict that when it came time to elect a new General Secretary Woodley would win. The attempt by right wing candidate Jack Dromey to pose as an opponent of Blair and somehow 'on the left', tells us a great deal about the current mood in the union. Needless to say Dromey's act fooled no-one. A central plank of Woodley's manifesto was the pledge to call a summit of union leaders to organise reclaiming the Labour Party. In addition to a pledge to fight to save jobs, this struck a chord with the membership.

The ongoing process of left wing leaders being elected, seen alongside an increase in grievances, of disputes and of industrial action, is clearly not an accident nor the result of left wing agitators but a profound expression of a change in outlook of the working class, of union activists, and in society in general.

## Profound Changes Taking Place

IT IS not an accident that the election of Derek Simpson coincided with a local government strike and a shift to the left in other unions, or with other workers



taking action, especially the firefighters. These developments are all part of the same process. Seen alongside these other events, and not separate from them, the local government strike was an indication of the profound change taking place in society. The firefighters' strike made that abundantly clear to all except those who refuse to see.

Our friends at The Guardian are entirely wrong to claim that there is no trend to be seen here. It is vitally important for trade unionists to be able to see this trend, to see events not in isolation from one another, unconnected, but to see the process linking them all together. This is the task of Marxism. Socialist Appeal has attempted to chart, describe and explain this process in advance over a number of years. Here we see the vital importance of theory for trade union activists, the advantage which Marxism has over all other trends in the labour movement, as Leon Trotsky once explained, is the benefit of foresight over astonishment. This is not meant to suggest that Marxists are in possession of a crystal ball with which to predict the future. Theory allows us to avoid being seduced by the surface calm of society, to see beneath that thin veneer to the real process unfolding underneath. It allows activists to see the process of change like the one that developed over several years in the AEEU, and not be conned into thinking that Jackson and co were cast in stone, immovable and impossible to defeat.

The trend which we have charted for some time, although invisible to our friends in the media, in reality, extends back years.

At the time of the 2001 general election we were told that the low turnouts were caused by 'voter satisfaction'. In reality, this too was an early expression of the level of anger and discontent being built up beneath the surface of society. Many workers voted Labour to give them another chance, to give them more time. Many voted Labour simply because there was no

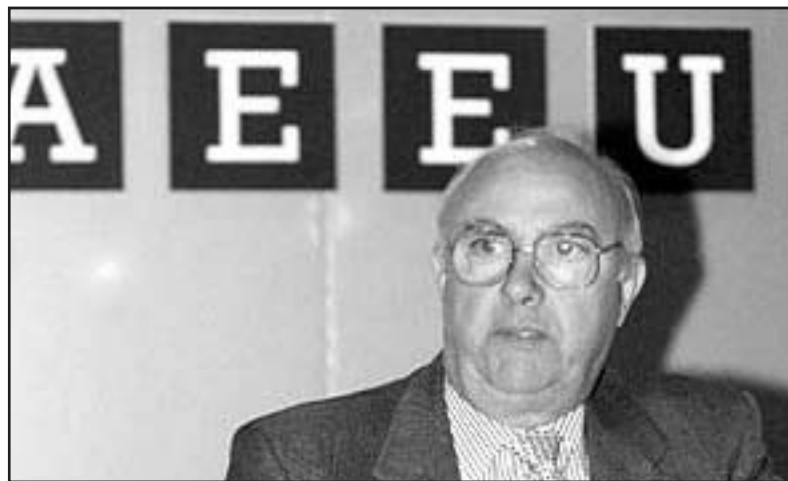
alternative, though they had already become disillusioned. Many others simply stayed at home unable to bring themselves to vote for Blair and co.

Blocked from solving their problems on the political front, through the election, workers turned once again to the industrial field of action. The number of strike ballots steadily grew. Often strikes were averted only by the role of the union leaders themselves. This began to provoke changes inside the unions, with the election of new more militant leaderships. Beginning with those unions that had been involved in action, the postal workers and railworkers in particular, the old leaders began to be swept aside. The profound discontent and anger that was mounting beneath the apparently calm surface of society sought ways to express itself. On July 17 it burst through dramatically, in the local government workers strike. This was the prologue. The curtain rose on the firefighters' strike just four months later. In the midst of this unfolding drama, one of the main villains of the piece, Sir Ken Jackson, was roundly defeated.

## All Change at the Tops of the Unions

THE CHANGES inside the unions which had begun in smaller unions like ASLEF and the RMT rapidly spread to the larger unions with the victory of Mark Serwotka in the PCS, the election of Tony Woodley as Deputy General Secretary of the T&G, and the earthquake, the final proof for those who still refused to see the process unfolding before us, the election of Derek Simpson in the AEEU and the defeat of Blair's closest ally in the unions, Sir Ken Jackson. If any one single event demonstrates the profound nature of the changes beginning to take place in the unions it is surely the victory of the left in what was seen as the bulwark of the right wing in the movement for decades, the AEEU.

In the context of all these events it now becomes clear that the strike by UNISON, GMB and T&G members represented an early expression of the same profound change taking place in society. That was clearly illustrated by the Guardian/ICM opinion poll which found 59% of people in favour not only of this strike but of other future strikes being planned. This figure is one more expression of the mood of anger which has built up within society over years. It was a precursor of more industrial action to come. The enormous level of support for the struggle of the firefighters indicates a change in mood that is



widespread across every part of society. This was not merely an expression of the respect in which these workers who risk their lives to save others are held, more than that their fight resonated with the mood of millions of workers. At last after twenty years someone was standing up for themselves. We all feel the same way too! We have all had enough! This change in mood is a condition which can prepare the way for a general strike in the future as we have explained before - usually to the derision of those cynics who argued that the working class was finished. The same cynics who claimed that there could never be a national public sector strike, and that there could never be any change in the AEEU. They are the same cynics who will tell you that Tony Blair has the Labour Party firmly under control and that there will never be any change there either. They received their answer on July 17, they were answered by the FBU strike and by the election of Derek Simpson.

## "We Are All Working Class Now"

OPINION POLLS in themselves prove nothing, of course. In fact, depending on what question you ask, they can probably prove everything. Seen alongside all the other developments however they are an important element in the equation. MORI regularly conducts an opinion poll on people's attitudes to class. In 1994, 51 percent of those interviewed considered themselves working class. In 1997 the figure rose to 58 percent. In 2002, 68 percent declared themselves "working class and proud of it". The Guardian, who published this poll, then devoted a large article by Roy Greenslade to excusing this inexplicable declaration.

Greenslade's argument went as follows. Whilst we are all really much better off, and should really call ourselves middle class, we can't bring ourselves

to do so because of the connotations of snobbery. Whether such a feeble argument convinces anyone or not, it does not explain why the number of people describing themselves as working class has grown so consistently over the last ten years to the record figure recorded in 2002.

There is a much simpler and more convincing argument which does explain this growth, however. There are no cosy jobs anymore, no jobs for life, no-one feels safe. Those who in the past might have thought of themselves as middle class, bankworkers, social workers, civil servants and teachers, for example, face intense pressure, falling wages, and job insecurity. It is this profound level of insecurity and the unprecedented levels of indebtedness amongst ordinary workers, which explains this poll which should take its place as another symptom of the profound change taking place in society.

These changing conditions more accurately explain the rise in militancy, the shift to the left in the unions, and the growth in union membership in the recent period. While the changes in union recognition rules have had some effect, the GMB recruited 44,000 new members on the basis of their campaign to keep the private sector out of public services alone. A more campaigning stance, a serious attention to recruitment on the part of the unions, could see membership grow still more rapidly. In predominantly industrial unions like Amicus membership has inevitably fallen as a consequence of the wholesale destruction of British manufacturing industry. Nevertheless the union's membership can be rebuilt if a serious approach is taken to recruiting new members and in new workplaces. The other prerequisite for building the union is that it is seen to stand up for its members. Workers do not generally join a union for cheaper car insurance but they will join if they see an organisation which will represent them and fight for them in the work-

place.

The developments within the unions described here represent the beginning of the catching up of consciousness with reality. Things are not going to get better on their own. Blair and co. are not going to solve anything either. This represents a fundamental change taking place, a change which has already begun to find an expression inside the trade unions, even at the 'highest' levels.

## The Left and the General Council of the TUC

EVEN AT the somewhat removed level of the TUC there has already been a profound change. Billy Hayes of the CWU and Derek Simpson of the AEEU are now on the General Council, along with Jeremy Dear the General Secretary of the NUJ, Andy Gilchrist of the FBU, Mick Rix of ASLEF and other socialists and lefts. This already represents the biggest swing to the left in the TUC for twenty years. They constitute a formidable bloc. The election of Woodley to the General Secretary position in the T&G strengthens that bloc still further. This bloc must not be confined to the tops of the movement, however, but used to rally and organise activists across the trade unions. The left must be built in each union, gaining majorities on National Executives so that left General Secretaries are not isolated. This is not an end in itself, of course, but part of the struggle to change the policies of the unions, to return to their militant, fighting traditions in the interests of their members, and put an end to the period of social partnership - in reality class collaboration - once and for all.

In their own unions and collectively across the labour movement these new leaders hold a great authority, an authority which must be used in the interests of their members and of the working class as a whole. United behind a common programme of struggle, against privatisation, for public ownership, against closures and redundancies, for a shorter working week, for the repeal of all the anti-union laws, such an opposition would form an immense pole of attraction.

In the next period a struggle will unfold across the public and private sectors to defend jobs, to defend terms and conditions, pensions etc. A vital element in those battles will be the fight to reclaim the unions for their members. Equally the trade unions can play a decisive part in reclaiming the Labour Party for the working class.

# Reclaim the Labour Party - Fight for Socialist Policies

STRUGGLE ON the industrial front in defence of jobs, wages and conditions is vital, but is also only a part of the task in front of us. The struggle needs to be taken onto the political field too. The fight must be taken into the Labour Party. Through their attacks on the firefighters the Labour leaders have made it quite clear that they want a fight with the unions. The unions should give them a fight, inside the Labour Party. The new left leaders, and trade union activists across the movement must launch a serious struggle to reclaim the party, formed by the unions to represent working class people, from the careerists who have hijacked it.

The Blairites are once again raising the idea of state funding of political parties. They are desperate to sever the link between the party and the unions before the disease of militancy can spread. The initial support amongst some activists for breaking the link is turning into a realisation that the link must not be broken but used to reclaim the Labour Party.

In yet another poll, a big majority of Labour voters expressed their opposition to breaking these historic ties. 64 percent of Labour voters are opposed to breaking the link. 53 percent of Tory voters are in favour. So while the Tories and the Blairites agree, the big majority of workers want to defend the link and that will be expressed in the political fund ballots which begin again in 2003. Understandably given the commitment of Blair and co to Tory policies like privatisation, some union activists will still want to break the link. It could not even be ruled out that one or two small unions might vote to disaffiliate from the party. Even if this does happen it will be a temporary phenomenon. It will not last, and the big majority of unions will retain the link with the Labour Party. The task is not just to keep the link, but to use it to transform the Labour Party into an organisation that fights for and represents working class interests.

The trade unions are the key to reclaiming the Labour Party from the

Blairite hijackers. Many new union leaders have called on their members to join the Labour Party and reclaim it. The leaders of the CWU, RMT, ASLEF, have stated that the place to take Blair on is inside the Labour Party. Derek Simpson has made the same point. We support their call one hundred percent. A campaign must be organised by these union leaders to turn the unions into the party and reclaim it from the dead hands of the carpetbagger Blairites. In his election campaign in the T&G Woodley pledged to call a summit of union leaders to organise taking the party over. We must ensure that Amicus plays a full part in that campaign.

The struggle to reclaim the unions and the Labour Party form an integral part of the struggle to change society. Ultimately only breaking with capitalism and carrying out a socialist transformation of society can permanently address the problems facing all working people. In order to change society we need to take our tools, our organisations back from the careerists and bureaucrats.

None of this will happen overnight. But many believed even the first transformations which we have already seen could never happen. The trade unions look very different today to what they did five or ten years ago. They will look very different again in the next ten. They will go through a process of transformations and changes. As, at a certain stage, will the Labour Party. The new period we have entered will see explosive developments. The Firefighters represent the front rank of millions of workers who have had enough. Now a queue is forming of workers preparing to take action. The floodgates may not yet be open but the dam has been breached. A wall of pressure is mounting behind and will burst through again and again. The process will not proceed in a straight line. There will be ebbs and flows, quiet periods and periods of rapid change. It will take some time, but the important thing now is to recognise that this process has begun.

## Pendulum begins to swing left

IF ONE sees the changes in the labour movement over the last twenty years as the motion of a pendulum, then that pendulum has swung a long, long way to the right. If we remember our school physics lessons however, every action has an equal and opposite reaction. The pendulum has now begun its journey in the opposite direction. The movement of the working class looks a lot different now to what it has looked like, at least on the surface, for years. In reality the trade union movement has been transformed. It will be transformed again and again in coming years. Just look at the leaderships of the unions say ten or even five years ago. The civil servants union has been led by the hard right for years. No matter how hard Barry Reamsbottom, the outgoing General Secretary, tried to cling on to his post (much like Sir Ken Jackson) through legal action, the mood of the union was clearly reflected in the election of left candidate Mark Serwotka. The postal workers were led by Alan Johnson who jumped ship to become a Labour MP at the 1997 general election and support the Blairites backdoor privatisation of the post office. Left candidate Billy Hayes has won the General Secretary election in that union. ASLEF was led by Lew Adams, now by left winger Mick Rix. The RMT was led by Jimmy Knapp, now by leftwinger Bob Crow. It is no accident either that these were precisely the unions which have been involved in struggles over jobs, pay and conditions in recent years.

Then there is the final nail in the coffin of the argument that these events are all unconnected and somehow inexplicable - the defeat of the right wing on what was perceived to be its home ground, the AEEU. The union's name had become a by-word over decades for so-called social partnership, in reality class collaboration. The right wing leadership of Gavin Laird and Bill Jordan was succeeded by Sir Ken Jackson. Jackson was Blair's biggest supporter in the trade union movement, and in turn Blair heaped praise upon the former AEEU General Secretary. Despite all the organisational and financial resources at his disposal he could not hold back the tide which swept left candidate Derek Simpson to victory.

So the trade unions look a lot different to what they did just a couple of years ago. However this is just the beginning. They will look different again in the next ten years. All of this will be reflected inside the Labour Party too.

This has been the case throughout the history of the British labour movement. The process unfolding before us now will not simply repeat the same course taken before. What is certain though is that over a period of time the shift to the left in the unions and mounting mood of militancy will also see a new left emerge inside the Labour Party. The tide has begun to turn against Blair already. In the next period there will be tremendous opportunities for us to reclaim our own organisations, the unions and the Labour Party.

The past is now decisively behind us. The future is there for the taking if we fight for it. In all the struggles in front of us the ideas of Marxism and Socialist Appeal can prove to be an invaluable weapon.

# AMICUS- The Past and the Future

THE HISTORY of our union in the last twenty years has been dominated by 'sweetheart deals', 'social partnership' and a right wing bureaucratic leadership which has constantly worn away the democratic practices of the union. It is no accident that these developments have coincided with the wholesale destruction of manufacturing industry, the loss of countless thousands of jobs, and the erosion of hard won terms and conditions in the workplace which represent a full scale counter-revolution in the workplace. It is no accident either that these developments ran parallel with the shift to the right at the top of the Labour Party and the triumph of Blairism. All these phenomena are closely linked together and dependent on one another. Indeed, Jackson and his predecessors played the leading role in the move to the right at the top of the entire movement in the recent past. For that reason the defeat of the Jackson bureaucracy marks a decisive turning point in the trade union movement, and the opening of a new chapter of struggle inside the Labour Party.

This recent history serves to mask the proud, democratic and militant traditions of the union. The workers who constitute AMICUS are a key section of the industrial working class.

Engineering, construction, motor vehicle, shipbuilding, metal and electrical workers have played and continue to play a central role in the struggles of the working class across the world. Today they are at the forefront of the struggles of workers from South Korea to Brazil to defend jobs and improve wages and conditions. Here in Britain too these sections of workers played a vital role historically particularly in the struggles to reduce working hours and the building of shop stewards organisations. However, the militant tradition of these workers is not merely a subject for the history books. In the new period of struggle to defend jobs and conditions from the rapacious hands of the bosses and the world market, AMICUS can and must play a central role.

## The History of the Engineers' Union

IT IS appropriate that the publication of this pamphlet should coincide with the merger to form AMICUS. There have been many mergers in the history of the organisations that constitute our new union.

Five small unions came together in 1851 to form the Amalgamated Society of Engineers (ASE). This was a national organisation of around 5000 members, all skilled craftsmen. It was a 'craft' union. The reason why throughout most of its history (with notable exceptions) the leadership of this union - through all its incarnations, the AEU, AUEW, AEEU etc. - seems to have been in the hands of the right wing is a matter of some misunderstanding amongst many on the left. The reason given by some is that this is inevitable, inherent in the nature of the workers concerned, skilled, well-paid and so on. The conservative leadership reflects a conservative rank and file. In reality the reason why some of these workers have been amongst the better paid sections of workers, and have sometimes enjoyed better terms and conditions is precisely because they fought for them.

The explanation for lengthy periods of right wing domination is not to be found in a conservative membership.

The real reason is no great mystery. In short, for whole periods after the workers improved their position through struggle, they fell out of activity, the union fell into the hands of right wing bureaucracies under whose direction the improvements gained were whittled away by the employers until the workers

moved once again to take the union out of the bureaucrats hands and use it to defend and improve their position. Such is the nature of what is happening today. Workers cannot be on strike and involved in struggle every week. They go to work to earn money to put a roof over their heads, food on the table and clothes on their back not in order to go on strike, despite the fantasies of some so-called socialist groups. This does not make them conservative, just realistic. They enter the road of struggle and strikes only when they are left with no alternative, and along the way they transform their own organisations to better suit their needs.

It is inevitable too that despite important victories, the workers movement suffers many defeats. If every strike ended in victory there would have been no need to create the Labour Party, no need for workers to organise politically, and through a series of successful strikes we would have achieved the creation of a socialist society decades ago. The creation of the Labour Party by the unions was a recognition that industrial struggle alone was not enough. Whatever reforms were wrung out of the bosses left hand through struggle they would attempt to claw back with the right at the earliest possible opportunity. Therefore workers needed to organise politically, in order to bring about fundamental change, not just gain this or that reform, but transform the whole of society. This was the reason for the creation of the Labour Party.

For long periods following struggles, workers fall into inactivity, they have to get on with earning a living. During these periods the right wing gains control. In truth the right wing rest on inactivity and a lack of involvement of the members. When conditions reach the point where something has to be done, the right wing are booted out and replaced by new leaders. A new period of struggle begins.

This process can be seen many times during the history of the union. As far back as the 1890s, during that explosion of militancy known as "new unionism" - the struggles of the Bryant and May matchworkers, the London Dockers and the gas workers, in one year alone membership of the trade unions doubled - a new left developed in the ASE around Tom Mann and John Burns, veterans of the previous London Dockers strike in 1889. Under their influence a campaign was waged against the intolerable working hours of engineering workers. They struggled for a 48 hour week! The bosses of the Engineering Employers' Federation locked them out for 30 weeks. That struggle ended in defeat. Over many years the engineers have fought time and again to reduce

their intolerable working hours. Some they won and some they lost. As far back as 1871 the engineers in the north-east of England inspired by the revolutionary movement of the working class of Paris - the Paris Commune - fought for the introduction of a ten hour day.

It was the engineers who played a key role again in the new struggles during the first world war, in Sheffield, Belfast and on the Clyde. The old right wing leaders were replaced by a new generation. Tom Mann was elected General Secretary and in the 1920s introduced massive democratic reforms to the union, including the election of district and divisional committees, an elected National Committee, Rules Revision Committee and Final Appeal Court. This new rulebook and the tradition of electing officials at every level remained largely in place until the 1980s. It was the envy of the labour movement. From the very beginning of the unions history militancy and democracy have gone hand in hand.

### Shop Stewards Movement

RATHER THAN inherent conservatism, the role played by the engineers in the creation of the shop stewards movement marked them out as an advanced section of the working class. The struggles during the first world war have already been referred to here. Naturally, engineers played a central role in the munitions industry and the struggles which took place in the industry in Glasgow, Belfast, Sheffield and the Midlands. However, it would be no more correct to describe engineering workers as inherently militant than to describe them as somehow genetically conservative. On the contrary, the outlook of workers is not a question of mysticism or biology, but is determined by conditions. It is their position at the heart of the profit making system, organised at the point of production, which determines the power of these workers in society. It is these conditions which determine the outlook of the workers. In wartime these factors are multiplied. The engineers are not simply at the heart of war production, they are at the heart of the production of war profits. The shop stewards organisations which existed in these industries came into conflict with the right wing national leaders of the union. They began to take on flesh. Not restricting themselves to their own members or even their own workplace, shop stewards committees spread across industries and across communities. The leadership of these shop stewards committees included socialists and communists like Willie Gallagher and JT Murphy. There

For long periods following struggles, workers fall into inactivity, they have to get on with earning a living. During these periods the right wing gains control.



can be no doubt that these leaders and the workers involved in struggle were being influenced by the revolution taking place in Russia. It cannot be an accident that these shop stewards committees gained recognition from the employers in November 1917.

The shop stewards movement was leading mass strikes that struck fear into the hearts of the bosses, who themselves had one eye on what was happening in Russia.

When the bosses of the White and Poppes factory in Coventry refused to negotiate with the Joint Shop Stewards Committee over a dispute involving one section of workers, the shop stewards movement which commanded the leadership of the workers across Coventry called 50,000 workers out on strike. Management was forced to cave in. This victory led to the recognition of shop stewards committees all over the country. Against the background of the Russian Revolution, and mounting industrial militancy at home, the workers had secured an important victory, and the engineers were at the forefront of that struggle.

### The election of Scanlon and the defeat of Sir William Carron

BETWEEN THE two world wars the shop stewards movement continued to play a pivotal role in workers struggles and in the labour movement. The boom years which followed the second world war served to strengthen the position of the union. The creation of whole new industries, plastics, electronics, aerospace etc. served to increase the membership of the union and saw the shop stewards movement spread across these industries, much to the annoyance of management.

The leadership of the shop stewards movement included members of the Communist Party and left wing members of the Labour Party. In the 1960s they

formed a Broad Left which scored important victories in elections within the union, culminating in the election of Hugh Scanlon as President of the union in 1968. That election has uncanny parallels with the election of Derek Simpson. The great American writer Mark Twain once wrote that "history doesn't repeat itself, but sometimes it rhymes." The Jackson of his day, AUEW leader Sir William Carron (later Lord Carron) - who was also the standard bearer of the right wing in the Labour Party - would not accept Scanlon's election and reran the ballot three times.

Scanlon's election was an earthquake in the labour movement at the end of the 1960s in a similar way to the election of Derek Simpson today.

## Militancy in the 1970s

THE 1970s opened with a new wave of working class militancy. The early 1970s were dominated by colossal workers' struggles on the part of the miners, the dockers and the Upper Clyde Shipbuilders, which resulted in the defeat of the Tory government of Ted Heath

Once again the shop stewards' movement played a central role in these struggles, and engineering workers were at the forefront most notably in the struggle against the closure of the Upper Clyde shipyards.

Carworkers and other engineering workers, in the Midlands especially, joined miners at the famous Sallley Gate picket which marked a decisive turning point in the miners' strike of 1972.

Power stations were closed by flying pickets and workers' solidarity. This was no doubt a vital element in the victory of the miners and the eventual defeat of Heath.

There was also a warning in these struggles. Scanlon, who was a left leader, began to distance himself from the plant occupations taking place in Manchester which followed the collapse of talks between the union and the Employers' Federation over pay and hours. Thousands of workers in Yorkshire were about to join their brothers and sisters in Manchester when local leaders were called to London and instructed to back down. The national leaders feared the direction the movement was taking. Whilst having little in common with previous or later right wing leaders Scanlon nonetheless lacked a perspective for the movement. However honest individual leaders may be, they must be under the control of the members and they must have a perspective, an understanding of what to

do next, how to take the movement forward. Not just a view of one struggle, but a vision of the way forward for the whole movement. Not just the tactics for winning an individual dispute - vital though this is - but also a wider view of how to struggle to change society.

Without such a perspective any leader, no matter how honest, can be blown from pillar to post in the course of events. All leaders will come under pressure from governments and bosses, how they stand up to that pressure depends on a mixture of accountability and theoretical, political understanding of the situation.

Scanlon went on to call a national strike against the Industrial Relations Act following the sequestration of the union's assets. During the Labour government however Scanlon along with Jack Jones of the T&G, the "terrible twins" as they were nicknamed used their authority to back the government's incomes policy in the infamous "social contract" (the social con-trick as it was not too affectionately known). Scanlon even went so far as to break AEU policy by putting the union's ballot papers in the "wrong" box at the TUC conference.

Later still he was awarded a peerage. Nonetheless this period of struggle was an important one in the history of the union which today's activists should study carefully. The period which followed was dominated by the leadership of Duffy, Jordan and Sir Ken Jackson.

The role of the AEU leadership in the 'Derek Robinson affair' marked a truly shameful chapter in the union's history. It also served as a warning to other left wing shop stewards that they could expect no protection from these union leaders. On the contrary the union leaders were involved in the campaign to get rid of 'Red Robbo'. The collusion of the union leaders with the state in the campaign to oust Robinson was detailed in the BBC 2 documentary True Spies.

Derek Robinson was the union Convenor at the giant British Leyland Longbridge plant in the Midlands. BL management demanded his dismissal to 'ensure the future of the company'. The AEU leadership went along with the mockery of an investigation which left Robinson 'hung out to dry' and led to his eventual dismissal. This was a warning of what was to come, this was 'social partnership' between right wing union leaders and the bosses.

Nevertheless, in the late 1970s and the 1980s there were still important struggles. Through the Confederation of Shipbuilding and Engineering Unions the 40 hour barrier was broken and in the late 1980s the 37 hour week was won for thousands of engineering workers. Under the pressure from below,



even the right wing leaders were forced to lead some struggles. As time went on however, these right wing leaders replaced struggle with social partnership - ie class collaboration. With the leadership in the hands of these individuals the bosses felt safe to launch their attacks on workers jobs, wages and conditions. Teamworking, long hours, speed ups and 'new management techniques' followed. Hundreds of thousands of jobs were destroyed. On the surface a myth settled that nothing could be done, the union was in the pockets of the bosses. There could be no fight here, there could be no change. The domination of the bureaucracy was complete. Yet this was nothing new. It had been seen time and again. Eventually a line in the sand is crossed, the membership have had enough and revolt against the leadership. Jackson was defeated and a whole new period opens up in the history of the union, and of the whole labour movement.

## The Electricians

THE AEEU was not just the engineers, of course, but a merger between the AEU and the electricians union, the Electrical, Electronic Telecommunications and Plumbers Union (EETPU).

The EETPU itself arose out of a merger between the Electricians union the ETU and the small United Operative Plumbers Association in 1968. The ETU like the ASE was a craft union. In fact the ETU existed probably in large part because the ASE was a craft union - electricians were not allowed to join the Amalgamated Society of Engineers. So, the merger to form the AEEU in the 1990s healed a century old craft rift. In general Marxists are in favour of mergers which bring all workers in one

industry into the same union. In the same way that workers have more industrial muscle when they combine to form a trade union in a workplace, so a merger which brings together all the workers in a single industry gives the union more power to defend workers' interests. 'Unity is strength' is a basic principle of trade unionism. However, we were opposed to the way in which the AEEU merger took place. The replacement of the democratic elements of the engineers' rulebook by the bureaucratic rules of the electricians union meant the merger in reality was a takeover of the AEU by the bureaucratic leadership of the EETPU. There was a string of such union mergers taking place at the time. They were driven by the different bureaucracies' need to maintain their position given declining memberships and resources. Nevertheless, there was an indisputable industrial logic to the merger which created the AEEU, bringing together electrical and engineering workers in shopfloor and branch organisation. We explained at the time, while the bureaucratic rulebook would prove a hindrance to the membership taking charge of their union, and an obstacle to workers fighting to defend their jobs and conditions, this would have only a temporary effect.

The rulebook of the union is a very important question. No matter how tight the stranglehold of the bureaucratic leadership over the union however, the rulebook could not permanently protect the leadership from the membership. With an organised opposition, even the most bureaucratic leadership can be removed. That has now been clearly proven.

## History of the ETU

THE EARLY years of the ETU were dominated by scandals involving the leaders getting their hands caught in the till containing the members' money. The same process of radicalisation and working class militancy that had dramatic effects in the ASE a century ago led to the ETU moving to the left. The rising tide of militancy at that time was not confined to engineers, but represented, just like today, a profound change taking place in society.

As the union moved left throughout the 1930s and 1940s the ETU leadership became dominated by members of the Communist Party. The 1950s and 1960s witnessed a colossal battle between these lefts and the right wing organised and supported at the highest levels of society. The leading right wing figures in this battle were Les Cannon

and Frank Chapple, so-called 'moderates' on the right wing of the Labour Party. They were not fighting on their own, however. The role played by the state in organising the fight against CP influence in the ETU has been documented elsewhere. The left leaders of the ETU had powerful enemies. Nonetheless they made many errors. Had they relied on the rank and file and a socialist policy, they could have defeated the right wing. Instead allegations of ballot rigging led to a high court battle which found five out of fourteen defendants guilty of rigging the ballot for General Secretary. The union was now in the hands of the right wing. This was not any old right wing leadership, however. They attempted to transform the union into a 'business union'. Their names, and through them the name of the union, became synonymous with the extreme right wing of the movement.

The new rules introduced by the right wing began by banning members of the CP from holding office in the union. They continued by cementing power in the hands of the bureaucracy, taking the control of the union away from the membership. They abolished rank and file area committees; they abolished the right of branches to appeal against Executive Council decisions; they gave the executive the right to close down or amalgamate branches; and they introduced a full time executive to be elected every five years. Whereas the old, democratic rulebook of the AEU was the envy of many activists in the labour movement, the ETU rules were the envy of right wing bureaucrats everywhere. In its essentials this is the rulebook that was foisted onto the membership in 1995 as a result of the merger that formed the AEEU.

In the end even these rules could not prevent Jackson from being defeated - even ballot rigging could not save him. Our response of course is not to propose banning members of right wing factions from holding office, or trying to consolidate power in the hands of a few leaders, but the opposite. New rules are needed to return control of the union to the membership. We shall return to this point later.

Following the introduction of these new rules in 1965 and the election of Frank Chapple as General Secretary in 1966, the union was firmly in the grip of the right wing. For decades these leaders, first Chapple, then Hammond, Gallagher and finally Jackson were the advanced guard of the right wing in the labour movement. In both the TUC and the Labour Party they posed as the scourge of the left. Industrially and politically they followed a line of class collaboration. The name of this policy changed over the years from 'new real-



ism' to 'social partnership' but the content remained the same. They represented a trend of company or business unionism in the labour movement.

## Collusion with the Bosses

IN THE 1960s and 1970s the electricians' union's leaders collaborated with management in industry to weed out 'troublemakers' (ie stewards and activists) from the industries where the EETPU organised. Meanwhile in the Labour Party they became fervent opponents of socialist policies, leading the campaign against nuclear disarmament, and put themselves at the forefront of the attempts to expel the Marxists organised around the Militant newspaper.

During the 1980s the EETPU leadership pursued sweetheart deals and no-strike agreements with employers. Along with the AEU's Terry Duffy, Eric Hammond connived with Thatcher to introduce anti-union legislation, particularly making balloting compulsory for internal elections and votes for industrial action. Hammond's willingness to take government money to conduct these ballots led to a serious division within the TUC. Marxists take the question of democracy in the movement very seriously. In the first place the government and the state should keep their noses out of trade union affairs. It is a basic principle of trade unionism that the union belongs to its members and that they, and they alone, should determine its rules.

The apparent 'democracy' of secret postal balloting simply meant that members would vote with one side, and one case rammed down their throats through the pages of the newspapers and the TV screens. In an election the membership should attend a branch meeting and listen to the arguments of the candidates ask them questions and then come to a

decision on who to support. The decision to take industrial action should be taken democratically by the membership after mass meetings to discuss the alternatives.

## Wapping

DURING THE year long miners' strike of 1984-5 Hammond and co lined up with almost anyone opposed to the NUM. At the TUC he denounced Scargill as a donkey. In a backhanded insult to Scargill, but a full frontal attack on Hammond, Ron Todd of the T&G commented, "I'd rather be led by a donkey than by a jackal." These people were too right wing even for the most moderate of TUC leaders. Hammond was even willing to link up with the government sponsored breakaway from the NUM the so-called UDM. They were becoming pariahs. Hammond even talked openly about splitting the TUC, which looked possible before the electricians' expulsion following the disgrace of Wapping. The rank and file of the AEU, no matter what the leaders wanted, would never have allowed the union to leave the TUC, therefore, for a whole period - until their readmittance on the coat-tails of the merger to form the AEEU - the leadership of the EETPU was isolated.

Their expulsion from the TUC was entirely justified. Following their sweetheart deals and their conflicts with other unions and with the TUC, in the aftermath of the miners' strike, came Wapping. This reads as one of the darkest chapters in British trade union history. Hammond and co. took their creed of company unionism to its logical conclusion and colluded with Rupert Murdoch to smash the print unions at Wapping.

They were expelled from the TUC. At the time Marxists argued that activists should remain in the EETPU and fight to change it from within. There was a sizeable left organised in the Flashlight group. Unfortunately they made a mistake and broke away to form the small EPIU group. As much as one can sympathise with their sentiments, the road to a very warm place is paved with good intentions. To break away only left the union, and therefore the members, even more firmly in the grip of this rabid right wing clique.

Had the left remained in the EETPU, holding their noses if you like, they would have been in a much stronger position at the time of the merger to form the AEEU.

Once the prospect of splitting the TUC and forming some kind of new right wing federation had receded into

the distance, a merger between the EETPU and the AEU became almost inevitable. This would be the EETPU's route back into the TUC. Both the tops of the unions and the Labour Party were moving further to the right during this period following the defeat of the miners. In reality the triumph of 'new realism' in the movement - the shift to the right - was predicated on the miners' defeat. Activists everywhere were shattered. "If the miners can't win then no-one can" was the despairing note sounded across the union movement. The left, lacking any perspective or programme to take the struggle forward, largely disintegrated. The right wing's ascendancy in the movement for a period of years was not based on them being proven correct, or defeating the left, but on the defeat of a major section of the working class.

## AEEU since the merger

THE RIGHT wing leaders of the new union from the engineers' side - Bill Jordan and Gavin Laird - resigned, presumably to spend more time with their wallets and their company directorships. In a shock to the right wing, left candidate Davey Hall won the election for President of the union. This was an early sign of changes to come. However, and this remains a warning to all left union leaders today, Hall was isolated at the top of a union whose leadership was otherwise firmly in the grip of the right wing bureaucracy. In the 1970s the left had mistakenly concentrated all their efforts on winning positions without building a movement based around a socialist programme. As a result the successes they scored only resulted in their triumphant candidates becoming "prisoners of Peckham Road" (the union's headquarters). Hall no doubt came under immense pressure. Lacking a firm political and theoretical anchor, and lacking the perspective of building the left and defeating the old right wing leaders, he eventually agreed to the abolition of the post of President. The left, organised around The Gazette, did nothing. For too long they had been concerned simply with winning election to this or that post, with little idea of what to do next. In other words they lacked a perspective for the union, a way forward to defeat the right and an alternative programme, a policy to fight job losses and attacks on pay and conditions. In the period since there have been important changes in The Gazette, no longer as secretive as it was in the past, concerned with union policy not just

electoral slates. The left organised around the Gazette played a key role in defeating Jackson. Now they must build their organisation into a thriving left wing voice inside the union, linking up with the left in MSF, to fight for democracy in the union, an end to social partnership, action to defend jobs, wages and conditions, and conduct a struggle to reclaim the Labour Party a political struggle for socialist policies.

In the absence of a layer of old leaders, now retired or resigned, the General Secretary's position fell to the little known machine man, Ken Jackson. Electricians' leader Paul Gallagher retired through ill-health, so Jackson took over as acting General Secretary of the EETPU. When he stood for election to this post he managed to win with a majority of just a few thousand votes. Then under the rules of the merger he became General Secretary of the 700,000 strong AEEU without standing for election. These are the same people, remember, who colluded with Thatcher to introduce secret postal ballots and other anti-trade union laws. It seems their view of 'democracy' is not about principle, but what best serves to maintain their positions. Until his defeat by Derek Simpson, Jackson had not stood for election to the position he held, and tried for dear life to hold onto.

There are many stories from all parts of the country about how Jackson and his official machine closed down branches and bureaucratically manoeuvred and twisted to try to silence opposition within the union.

When eventually forced to hold an election, after his bid to stay on past retirement had failed, Jackson mobilised the entire union machine for his campaign. The reports of full time officials turning up at different branches to influence and even vote in nominating meetings read more like a mafia story than a trade union election.

At union headquarters, a full time organiser is believed to have been orchestrating Jackson's campaign. The local MP John Spellar was heavily involved and had an office at the union's HQ. Despite all their shenanigans, all the apparatus at their disposal, they were defeated by a candidate backed only by a campaign organised by rank and file activists. Even an iron clad rulebook cannot protect the union bureaucrats once the members move to reclaim their union. However, whilst a change in mood amongst the rank and file is the necessary condition for defeating the right wing it is not enough on its own. The opposition must be organised, must have a programme - in this case democracy in the union - and must work for their victory. In the end it

was a combination of a changing mood not just in the AEEU but in society as a whole being reflected in the election of left candidates in one union after another, with the work of committed activists which secured the historic defeat of Sir Ken and the election of Derek Simpson to the post of General Secretary.

of patternmaking which developed with the new powered machinery.

ASTMS was also born out of a merger in 1969. The larger of the two unions forming ASTMS was ASSET - the Association of Supervisory Staff, Executives and Technicians. It had begun as the National Foremen's Association and largely represented supervisory staff in the metalworking and transport industries. The other partner was the Association of Scientific Workers with members among technicians and laboratory staff not only in metalworking industries but also in chemicals, universities and the health service. ASCW's public sector membership is the origin of MSF's membership in the health service.

ASTMS had a phenomenal record of growth following its formation and expanded rapidly into new industries and services. A particularly significant development began with merger of the Prudential Assurance Staff Associations which was followed by other staff organisations in the insurance industry including the Union of Insurance Staffs. MSF became the largest insurance trade union in the United Kingdom. During its existence, over thirty different staff organisations merged with ASTMS.

Given the workplaces in which the MSF has organised there is also an industrial logic to the merger with the AEEU to form AMICUS. This will not have been at the forefront of the thoughts of the union bureaucracies concerned however. As well as the need to bolster funds and resources, Jackson and co undoubtedly believed that a merger with a white collar union like MSF would preserve the right wing dominance of the union. Likewise the right wing in MSF betrayed their true feelings when they announced at 2002 conference that any decisions taken not in line with the policy of the joint executive would be ruled out. Both right wings had the illusion of bringing together two right wing unions to form one big right wing group in the TUC and in the Labour Party. The right wing in the MSF have long played a key role in the Labour Party from Clive Jenkins' support for Kinnock to casting the union's vote in favour of the One Member One Vote 'reforms' and Blair's proposals to ditch Clause Four part four of the constitution committing the party to the socialist transformation of society.

However, white collar and technical staff are no more inherently right wing than engineers or electricians. Insecurity, changes in terms and conditions affect all sections of the working class and serve to change their outlook accordingly. Historically there has always been a strong left within MSF, and before that in ASTMS and TASS. In the new situation developing in Britain, and in the labour

movement, rather than strengthening the right wing, the merger will bring together growing left groups within both unions. The coming together of these left groups to struggle to put the union back in the hands of the members, united in the struggle for union democracy, and for socialist policies can create a powerful force, not a right wing bloc, but an industrial union of a million workers moving left. This can prove a formidable force in transforming the union movement and the Labour Party.

# History of the MSF

THE MANUFACTURING, Science and Finance union was formed in January 1988 by a merger between ASTMS (Association of Scientific, Technical and Managerial Staffs) and TASS (Technical, Administrative and Supervisory Staffs). Largely representing white collar workers, the MSF too has a proud tradition as well as the one represented by the right wing of the union

TASS' members were skilled and professional staff and were employed mainly in the engineering industry. ASTMS had developed into a white collar union with members in all sectors of industry and services.

TASS had its origins in Association of Engineering and Shipbuilding Draughtsmen which had been founded in 1913 and had later become DATA - the Draughtsmen and Allied Technicians Union. In the 1970s, TASS operated within a federal structure as the white collar section of the Amalgamated Union of Engineering Workers.

The plan to form one engineering union based upon the AUEW did not succeed and TASS did not continue its links with the other AEUW unions. During the 1980s five craft unions merged with TASS and these unions are the basis of MSF's craft sector.

Two of these unions were among the oldest established unions in Britain. The Tobacco Workers Union was founded in 1834 while the National Union of Sheetmetal Workers, Coppersmiths, Heating and Domestic Engineers traced its history back to the medieval guilds of coppersmiths and braziers and the seventeenth century tin plate workers' organisations. Two of the other unions had been formed in 1872. The National Society of Metal Mechanics to represent the interests of brass trade workers and the forerunner of the Association of Patternmakers and Allied Trades the craft

## 20 years of counter-revolution on the shopfloor

### Time to fight back

OVER THE last twenty years or so, the policies of new realism and social partnership pursued by our union leaders have done nothing to stem the tide of job losses, in manufacturing industry in particular. The domination of finance capital and the upstarts in the City of London over our economy has transformed Britain into a giant cashpoint machine and dumping ground. From the workshop of the world Britain has become the sweatshop, dark satanic mills have been replaced by dark satanic call centres. Meanwhile those in work have seen their jobs transformed. Through the introduction of teamworking, speed-ups and new management techniques, more and more sweat has been squeezed out of our labour, usually with the agreement of our own leaders. Our rights, our hours and our terms and conditions have been demolished. The first task of the union must be to abandon the cosy relations between our

leaders and the bosses and return to representing the interest of the members. We have to start by getting our own house in order, that is, by changing our own union.

# A New Rulebook

THE DRAWING up of the new rulebook took place under the terms of the instrument of amalgamation that was presented to the members in a postal ballot. A recommendation for support was made by both right-wing led executives, who also linked the instrument to a vote on the merger of the MSF and AEEU, despite earlier opposition from the MSF conference. Under the terms of the instrument the membership had little opportunity to participate in the drawing up of the rulebook and there was no opportunity to present amendments to the draft - with the rules conference presented with an all or nothing decision.

However, faced with the prospect of postponement of the merger and the cancellation of elections to a new joint executive it was important that no opportunity be given to endanger the election of a new executive. Without a left led joint executive committed to restoring democracy in the union there is no guarantee of preserving the gains of a democratic rulebook. This was clearly demonstrated when the right wing AEEU executive removed, through a postal ballot, the right to elect officials, which had been retained from the original AEU rulebook after the threat of opposition to the merger with the EETPU. Any rule designed to take power and control away from the membership must be strenuously opposed. At the same time we will have to organise to change the rules to implement Derek Simpson's election pledges, and to restore democracy and accountability to the union.

The rulebook is not a secondary matter. The way the union is organised and operates has an important impact on the ability of members and activists to organise effectively in the workplace, to defend members jobs, pay and conditions, and to represent the interests of the members inside the Labour Party.

Therefore the election of a rules revision committee, which always existed in the past in the AEU and even in the EETPU, would provide an important

channel for union bodies to propose changes to the union's rules.

The rules must ensure the proper functioning of regional committees and a campaign must be started to restore district shop stewards committees. Derek Simpson pledged to make industrial organisation more effective by handing powers over to area committees. He also pledged to put control of the branches back in the hands of the members, under the direction of elected lay members and with full access to branch funds, including allowing donations to industrial disputes - denied in the recent past. Discrimination must also be removed from the rulebook to enable all members of the union to hold elected lay office as branch officers, members of regional and national committees and conference delegates.

The union's delegates to the TUC and the Labour Party at all levels must be accountable to the membership and represent the democratically decided policy of the union throughout the movement. Members of both the AEEU and the MSF were denied a say in the union's position on the election of the London Mayor - while the AEEU were funding Frank Dobson's campaign to the tune of £50,000 of members' money.

Derek Simpson pledged during the General Secretary election that all new full time officials will be elected and accountable to the membership. A campaign to introduce this rule change must begin immediately. Furthermore the officials of the union should face regular re-election. We would also argue that they should be paid the same as the workers they represent. Being a union officer should not be a cushy career move. We do not want officials to wear hair shirts they should earn a living wage, but no more than the members they are representing. This can serve to keep the officials in touch with the living conditions of the members.

In the forthcoming elections for a new Executive Council the left will have to organise to win a majority not for its own sake but as part of the struggle to restore democracy to the union and to fight for socialist policies. The left's campaign should be based on a programme of ending social partnership, for militant action to defend jobs wages and conditions, against privatisation, for public ownership and for socialist policies in the Labour Party. An open campaign around the country based on such a programme, will provoke a lively debate and discussion. It will not only ensure the election of a left EC, but also the building of a powerful left organisation throughout the union. Elections to the EC must then take

place on a regular basis.

A new appeals procedure must be developed where an independent directly elected committee is re-established giving members the real ability to appeal against EC decisions.

Above all the policy conference must be the sovereign body of the union. Delegates should democratically make the decisions of the union which must then be implemented by the EC. This may seem like ABC trade unionism, yet can any AEEU member really claim that this was the position in recent years?

Democracy is the key to transforming our union into a weapon capable of defending our members, and of fighting for socialist policies throughout the labour movement. The entire history of our movement demonstrates that democracy and militancy go hand in hand.

## Repeal the Anti-union Laws

THE TORIES anti-union laws have played a key role in preventing trade unionists defending themselves against the attacks of the bosses over the last twenty years. The threat to sequester unions' assets, and the threat of court action has been used as a screen behind which right wing trade union leaders have hidden their bankruptcy. We don't have a light minded attitude towards these assets which are hard fought for and paid for by the union's members. Nevertheless, at the end of the day the union is its members not its buildings. Their needs must come first.

At the same time the laws on balloting have made legal industrial action very difficult to organise. The laws banning solidarity action have left workers isolated without the backing of their brothers and sisters in other unions. The combination of a right wing leadership with these Tory laws has made it far more difficult for workers to fight to defend themselves. As a result agreement after agreement has been ripped up or ignored by management.

We have made a start in dealing with one side of this equation, dealing blow after blow against the right wing in elections in one union after another. Given the role of the leaders of the AEEU in the past in supporting the introduction of vicious anti-working class legislation, our new union must have the repeal of all the Tory anti-union laws high on its agenda.

It is a scandal that a Labour government clings on to these laws, even threatening to use them against striking firefighters. Finally, after many years, the TUC now calls for their repeal. AMICUS will have a powerful voice in the Labour

Party, and that voice will need to be raised to demand the repeal of these laws. This is a vital practical question to allow trade unions to stand up for their members and the whole working class.

The repeal of the anti-union laws must form a key part of the programme required to build a left force in AMICUS, a programme on which left EC members will be elected. But such a programme is not just for winning elections, it is also vital to bring more members into activity in the union, and above all it must be a basis on which the union fights for the interests of the members.

## End the myth of 'social partnership'

AT THE top of such a programme must be an end to the myth of social partnership. The only partnership which exists between workers and bosses is the one between a horse and its rider, and they have not failed to take the whip to our backs over the last twenty years. Enough is enough! So-called social partnership has not saved one job. On the contrary it has seen hundreds of thousands of jobs destroyed, whole sections of industry wiped out.

In his election address Derek Simpson pledged to "see an end to sweetheart partnership deals that leave members confused about whose interests we serve." It is not the union's job to protect company profit margins by signing away workers' rights, jobs and conditions. The bosses have their own organisations. The union is our organisation to protect and further our interests.

This does not mean the union should not negotiate with management. On the contrary it means demanding the right to negotiate and if our members interests can be served through a negotiation without taking industrial action, then so much the better. What it does mean is not emasculating the union, not signing no-strike deals, not taking away the union's most powerful weapon. Negotiations tend to go better when management believe there is a possibility of strike action. If they know in advance there is no chance of such action, then they will do what they please. Weakness invites aggression.

Here we return to the vital importance of Marxist theory to trade union activists. It is not a question of good bosses and bad bosses. It is not a matter of sentiment, it is the nature of the profit system. The reason for the existence of class struggle - and despite all the delusions of capitalism in the eighties and nineties the class struggle has not ended - is that workers and bosses do not have shared interests but diametrically opposed ones. The class struggle

is not fomented by 'reds under the bed', by union agitators, but by the appalling conditions imposed on the working class. It is these conditions which forced workers to organise unions in the first place, and it is these conditions which force workers to take industrial action in defence of their jobs wages and conditions.

The system we live in, capitalism, is based on the fact that a minority, the capitalists, own the means of producing the wealth, the land, the factories etc, while the rest of us don't own anything much other than our ability to work which we have to sell to the bosses in order to put a roof over our families' heads and food in our stomachs. We live on the wages we get paid for working. The bosses live on the profits we make for them. The source of profit is to be found in the fact that we don't get paid for the work we do, but for our time and skills, for our ability to work. The value of the work we produce is greater than our wages and the difference, what Marx called the unpaid labour of the working class, is the source of the bosses' profits. After working just part of our shift we have created more value than our wages, but then we carry on working the rest of our shift, and sometimes longer on overtime (which allows the bosses flexibility to meet demand and so extract greater surplus value at their convenience). Therefore, it stands to reason that if the employers can get fewer of us to produce the same amount or even more, or if they can get us to produce more quickly, so that we spend longer working after creating the value necessary to pay our wages, then they make more profit. For the same reason they try to keep our wages low. All else being equal when our wages rise their share falls and vice versa. This struggle over the surplus - the value produced over the amount needed to pay our wages which Marx called surplus value - produced by our labour is the core of the class struggle.

It is also the reason for the counter revolution in the workplace in the last twenty years. Faced with ever more ferocious competition in the world market, the bosses are constantly trying to make us work harder and longer for less money, in order to maintain their profits.

Instead of being used to make our lives easier, to cut working hours and so on, new technology is used as a vice to squeeze more of this surplus value out of us, to make more profits for the bosses.

Longer working hours - British workers now work the longest hours in Europe - and dependence on overtime are designed to increase what Marx called absolute surplus value. In essence this simply means getting us to work longer after we've produced enough to pay back our wages, and therefore produce more profits.

New Management Techniques, teamworking, speed-ups are all designed to increase what Marx called relative surplus value. In practice this means the boss sacks a section of the workforce and gets the rest of us to work harder, to produce the same amount of surplus value as before but with less wages to be recouped. Or they simply make us work harder in order to reproduce the value of our wages more quickly so that we work for free for longer, thus producing more profit.

Marxist theory is not an academic question, but is a vital weapon for trade union activists to understand the attacks of the bosses. For twenty years capitalism has squeezed more and more sweat out of us and at the same time thrown thousands of workers on the scrapheap, not because they are nasty bosses - though some of them undoubtedly are - but in the name of profit. No more! No more sweat for profit! No more job losses, or new schemes designed to squeeze yet more out of us.

# For a 35 hour week Without Loss of Pay

FOR TWENTY years we've been told to tighten our belts. Shamefully the Labour government boasts the most flexible workforce in Europe (by which they mean that we are so flexible that our backs are bent to breaking point). Meanwhile for the last decade the capitalists have been raking in billions in profit. Instead of investing in updating machinery, research and training, and instead of updating our wages and using the advances in technology to cut working hours, they have squandered this immense wealth on the stock

exchange roulette wheel or invested it abroad. These are the people who appeal to us to save British manufacturing by accepting job cuts, closures and changes in terms and conditions. They are only interested in one thing - profit.

They have made a fortune during the boom, or rather we have made a fortune for them. In return we were tossed a few crumbs, and made to sweat to get them. Now that boom is at an end. A new economic recession will hit us all hard. The capitalists will try to protect their profits at our expense. Yet more job losses, wage restraint, more attacks on our terms and conditions will follow. We have to defend ourselves. That is what the union is for.

Throughout our union's history we have a proud tradition of fighting to cut the intolerable working hours of our members. Even under the right wing leadership of the late 1980s, the struggle for the 35 hour week achieved important victories, achieving the 37 hour week for thousands and thousands of engineering workers. Over the last decade in particular however, the counter revolution on the shopfloor has meant workers working longer and longer, becoming increasingly dependent on overtime. This has meant intolerable stress and strain on our bodies and on our lives. While the number of working days lost through strike action fell, the number lost to ill-health grew dramatically. The effect on our health and on our families of intolerable hours must be tackled. The struggle for 35 hours must be taken up once more. This would be a starting point towards a 32 hour week which could dramatically improve our lives. In the past a war-chest was built up in the AEU running into millions of pounds to conduct this campaign. Now the new powerful union must devote its resources to a new struggle to cut working hours, to allow us all time to breathe.

**⊖ No more 'partnership'-  
For militant action to defend  
jobs, wages and conditions!**

**⊖ For a 35 hour week With  
No Loss of Pay!**

## Regulation

SOME ON the left have raised the question of regulating big business, introducing laws and taxes to prevent the bosses investing abroad and so on. Whilst these are no doubt genuine attempts to find ways of protecting jobs, no amount of regulation will prevent the capitalists doing what they want in

pursuit of profit. In the past Labour governments introduced high levels of taxation for the rich, and the response of the rich was to open bank accounts abroad, and to employ armies of lawyers to find loopholes in the legislation. In the same way today they find ways around the legislation on the minimum wage and on maximum working hours.

Such regulation would in any case not be introduced by Blair and co. They have cut Corporation Tax to historically low levels. If they raised company tax back to the level it was under the Tories they would raise enough to pay the fire-fighters £30,000 and to abolish tuition fees for students. Or at least they would if the big companies actually paid their tax. They prefer to pay accountants and lawyers to find ways of not paying. We must struggle to change the Labour Party, but if we are going to fight let's not fight for a halfway house. We have to struggle for socialist policies, not just a return to the failed policies of the Wilson and Callaghan governments.

## The Euro

OVER THE last few years joining the Euro has been raised by some as a potential solution to our problems. The argument goes that British industry cannot compete because of exchange rates, the pound is overvalued, joining the Euro would create a 'level playing field' for British companies. Even if this were true there is no reason to imagine that any benefits accrued by joining the Euro would ever be passed on to us. If joining the Euro helped British capitalism to compete in the way argued by its advocates it would simply mean that Britain's capitalists would rake in more profits. Does anyone really imagine that the response of the bosses would be to increase our wages or cut our working hours, or even to guarantee our jobs? Out of the goodness of their hearts? In reality, they would pursue the same policy of attacking us to maximise their profits.

However, the real reason why British industry can't compete is that they have failed to invest for decades in updating machinery or in research and development. The productivity of our labour is way behind the US, Germany and France, and not because we don't work just as hard. British workers are not lazy but hampered by outdated machinery. To catch up with the productivity levels of British capitalism's competitors in the world market would take billions and billions of pounds of investment over years. Instead the profits we sweat to make are invested abroad or squandered on gambling on stocks and

shares. It is not exchange rates - which after all don't prevent US capitalism from competing effectively - nor our laziness that means British industry can't compete, but the short term scramble for a quick buck, the desperate search for a way of making money without the bothersome business of building factories and machinery on the part of British capitalists. They have maintained their profit levels by squeezing us rather than investing. In or out of the Euro they would continue to do so.

Membership of the Euro has not prevented job losses in Eurozone countries. Workers in Germany, Italy, France and the rest have been facing attacks on their wages, jobs and conditions too. This is the real level playing field that Europe's capitalists want to create. They are trying to drive down workers conditions to British levels in defence of their profits. The Euro has offered nothing to the workers of these countries, they have been forced to fight back to in wave after wave of strikes - and even General Strikes in Italy, Spain and Greece - across the continent over the last year or so.

The purpose of the Euro and the EU for the capitalists is to create a trading bloc capable of competing with the US and Japan, in order to protect and increase the profits of Europe's capitalists.

It is true that if all the resources of Europe were pooled and planned rationally, scientifically and democratically, the economy could forge ahead at twenty percent a year doubling the wealth of society in five years. All of this could be done without unemployment, and with reduced working hours and higher wages, but not on the basis of the profit system. This would be a socialist Europe not a capitalist one. The intention of capitalism is not to unite Europe's resources in the interests of society, but to exploit them in the name of profit for the few.

Membership of the Euro has not prevented attacks on workers in every country. What it has done is taken away some of the mechanisms by which the capitalists in each of the member countries could overcome some of the worst consequences of a recession. It has taken away their ability to devalue their currency, and to borrow to fund public spending. Such policies are no solution, but without them the workers in those countries will be made to feel the full force of economic slump, with job losses, tax rises, wage restraint and austerity programmes, designed to protect profit at our expense.

For Marxists opposition to the Euro is not a question of defending the pound. The existence of sterling, the picture printed on banknotes or the

colour of our money makes no difference to the fact that we haven't got enough of it. Workers have no interest in joining the Euro, but they have no interest in defending the pound on some 'patriotic' basis. We don't want to be ruled by bankers whether their head office is in London, Brussels or Berlin.

The Euro is no answer. No to the Europe of the Bosses and the Bankers! For a Socialist United States of Europe!

## Import Controls

THE PROCESS of radicalisation now taking place in the movement means workers will be searching for answers, searching for new policies. We have mentioned here the ideas of taxation, regulation and the Euro. Another idea that raises its head in the movement every few years is the policy of import controls. In other countries, we are told, restrictions are placed on the imports of certain goods, cars, computers, steel, bananas and so on. Could applying the same policy in Britain save jobs in British companies?

In the first place British jobs could only be saved at the cost of workers' jobs in other countries. Internationalism is a principle of socialism not because we like foreigners, it is not a sentimental question. The word Globalisation has been rammed down our throats in recent years. All it really means is that the world market dominates every aspect of our lives. Capitalism spreads its tentacles all over the world. Workers have to organise internationally to oppose their attacks.

That would be true if the policy of import controls worked. It would not. It is not a new idea. In those countries who utilise this policy the workers don't find themselves in any better or safer position.

The dog eat dog competition of the world market has led to the destruction of thousands of jobs in British manufacturing over the last couple of decades. The motor vehicle, shipbuilding and steel industries have been particularly hard hit. Despite all the efforts of the workers in these industries who have tightened their belt passed the last notch, the failure of British capitalism to invest in new machinery, research and updating industry, meant that large sections of British industry were incapable of competing. The capitalists prefer to gamble the fruits of our labour on speculation rather than investing in industry. Despite all their appeals to 'save British industry', sold to us by our own union leaders, when we tightened our belts they squandered the proceeds.

Without a fighting lead from the tops of the TUC and with no socialist

alternative being offered by the leadership of the Labour Party many workers will look for a way out on the basis of the present system, trying to find an easy option to save jobs.

This explains why the old, failed policy of import controls is being raised once more, particularly in relation to the steel industry, but not only there. The idea of preventing the import of steel from abroad is being raised by some on the left and on the right of the Labour movement.

## British Industry

THE IDEA of import controls appears to have gained some support not only from a section of steel workers, who understandably are desperately trying to save their industry, but other sections of the Labour movement generally. It has also been raised by a small section of Tories and businessmen, fearful of either losing support in their constituencies or of the social and economic effect of a further decimation of British industry.

The main attraction of import controls is that they appear to offer an easy way out. The innate conservatism of the human mind, which tends to lag behind the development of the productive forces and technique, and resists the idea of fundamental change until it is left with no other alternative, means that the great majority of society, including the working class, will desperately seek solutions which do not imply a sudden and decisive break with the past.

In the first instance many workers will seek the "line of least resistance". As the crisis develops, all sorts of quack theories and panaceas will inevitably rise to meet this demand. Import controls, it would seem, are easy to understand, and apparently just as easy to apply, and therefore have all the compelling attraction of an instant "miracle cure" for a nasty and painful disease. But beware, before swallowing the medicine take the manufacturers advice, read the label carefully, what will be the consequences and side-effects of such a policy?

We all know from bitter experience, any economic policy that is defended by the bosses is almost certain to be in direct contradiction to the interests of working people. Far from being an



argument in favour then, the fact that a section of died-in-the-wool reactionaries in the Tory party and the CBI put forward this policy should in itself make us think twice before adopting the same position. The workers can trust only their own forces and their own organisations in the fight to defend jobs.

## C(h)orus of Protectionism

BUT AREN'T import controls a socialist policy? Why would a section of the bosses support import controls? In whose interests would this policy work? What effect would their introduction have on jobs and prices? If they are really such a good idea, why haven't they been implemented already? These are the questions every thinking worker should consider before joining in any new chorus of protectionism.

The advocates of import controls argue that their introduction would afford British industry, or rather specific sections of it, steel for example, a breathing space "protecting" at least the domestic market for home produce, allowing the capitalists the time they need to re-tool and re-equip industry. That task accomplished, the "temporary" measure of import controls could be dispensed with, and Britain would once again be set to become the "workshop of the world." (And these people are supposed to be the realists!)

Even then, they argue, controls would only apply to those parts of the economy which were seriously threatened, no-one is calling for controls on all imports, only on those affecting certain selected industries.

Clearly these arguments won't bear up to a thorough examination. In the first place the difference between "selective" controls and general ones is mere sleight of hand. We would ask the supporters of these "selective" controls which sections of British industry are safe, secure and without the need of protection?

In reality, almost all of what remains of British manufacturing is under threat at the present time. A recent survey in The Sunday Times predicts the bankruptcy of 70,000 firms in the next three years. This constitutes the destruction of a further ten percent of manufacturing industry.

In other words import controls would have to embrace the decisive sections of manufacturing, precisely those subject to the most cut-throat competition internationally.

In a period of generally expanding world trade, the supporters of import controls might argue that with trade growing for everyone, Britain's overseas rivals "wouldn't mind" if Britain protected some of its own industry. Whether this is true or not we are clearly not in such a period of general expansion. That is precisely why the decisive sections of the British capitalists have rejected the idea of introducing protectionist measures to date, at least in an open and undisguised form. They fear retaliation from their foreign rivals which would seriously damage the British economy, which is heavily dependent on the world market.

## Cut-throat Competition

OF COURSE there's no honour amongst thieves. Disguised import controls have existed for a long time in the form of quotas, state subsidies and a whole list of legal regulations tending to limit imports and "protect" national industries. The steady growth of these tendencies is an expression of the cut-throat competition in a situation of contracting world markets. The fact that British capitalists may be forced to introduce import controls by the rising tide of protectionism internationally is all the more reason why we should oppose them.

Now, some workers, still harbouring illusions that it is possible to find a way out on the basis of capitalism, will be prepared to embrace import controls as a "practical" solution to the problem of unemployment, at least in the short term. In reality, however, whilst the introduction of "selective" controls might save some industries, and even then only temporarily, it would be at the expense of others. The increased price of goods which would inevitably flow from such a measure, would reduce the ability of British workers to buy other goods provoking crises in other sections of the national economy. In other words it would at best mean the transference of unemployment from one industry to another, at worst, with the development of a trade war, an economic disaster in which there could be no winners, but

British capitalism would be hit especially hard, and as usual it would be the workers who would be asked to pay with more unemployment and price rises.

Just what effect would this policy have on prices? The British capitalists freed from competition with their foreign rivals would increase their prices and, without any incentive to undercut the price of British goods, foreign capitalists would raise the price of those imports that were allowed in. In other words workers would be forced to pay for keeping their jobs with another variation of a pay cut.

In addition, British industry is heavily reliant on the import of machine tools and semi-manufactures as well as raw materials, so if import controls were placed on these it would increase the operating costs of British industry further undermining its competitiveness, leading to more job losses.

So much for the economic consequences of import controls, but for socialists the matter does not rest there. Behind all the appeals to save British jobs from the "enemy without", lurks a real threat to the class consciousness of workers and an attempt to replace the instinctive bonds of international class solidarity with the poison of nationalism.

## Moral Arguments

WE SHOULD also examine the most insidious of the arguments for import controls, the argument of the "moral high ground". Their argument goes like this: we should ban the import of certain goods from certain countries with dictatorial regimes, for example, on moral grounds. In other words, slyly disguised import controls masquerading as "internationalism". Why not ban all imports from these countries? What about all the other brutal regimes in the world?

The only effective way to assist the struggle of workers in other countries is for us to concentrate on stepping up the fight against our own capitalists, not to side with them against their foreign rivals. Of course it comes as no surprise that reactionaries on the right can spout such nationalist claptrap but for Labour representatives, especially those on the left to do likewise is unacceptable. It shows in practice where the defence of import controls ultimately leads ? to a common front of British workers with British bosses against foreign workers and their employers.

Let us be clear, the blame for the appalling decline of British industry lies not with unfair competition from abroad, or still less with workers in

other countries, but fairly and squarely on the shoulders of the British bosses and the entire capitalist system.

None of this, however, should be interpreted as meaning that we are great defenders of "free trade". Just because we oppose one capitalist policy does not mean that we defend another. In any case, how can the "market" possibly be the solution when, as we have shown, it is precisely the market and free trade i.e. capitalism, which has created this mess in the first place. The market isn't the answer, it's the problem.

Karl Marx explained over a hundred years ago that neither "free trade" nor "protection" could solve the problems facing workers. So what is the solution?

# Socialist Alternative

SO WHAT solution do we propose. All our problems find their root in the ownership of the economy by a small handful concerned only with their own profits and not the interests or needs of society. In other words, the counter revolution on the shopfloor, attacks on trade union rights, attacks on our wages and conditions are all the inevitable consequences of capitalism. Ultimately these problems cannot be solved within the suffocating confines of the profit system.

Marxists believe in fighting for every reform that can be won and fighting to defend everything won in the past. We don't throw our hands up in despair - oh, you can't do anything unless you abolish capitalism. Through trade union struggle and through fighting to change the Labour Party we can achieve a lot.

Instead of regulating or taxing those companies who want to shut up shop and move production abroad why not demand their nationalisation. The same goes for any firms threatening redundancies.

The steel industry is where the argument for import controls and government subsidy most commonly arises. Thirty years ago British Steel employed a quarter of a million workers. Today Corus employs just 12,500 in Britain. This is the outstanding success of privatisation, in other words of private ownership. These private bosses now plan to destroy another 4000 steelworkers' jobs. These attacks must be resisted. The union must stand and fight

for its steel sector members.

Instead of arguing for regulation, euro membership, or subsidies - none of which will save steel jobs, we have to demand that Corus be taken back into public ownership. That requires a political struggle by the union as well as an industrial fight to save jobs. In other words that means taking the fight to save jobs into the Labour Party, in the shape of fighting against the pro-privatisation leaders of the party, and fighting instead for socialist policies.

We are not talking here about what passed for nationalisation in the past, although even those bureaucratic organisations would be an improvement on what we have now in steel, power, on the railways etc.

In the case of steel, and the same applies to other industries, what is needed is not the free play of market forces, or controls on imports, but economic planning. But you can't plan what you don't control and you can't control what you don't own. In other words, the nationalisation of steel and other major industries is required. Not the kind of nationalisation that we have seen in the past, however, where industries were state funded, but run as private industries, with the workers having no say in the matter. The nationalisation we want is based on the democratic management and control of industry by the workers themselves. Boards made up of one third from the government, one third from the workforce concerned and one third from the TUC representing the working class as a whole.

A socialist policy of nationalisation would have to enable workers to run industry democratically. Production could then be planned in the interests of society, making the most efficient use of resources, and protecting the health and safety of the workers, the local community, and the environment in general. Some on the left of the Labour movement have raised a kind of halfway house position of some nationalisation, particularly of the privatised utilities, combined with controls on imports.

While we would of course agree with the call to re-nationalise these industries (along the above lines and only compensating those shareholders in genuine need, not the fatcats who have infamously made fortunes out of asset stripping our basic industries), the privatisation of which has led not to increased competition but the creation of private monopolies which have raised prices, cut services and jobs, clearly this would not be enough. To enable the economy to be planned, will require the nationalisation of the banks, financial institutions and big monopolies too.

A Labour Party proposing to control capitalism, especially if it proposes

nationalising key sections of the economy would face sabotage and a vicious campaign through the media, the courts and the other arms of the capitalist state to prevent it gaining power. That being the case, why propose tinkering with the system, why not abolish it altogether?

As unemployment rises, recession kicks in and the prospect of a return to the "good old days" fades, we can be sure from past experience that the leaders of the labour movement including those on the left will continue to rummage in the dustbin of history for all kinds of ways of shoring up decrepit and decaying capitalism, and all this in the name of "modernisation". There are none so blind as those who refuse to see. All they are doing is prolonging the death?agony of the system and lending it a more violent and convulsive character.

The dialectical contradiction of reformism is that it always succeeds in achieving end results diametrically opposed to its stated intentions. They imagine that they are being practical when in reality they are utopian. They imagine that they are defending a socialist policy when in fact they are advocating a reactionary nationalist position, and are doomed to have their clothes stolen by the most reactionary elements as the tendency toward protectionism grows internationally.

### Leadership's Role

IT IS the task of a leadership to lead, not to tail?end the bosses and their representatives. The call for import controls, regulation or Euro entry is no substitute for a fighting socialist policy against redundancies and unemployment. It only serves to divert workers attention from the fundamental issues and in particular the fight against their own bosses, the "enemy within", by pointing a finger at foreign workers as well as foreign capitalists. The only answer to this crisis is indeed the most modern policy of all, socialism. No control can be established over the economy while the purse strings remain in the hands of the capitalists. No job is safe and there will be no end to the colossal waste of human resources that unemployment represents while production is based on profit and the anarchy of the market.

A socialist plan of production, based on the nationalisation of the commanding heights of the economy, under democratic control by the workers, could not only save jobs but eradicate unemployment. Once the profit motive is removed all the talent of human resources currently wasted could be employed. Such a socialist plan would be an inspiration to the workers of Europe and the rest of

the world. On the basis of a common plan of production throughout Europe, trade could be managed without threatening jobs, but by the harmonious pooling of resources. A Labour leadership committed to such a programme would not only be more likely to win elections but could rely on the support of the working class against any attempted sabotage by the capitalists, who would not simply hand over it's privileges without a fight. As the old saying goes, a thing isn't worth having unless it's worth fighting for, and what could be more worth fighting for than an end to the uncertainty, chaos and misery of capitalism, and the building of a socialist future?

# The future of AMICUS

## A Democratic, Fighting Union

THE UNION must now be returned to its members. One of the first tasks of the left and of activists across the country is to build a left majority on the new executive council. Building the left is not just about winning elections, however. The left must be built into a thriving campaigning force. It must be an open organisation where activists can participate, and debate policy. The new left group AMICUS Unity Gazette should spearhead a campaign for new democratic rules, and socialist policies.

AMICUS will be one of the most powerful unions in the country. Therefore it has an important role to play not only in defence of its members but of the whole working class, throughout the whole trade union movement.

## Don't Contract Out, Contract In - Reclaim the Labour Party

MOREOVER AMICUS will have a very powerful voice inside the Labour Party. The attacks launched by the Blair leadership on trade unions and by the Blair government on the working class, have led some to question our union's, indeed all unions', affiliation to the Labour Party. This is understandable, but any move to weaken the unions' link with Labour now would only play into the Blairites hands. They are the ones who want to introduce state funding of political parties. They, rightly for once, believe that in time the process of radicalisation and change which has begun

in the unions will spread to the Labour Party. They see the trade unions as a cancer to be cut away before the 'disease' spreads. We must do nothing to assist them in this project. On the contrary, as not only Derek Simpson, but also Billy Hayes of the CWU, Mick Rix of ASLEF and other union leaders correctly argue we must step up our intervention individually and as a union in the Labour Party to take it back, to reclaim it from the 'modernisers' who want to drag us back into the nineteenth century. It was Tony Blair do not forget who declared that the creation of the Labour Party by the trade unions a hundred years ago was a mistake. Well, if they think they can break the link between the two wings of the labour movement they are sorely mistaken.

Now the call to reclaim the Labour Party must be carried out in practice. AMICUS Unity Gazette should launch a campaign within the union to recruit members to the party. Amicus' leadership must play an active role in the summit of union leaders new T&G leader Tony Woodley has pledged to assemble to organise taking over the Labour Party.

This campaign will have to be organised concretely not left up in the air as a vague aspiration. Seats on Constituency GCs, regional conferences, policy forums etc, must be taken up by AMICUS members. Then using

these positions within the party, we should fight for change, fight for socialist policies, fight to reclaim the Labour party for the working class.

This must not be left up in the clouds. Policies must be agreed, a programme must be fought for in resolutions. The question of deselection MPs will have to be studied and organised. Together with other unions we must recruit thousands of our members directly into the party in order to take it back from the Blairite carpetbaggers.

To those who argue that the Labour Party can't be changed, its a bosses party etc, we have one simple answer - you said the same about the AEEU, yet we defeated Jackson and we have begun to change the union.

As for those who want to see the unions break from Labour and form a new 'workers' party', we have heard this refrain many times in the past we would simply pose this question, which is the most practical and realistic struggle, to build a new party from scratch all over the country, and then convince workers from all backgrounds to ditch their traditional party, then overturn parliamentary majorities of ten, twenty or thirty thousand; or alternatively convincing 50 or 100 trade unionists in each constituency to join the party and deselect those MPs not representing working class people? The question only needs to be posed...

The struggle to regain control of our union and of the Labour Party is our next most urgent tasks. These are the tools we need to fight for our members. We will also be engaged in struggle after struggle to save jobs and to defend workers.

The industrial struggle, the struggle to reclaim our own organisations and the political struggle are all intimately linked together. In the end the only way to save jobs permanently, to cut working hours without loss of pay, to address all the problems facing working class people, health, housing, education, and all the rest, is to make the capitalist system redundant.

Reclaiming our organisations and fighting for socialist policies is an important element in the struggle to change society. Only a root and branch transformation of society along socialist lines in Britain, linking up with our brothers and sisters in Europe and internationally, can put an end to the nightmare of wars, slumps, unemployment, low pay, illiteracy, disease and the greatest scourge of all, despair. Capitalism can offer us no future. But there is an alternative. Join us in the fight against the bosses' attacks, the fight to transform Amicus, the fight to reclaim the Labour Party, the fight for a socialist world.

## In the Cause of Labour A History of the British Trade Unions

We are pleased to announce the publication in July of a new book by Wellred on the history of British trade unionism. The original idea for this book arose from the series of monthly articles Rob Sewell wrote for *Socialist Appeal* in the early nineties. Although the material contained in this book is based on those articles, they have been considerably expanded, polished and revised. The conclusions are, nevertheless, the same as Rob Sewell wrote a decade ago. The only difference is that these conclusions have been confirmed by the events that have occurred since that time.

The book spans the two-hundred year history of the workers' movement, dealing with the birth of illegal trade unions, the Chartist movement, model unionism, New Unionism, the rise of the Labour Party, the war years and

their aftermath, the General Strike and the period covering up until the present day. The book is a Marxist history, which draws on the writings of Marxism to illuminate the lessons from the struggles of the working class in Britain. It is particularly relevant today with the shift to the left of the trade unions and the emergence of a new generation of trade union activists.

A foreword for the book has been written by Jeremy Dear, general secretary of the NUJ and newly elected member of the General Council of the TUC.

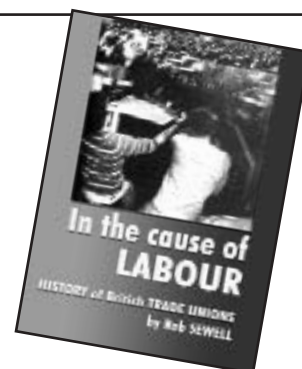
All readers of *Socialist Appeal* are being given a chance to take up an introductory offer of receiving an advance copy of the book post-free. To reserve your copy as soon as it comes off the press and to take advantage of our special offer please send a cheque for £9.99 to Wellred Publications

### Advance Notice:

New book from **Wellred!**  
**In the Cause of Labour**  
**A History of the British Trade Unions**  
**By Rob Sewell**

Approx 250 pages  
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# A Socialist Programme for *AMICUS*

## Jobs, Terms and Conditions

- I National Minimum Wage Rates Across Each Industry
- I Relaunch the struggle for A 35 hour week with no loss of pay
- I Trade Union Rights for all workers. The right to join a union. The right to recognition and representation.
- I Reverse the management counter revolution. No to productivity drives and job losses designed to squeeze more profit out of our sweat
- I Trade Union control over health and safety, over-time etc.
- I End 'social partnership' (class collaboration). For Militant Action to Defend Jobs, Terms and Conditions.



## The Union

- I For a Democratic, campaigning union
- I Rebuild the shop stewards committees
- I For a Democratic Rule Book
- I For the election of all full time officials
- I Officials to receive the same wage as the members they represent

## Take the fight into the Labour Party

- I Don't Contract Out, Contract In. Fight to Reclaim the Labour Party
- I Demand Labour Repeal the anti-union laws.
- I Retirement at 55 on a living pension
- I Nationalise firms threatening redundancies under the control and management of the workforce
- I End the anarchy of the market. For a socialist plan of production based on nationalising the commanding heights of the economy under democratic workers control and management

