

CONTRE L'AGENCIEN

With Europe's workers
against Europe's bosses
in a fight to end

WASTRICH MISERY

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Introduction

ON JUNE 14, marches from all corners of Europe will converge on Amsterdam to protest at the Inter Governmental Conference of the European Union. The marches are against the austerity policies, the casualisation of work and the racist policies being adopted by governments throughout the continent – against “unemployment, insecurity and exclusion”.

The fact that the marches are taking place at all is a historic step forward for international solidarity – the fruit of almost a year’s campaigning, involving unprecedented levels of coordination between the various national campaigns, coupled with broad united fronts within each participating country, which have linked up organisations of the unemployed with those of victimised excluded minorities, together with trade unions and political parties and groupings.

But the marches have also chosen to aim their protest at the right target: the European Union’s drive to greater monetary and political integration is being carried through at the expense of massive cuts in the jobs, living standards and welfare rights of Europe’s working classes.

At the centre of this orchestrated offensive being waged by governments of all of the main EU member states is the drive towards **European Monetary Union (EMU)** – a single currency – which the top Euro bureaucrats hope will eventually embrace all 15 member states.

Convergence criteria

The Maastricht Treaty in 1991 set the target date of 1999 for the launch of the new currency, and set a series of criteria to measure the extent to which the various European economies had successfully “converged” and created a stable base to proceed. These **convergence criteria** relate to levels of government spending, government borrowing and inflation in each participating state:

- * Inflation must be low – between 2 and 3 percent
- * The public debt of each country must not exceed 60% of that country’s Gross Domestic Product
- * The government’s public borrowing deficit must not be more than 3% of its Gross Domestic Product.

The criteria must be met during the current calendar year (the 12 months to December 1997), and on the basis of their performance in this “reference year”;

countries will be approved or rejected for participation in the 1999 euro launch.

The difficulty for many governments has been that they have been required to squeeze public spending to reduce borrowing and national debts during a period of recession. Attempting to squeeze down public spending with official figures showing 20 million unemployed across the EU is leading to a wave of attacks on unemployment and other welfare benefits, pensions, health services and education. Maastricht is a mechanism for enforcing a rigid monetarist discipline on member states.

No scope to renegotiate

Some – including the Swedish government – have suggested that aspects of the Maastricht Treaty should be renegotiated: but it is a binding Treaty, and can only be changed by unanimous decision of all 15 participating countries. The only way to escape from its clutches is for Parliaments of member states to refuse to ratify the Treaty and to withdraw from the convergence process. We say that’s what they should be compelled to do.

The British labour movement, and working class organisations all over Europe need to adopt a clear policy of opposition to the single currency.

While there is no reason why socialists should be opposed in **principle** to the idea of a single currency, the terms on which the **actual** currency on offer will be introduced are completely unacceptable.

Until now there has been a dearth of open discussion and debate on these questions in the labour movement. But the tremendous support that has come from trade union branches and other organisations to sustain the Euro-Marches shows the real possibilities of building a labour movement campaign against the single currency, and against the Maastricht Treaty itself, and thus increasing the pressure on Tony Blair’s government to say no to the euro.

The success of the Euro-Marches, and the emerging coordination of strikes and protests like that around the Renault plant closures, show that new levels of international cooperation are now possible. This pamphlet underlines the fact that we **have to** link up and fight back, uniting Europe’s workers against Europe’s bosses, if we are not to be defeated separately – and then exploited together.



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"Welcome to the Europe of free competition"

Instead of seeking crumbs from the bosses' table, we are now being urged to wait for scraps of paper from Brussels.

Why Maastricht matters

WORKERS across Europe are linking up to confront the austerity of the Maastricht criteria: but there are those in the British trade unions and Labour Party who argue for a different approach.

From the right comes the reformist argument that the "Social Chapter" of Maastricht, which Robin Cook has made great play of signing on behalf of the new Labour government – while repealing none of Thatcher's brutal anti-union laws – offers workers a significant improvement in employment rights and working conditions.

Trade union bureaucrats who years ago gave up any perspective of fighting against British employers for decent pay and conditions have implied that these things might be achieved through the back door of economic and political integration, and that compliance with Maastricht is the price to be paid for admission.

So instead of seeking crumbs from the bosses' table, we are now being urged to wait for scraps of paper from Brussels.

Others, like the TUC (in common with the CBI) go further, and tell us that any improvement in workers' living standards has to be linked to a future expansion of capitalism, which in turn is supposedly to be ushered in by the launch of the Euro.

Reluctant to admit their real motives, a cowardly refusal to fight the employers or the government in defence of workers' interests, many of these bureaucrats shelter behind the claim that action against Maastricht – or any opposition to the further integration of the EU – is somehow "nationalistic" or Little England" in approach.

Unfortunately for these Euro-reformists, far from heralding expansion and prosperity, the laws of the capitalist market, spurred on by the austerity packages required for most EU states to meet the Maastricht convergence criteria for the single currency, are leading to a full-scale Thatcherite offensive against jobs, wages and welfare rights throughout the continent.

Renault workers were the first to see the flimsy protection of the Social Chapter contemptuously torn up by a management hell-bent on ensuring European car plants match the levels of exploitation achieved in Britain after 18 years of Tory rule. German miners, too have had to resort to old-fashioned class action rather than Euro-laws to defend their jobs.

The spread of unemployment across Europe – and the accompanying onslaught on benefits and on welfare state provision – give little comfort to those who argue that the Euro will open up a new golden age of benevolent capitalist expansion.

But there are those on the left, too, who stand back, arguing that Maastricht is an irrelevance, and that even if it were not for the single currency the capitalist class would in any event be attacking workers throughout Europe.

The key issue, they tell us, is that during the Thatcher years the British working class allowed the bosses to cut real wages and cut their contributions to pensions and welfare benefits.

Of course there is a degree of truth in this. The fight against Maastricht should not be allowed to divert from the fight against national capitalists and capitalist

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governments which are attacking the working class.

But the problem of such a simplistic "class struggle in each country" approach is that it ignores the new, concerted onslaught being waged by big business throughout Europe, driven on by the deadlines and criteria of Maastricht. Each capitalist nation-state is urging the others along, with the goal of meeting Maastricht's 1999 deadline.

This in turn gives a material incentive, an urgent need for the working class movement to respond in kind by synchronising and co-ordinating its resistance on a continental level to defend its jobs, wages and welfare services.

Those who minimise the significance of Maastricht as a motor force of the current bosses' offensive also ignore the fact that if the Euro is established, along with a European Bank policing the actions of member states, the scope to force concessions or socialist policies at national level from any genuinely left wing government is virtually non-existent.

While leftists who ignore Maastricht denounce the "nationalism" of those fighting back, they have no answer to the fact that the oppressive power of an unelected central bank would create new national divisions and conflicts between member states. New demands for self-determination, for democratic rights could easily emerge from areas suffering the heaviest austerity at the hand of the new European Central Bank. The danger is that these new tensions could take a reactionary, nationalist turn, offering scope for right wing and fascist parties which trade on the divisions and defeats suffered by the workers' movement.

As millions of workers are becoming painfully aware, with cherished pension rights, jobs and living standards under attack, the Maastricht process is driving forward a continental offensive.

If workers throughout the EU are not to be driven down to the conditions imposed by Tory rule in Britain – and then progressively further in the name of competition with low-wage economies world-wide – they must unite in common struggle.

The fight is not to defend the pound, the mark or the franc, or even against the concept of a single currency: it is against the concerted effort of Europe's bankers to solve **their** crisis – the crisis of **their** rotten capitalist system – at **our** expense.

The only genuinely "social Europe" will be one in which the wealth and the means of production are socially owned and democratically controlled by Europe's workers. That's what we're fighting for.

The fight is not to defend the pound, the mark or the franc, or even against the concept of a single currency: it is against the concerted effort of Europe's bankers to solve their crisis – the crisis of their rotten capitalist system – at our expense.

Long countdown to the single currency

● December 1991: Maastricht Summit agrees to create single currency in 1999. Tory government insists on right to "opt out" of Social Chapter, and out of single currency.

● September 16 1992: "Black Wednesday": Britain withdraws from the Exchange Rate Mechanism having lost £18 billion in reserves.

● January 1993: Maastricht Treaty comes into force. Maastricht Bill passed by Commons in May.

● December 1995: Madrid Summit confirms 1999 as target start date for monetary union and single currency.

● November 1996: Tony Blair promises Labour would hold a referendum before joining single currency.

● December 1996: Dublin meeting of heads of state again confirms 1999 start date for single currency and adopts far-reaching economic "stability pact".

● June 1997: Amsterdam Summit.

Not dealing directly with single currency issue but with greater political integration, with hopes of new "Maastricht 2" (Amsterdam Treaty).

● Spring 1998: decisions must be made on which EU countries will join single currency, based on their performance against Maastricht criteria in 1997.

● 2002: Scheduled date for circulation of Euro notes and coins in participating countries.

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Europe's workers say no to Maastricht

1996 saw the biggest wave of struggles across Europe for more than 20 years. Strikes, demonstrations and occupations took place against the convergence criteria of the Maastricht Treaty and the cuts and austerity programmes they have generated.

It is far from the first time that the effects of the convergence criteria have been challenged in this way. There were strikes and demonstrations against cuts in welfare and government austerity measures in Italy and Greece soon after the Treaty was signed. In the Autumn of 1994 there were mass strikes in Italy followed by demonstrations in France against cuts in education.

December 1995 saw the huge confrontation in France which shook the government to its foundations. Millions of workers struck and millions demonstrated across the country against the Juppé plan and in defence of the welfare state. It was by far biggest challenge mounted by the French working class in since 1968.

The political climate in which it took place was of course very different and the movement of the 1990s lacked the vision of 1968, though some of the mobilisations were even bigger.

1996 saw major strikes in a number of European countries as the governments continued their negotiations and monetary union crept closer.

There were mass strikes in Italy Portugal, Belgium, Greece and Spain, while France maintained the highest level of class struggle in Europe. In Germany the biggest workers' demonstration since the second world war forced the Kohl government to withdraw proposed cuts in welfare.

In October, 150,000 metal workers participated in strikes in Germany. At the end of November 3 million Greek workers took part in a one day general strike involving both public and private sector workers.

80,000 French lorry drivers paralysed France with road blocks demanding more pay, early retirement and tax concessions. It was the most powerful strike action by an individual section of workers in France for years, and at the heart of the private sector. It showed, if any further illustration was needed, the massive potential of the working class in Europe.

Fearing a more generalised social explosion, the French ruling class had to concede the drivers' main demands. They won a massive victory.

Labour's helping hand

ROBIN COOK has pledged that the British government will do "everything in its power" to make sure the single currency gets off the ground on schedule in 1999 – "whether we are part of it or not".

Britain has the EU presidency for the first half of next year, the crucial period for deciding which countries will join the single currency.

Gordon Brown – described by one union militant as "deeper into Emu than Rod Hull" is also working consistently towards British participation, beginning with the abdication of control of interest rates to the Bank of England.



"In England they are killing cows, in Germany they are killing the welfare state"

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During 1997 we have seen the first genuine Europe-wide protests – mobilising workers from Belgium, France, Spain, Portugal and Slovenia in joint protest at Renault's proposed plant closures

Their struggle inspired truck drivers in Finland to mount blockades on the border with Russia and blockades were set up by Danish and Portuguese bus workers. On December 11, two million workers struck in Spain against austerity programmes. There were demonstrations of 210,000 in Madrid and 100,000 in Catalonia.

Inspired by the tactics of the French lorry drivers, 80,000 Greek small farmers declared "holy war" against Prime Minister Costas Smitis and his PASOK government's austerity policy.

They cut Greece in half by blocking the roads with their tractors, demanding increased subsidies and tax concessions. The government replied saying that there would have to be further cuts in government spending if Greece was to have any chance of meeting the Maastricht convergence criteria, and that this was their priority. Not since austerity measures were first introduced in the mid 1980's has the government of the EU's poorest member state faced such opposition. The revolt of the farmers was all the more painful in that it came from a sector that has traditionally supported PASOK.

On Wednesday December 17 most of Italy came to a halt when millions struck in support of engineering workers demanding higher wages. At the same time there were more strikes in France involving transport workers, communication workers, energy supply and theatre workers. There were further strikes and demonstrations in Spain against cuts in public spending.

Greece paralysed

On December 18, Greek seafarers began a two day strike, and tens of thousands of demonstrators marched through Athens as part of a public sector strike involving teachers, local government workers and health workers.

It was the second mass strike within weeks, and with much of the country still paralysed by the farmers' blockades, plunged Greece into further crisis.

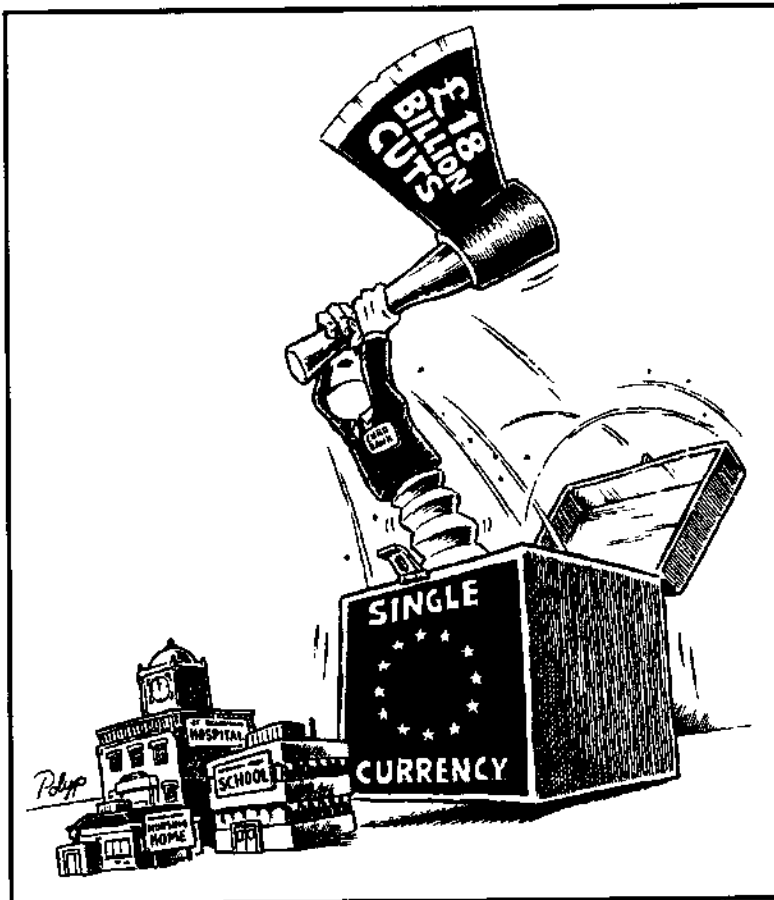
The following day, December 19, a campaign by unemployed workers in France demanding increased unemployment benefit led by the two main unemployed organisations and major sponsors of the Euro marches – Agir Ensemble Contre le Chomage (AC) and the Association de Defense et d'Entraide des Chomeurs (ADEC) – won an 11% increase in unemployment benefit from the government.

This came after a month of direct action by unemployed workers. They had occupied unemployment benefit offices and offices of employers' organisations, and fought repeated battles with the police who tried to evict them.

During 1997 we have seen the first genuine Europe-wide protests – mobilising workers from Belgium, France, Spain, Portugal and Slovenia in joint protest at Renault's proposed plant closures, with solidarity from Belgian workers from Volvo, Volkswagen, Ford and General Motors.

The mass action of German miners, who invaded Bonn and blockaded the city centre, forced a major climbdown by the Kohl government, which retreated from a Thatcher-style rundown of German coal mining at the cost of extra government subsidies. In Italy, the trade unions are standing firm against government plans to slash welfare services.

These struggles have not yet been replicated



Cartoon from 'People's Europe' campaign pamphlet

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in Britain, although the size of defeat inflicted on the Tory government on May 1 is a clear reflection of the mass revulsion at its policy of axing welfare spending.

The British working class and trade unions have suffered more defeats over the last 18 years than anywhere else in Europe. During the French strikes at the end of 1995 the British media pointed out that such action would be impossible in Britain because of the anti-union laws.

This is of course a simplification – action can be taken outside the law – but there is no doubt that the law together with the 'new realist' policies of the trade union leaders have worked together to leave Britain isolated from this European-wide tide of struggle.

To maximise the impact of these campaigns and their chances of success requires more co-ordination and united action by the workers' movement Europe-wide.

Most struggles will take place at least in the first instance on a national level, putting forward demands aimed at national governments. But it is important to recognise the common factors, link up those in struggle and spread the fight across the continent.

The attacks against the working class however are being organised at a European level, driven forward by Maastricht, and a Europe-wide response is needed. The only initiative concretely addressing this need at the present time is the European March for Jobs.

Unpopular mandate

ALL OVER Europe, capitalist governments are forging ahead towards the single currency in the teeth of massive and growing opposition.

In Sweden, which like Britain and Greece is currently outside the Exchange Rate Mechanism, a poll at the end of 1996 showed 60% would vote against membership of the EU if they were asked again, and a miserable 18% supported the single currency.

Denmark rejected the Maastricht Treaty in 1992, and only secured acceptance the following year after opting out of the single currency.

Spain's right-wing government of Jose Maria Aznar has embarked upon spending cuts and privatisation to cut its government deficit to the 3% of GDP allowed by Maastricht. And with 22% of the workforce unemployed, is looking for ways of cutting redundancy costs to smooth the path to further rationalisation of industry. But while Spanish bosses demand even more changes to cut their costs, polls show that after a year in office, Aznar's government has failed to extend its popular support, and would probably lose an election.

Efforts by the Italian government to hack back its budget deficit in line with Maastricht requirements have not satisfied the European Commission, which predicted in April that only Italy and Greece would fail to meet the 3% target.

The Italian government has imposed a specific one-off "Eurotax" among the measures to cut back its deficit, currently running at 6.8%, just 0.3% lower than last year. There were formal protests in Rome at the EC findings, but the report has been followed by a reprimand from a meeting of finance ministers who did not accept that the budget-balancing measures offered long-term stability.

Unions

While the government is eager to enter the single currency in order to reduce the cost of paying off accumulated debts, it has not convinced Italian unions, who are standing firm against cuts in welfare and pensions.

Perhaps the biggest headache of all is in Germany, where even the rigid control of the Bundesbank has not stopped the budget deficit in the recession-hit economy exceeding

Maastricht's 3% limit, and the national debt exceeding the 60% Maastricht maximum.

To make matters worse for Helmut Kohl, polls show that 77% of Germans want the single currency postponed. Building workers are the latest to threaten national action, this time on pay and conditions.

In France, where the election is nearing its conclusion as we go to press, there has been a growth of opposition to the single currency, with the Socialists proposing to renegotiate the Maastricht Treaty, and even the Gaullist right now split on the issue. Leading Gaullist Charles Pasqua has called for a referendum, saying that unemployment at 12.8% was "too high a price to pay for a Europe constructed by financiers and technocrats".

According to the latest reckoning at the EU finance ministers meeting on May 13, only five governments have so far reached the "approved" list – Finland, Netherlands, Luxembourg, Ireland and Denmark. The remaining nine – Austria, Belgium, France, Germany, Greece, Portugal, Spain and Sweden – remain on a "blacklist".

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THE NEW Labour government will quickly be forced to confront the issue Blair ducked in advance of the election – whether to sign up for the single European currency, for European Monetary Union (EMU).

There are broad hints that while Blair would like to opt for EMU and take Britain into the first stage in 1999, the government may hold back until the second intake of member states.

However, Gordon Brown's first significant move as Chancellor has been to hand over greater power to the Bank of England and an unelected quango of bankers and "experts" who will now control interest rates. This could be the first step towards a first-stage entry into EMU, which would require Labour to go further and privatise the Bank of England, to pave the way for the imposition of an "independent" European central bank.

While the technicalities of who fixes interest rates will leave many workers indifferent, the new government will need to make more and deeper cuts in the already battered welfare state if they intend to reduce government borrowing to 3% of GDP in line with the convergence criteria of the Maastricht Treaty. Already there is speculation that Brown might seek cuts of up to £3 billion in public spending.

Blair's insistence that he will not cut other areas of state spending (such as Trident nuclear missiles) or raise taxes leaves Labour with no middle way. A Labour government must either bridge the budget gap – by raising taxes on the wealthy and on industry or by attacking the welfare state – or reject Maastricht and undermine Britain's position inside the EU.

The Euro and economic union

Towards a capitalist super-state

EUROPEAN INTEGRATION is not the only reason for an assault on welfare: governments all round the world are seeking to cut back on public spending in order to reduce the tax burden on industry, and drive down costs to meet global competition.

Rather the Maastricht process and the drive towards greater integration and rationalisation of capital is the response of Europe's ruling class to the global war for markets. The Maastricht Treaty itself represents a means to drive forward and speed up the war on workers' rights.

Despite the struggles going on across Europe against the implications of the convergence criteria, the debate in the workers' movement lags behind the material process taking place.

This is particularly the case in Britain. Here the anti-Maastricht debate has been dominated by the Tory right, with Labour and TUC leaderships lined up behind European integration. The left, despite important efforts by sections of it to address the issue, has remained marginalised.

There were apparently as many as 50 opponents of Maastricht in the Parliamentary Labour Party before the May election, mostly, but not all, on the left. It is positive that some on the left have given support to the Euromarches, particularly Alan Simpson, who has also been active in the People's Europe campaign.

However, with the authoritarian tone of the new government, which made clear its hostility to the minority of hard left MPs long before May 1, few if any Labour MPs seem likely to mount any up-front challenge to Blair on this issue in the immediate post-election period.

Yet European integration is directed primarily against the working class, with the aim of more effectively exploiting its labour power and maximising profit.

The left in Britain has a responsibility to challenge this logic, develop the working class dimension of the debate, and start to rum the tide. Persuading left MPs and senior trade unionists to speak out clearly is crucial in gaining a wider audience for these ideas.



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The TUC and the Social Chapter

The 'New Realist' politics of the 1980s brought a sea-change in the TUC on the question of European integration. 10 years previously the TUC had opposed the EEC. Today the overwhelming majority of union leaders support the EU.

While they were not prepared to do anything themselves to challenge the Tory government, the bosses or the market system, they argued that the EC will extend workers' democratic and social rights. They look towards a 'social Europe' and the Social Chapter. They hanker after the institutionalisation of the unions in Europe. This was eliminated by Thatcher's government in Britain — an anti-union stance which Tony Blair is clearly keen to uphold.

Politically the union leaders have pinned their hopes on the illusion that the new bosses' Europe can be reformed to win additional concessions for working people. The 1996 TUC conference strengthened the stance still further, voting for **more** integration and specifically in favour of EMU. In this they were more forthright, at least in their public position, than the Labour leadership.

Despite the TUC vote, only a minority of unions had even discussed this issue, and although UNISON's conference has adopted a policy of opposition to Maastricht, neither its leader Rodney Bickerstaffe nor any other major union leader has been prepared to stand out against the TUC line.

Of course the so-called "social Europe" is not about the generosity of Europe's bosses. It is designed as a palliative to persuade the working class and the labour bureaucracy to accept European integration.

The Social Chapter — now endorsed by the Blair government — is not a panacea but a classic example of a paper tiger. It includes the right to strike, but this is subject to 'national obligations', and in Britain is over-ruled by the Tory anti-union laws — which remain in force. Its provisions, even if implemented, are marginal to the problems facing the working class.

In any case the so-called 'social Europe' also includes the notorious 1985 Schengen agreement, which ensures that anyone barred from one EU country is barred from them all. In Britain this racist structure has been complemented by the Immigration and Asylum Act, and similarly draconian legislation has been implemented in most other EC countries. Whilst citizens have rights to move their place of residence *within* the Community, the Schengen deal erects a wall against immigrants and asylum seekers from outside.

The tragic consequences of such racist laws were graphically illustrated in the death of 280 clandestine immigrants in the Mediterranean on Christmas Day.

The Dublin Summit

The Maastricht Treaty provided for a full constitutional review of its workings, which is now taking place. This process should be concluded at the Amsterdam Inter-Governmental Conference (IGC) in June. The recent Dublin summit of EU heads of government was a part of this.

The Dublin meeting discussed a new draft treaty — "Maastricht 2" — which will, if agreed in June, become the Treaty of Amsterdam.

The entire package of economic and fiscal policies with which Tony Blair's Labour Party went into the British election were in essence a collapse into Tory economic policy, implying further reduction in public spending, with the most severe cash limits ever imposed on the NHS, a standstill in the value of benefits, and cuts to come in education and local authority spending. But they are also the policies needed to meet the Maastricht criteria.

Stabilising profits

The Maastricht Treaty obliges member states to avoid excessive budget deficits.

Last year's Dublin meeting of heads of state adopted a "Stability Pact" designed to enforce this policy as part of the process of "convergence."

Each member state is required to "commit itself to aim for a medium-term budgetary position of close to balance or surplus" — whatever the impact on jobs or welfare services.

The budgets of each state will be scrutinised by the European Council, which will have powers to step in if

they are not satisfied. Sanctions can be imposed, in the shape of enormous fines of up to 0.5% of GDP to be paid by any government that steps out of line.

Of course there is nothing inherently progressive or socialist about running a budget deficit: it depends who is then obliged to pay taxes to cover the borrowing required.

The issue is one of democratic control: entrusting the economies of Europe to the control of unelected bankers makes it impossible to protect social priorities such as jobs or welfare.

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This will set the scene for a whole new stage of European political integration.

Not all the objectives of Dublin were achieved. John Major and the British Tories vigorously opposed proposals to drop passport controls and move to a common immigration policy – a chauvinist line now echoed loyally by Blair's team. These issues were laid to one side but will come up again in Amsterdam.

The crucial step which was taken by the Dublin summit was the agreement on the so-called 'Growth and Stability Pact'. This is a legal framework for the Euro, and establishes the rules by which the new currency will function. The Stability Pact is highly significant and will hand over far-reaching powers to the Council of Ministers to determine the fate of countries which sign up for the single currency.

Effectively, under the Pact, the convergence criteria will continue in force after the introduction of the single currency in January 1999, in the form of "stability criteria". Government spending deficits will remain fixed at a maximum 3% of GDP – and a breach of the criteria will result in a huge fines being levied on the countries involved, forcing them to cut spending to get back into line. These fines can be up to 0.5% of GDP – amounting to billions of pounds.

From the point of view of the European project, the Stability Criteria are crucial. The single currency is as precarious as previous attempts to regulate the currencies of the EU. The most recent experience was of the European Exchange Rate Mechanism, which went into crisis under the impact of recession. As a result the pound was spat out of the ERM on "Black Wednesday", after Norman Lamont and the Bank of England had spent £18 billion trying to maintain its value.

EMU will not just regulate exchange rates, but lock them permanently together. After that, if the Euro is to remain stable against the dollar and the yen, economic fluctuations between the different member states must be reflected directly in rising unemployment and cuts in government spending rather than in changes in the relative value of currencies.

This is why there has to be a genuine economic convergence if there is to be a chance of stability. There might be fudging at the margins, but serious fudging would threaten the whole set-up.

A new development in the world political situation, such as a recession in the USA, could threaten the whole structure.

British Capital and EMU

Both the Tory and Labour Parties have prevaricated over entry into EMU and argued that all the options are open. But it is not so simple. The majority of big banks and industry chiefs want integration.

Other sectors of capital, whose operations are focused elsewhere in the world, are more divided. Many smaller, less competitive companies are opposed to Maastricht and its consequences. But the most significant sectors want closer links with the EU. They are the driving force arguing that if the full benefits of Europe are to be realised, capitalism needs not only a single market but monetary and political union.

Germany, France and others are prepared for a two-tier Europe if some other countries are unable or unwilling to join by the target date of January 1999.

Prime Minister Blair has been seen – and tacitly endorsed – by Germany's Helmut Kohl and other right wing European governments as the man most likely to bring Britain into EMU and closer integration. He will not be happy if he is unable to join the first wave.

Waiting for stage 2 is not an easy option. There could be a lot to lose for British employers if they are forced to remain outside the currency for a few more years – and things shape up without them. However, it is not clear that it will be possible for Labour to move quickly enough to avoid this.

Ultimately integration will be on the terms of the most powerful state in the EU – Germany, which is itself struggling to meet the strict criteria it helped devise.

Many smaller, less competitive British companies are opposed to Maastricht and its consequences. But the most significant sectors want closer links with the EU. They are the driving force arguing that if the full benefits of Europe are to be realised, capitalism needs not only a single market but monetary and political union.

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Britain is already developing into a low-pay, under-skilled economy, over reliant on financial services in the City of London. EMU will accelerate and spread this trend, and exact a heavy price from the working class. The new Central Bank will have a free hand to impose monetarist, deflationary economic restructuring across Europe, to force through massive public spending cuts, with the aim of creating a more mobile, cheaper labour force, through the discipline of mass unemployment – all on the British model.

What Kind of Super State?

The European Union is fundamentally an attempt by the most powerful sectors of the European bourgeoisie to shift the balance of power towards itself and away from the working class. Facing stiffened competition from Japan, the USA and emerging industrial economies, they need to restructure European capitalism in the most effective way to increase the rate of exploitation and maximise profit.

Their ultimate aim is some sort of European super state, since – while it is not the only answer – a single state form can most effectively achieve this objective. What they have in mind is not just a duplication of the existing nation states, but development of a new state apparatus on a vastly larger scale.

However much the EU architects or monetary union may deny it, the new structure is intended to perform all the essential functions that nation states have traditionally carried out.

The Maastricht Treaty went further than any previous treaty towards the creation of this kind of state form. The timetables for a single currency and economic union also run alongside moves towards a common foreign, security and defence policy for the EU. Politically and economically both the Treaty, and the objectives it promotes, challenge the sovereignty of national parliaments and establish institutions which are outside of any democratic control.

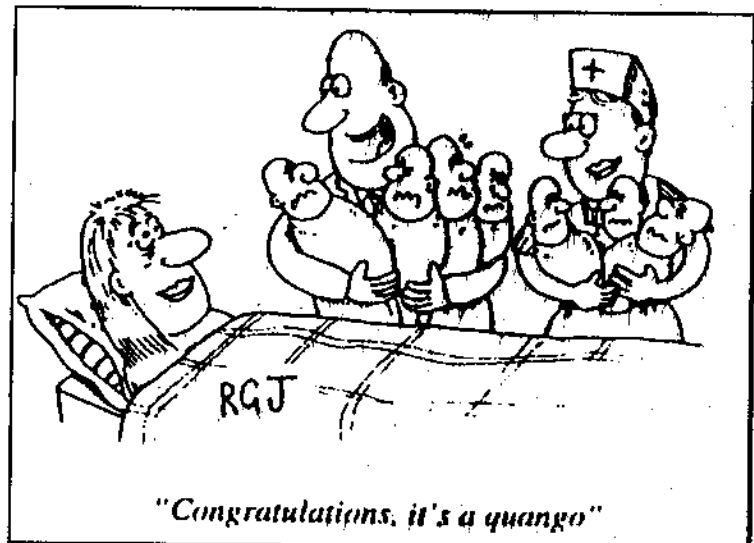
Although their critique is from a reactionary, ultra-nationalist perspective, the Tory right have made some correct points about this process. This issue has split the bourgeoisie in Britain and created the beginnings of civil war in among the Tory factions, helping decimate the Conservatives in the May election. Divisions over Europe may yet split and destroy the Conservatives as a party.

Under Maastricht, economic power will be shifted from both the national governments and national banks to an independent and even more unaccountable European Central Bank (ECB), modelled on Germany's Bundesbank, which would control the interest rates of all the countries within EMU.

The power would therefore be in the hands of a non-elected Euro-quango: board members of the European Bank would be appointed for eight years, and could not be removed by any popular vote. The European Monetary Institution, the forerunner of the ECB, will be established in early 1998 in preparation for the launch of the ECB a year later.

A single European currency and bank are essential not only for economic integration but the establishment of a monetarist structure across Europe that can break up the main elements of the welfare state which emerged in the post war settlement. They are seen as the way to slash the costs of European industry, preparing them to do battle in the global market place.

However much the EU architects or monetary union may deny it, the new structure is intended to perform all the essential functions that nation states have traditionally carried out.



Maastricht Misery

The emergence of the EU as a global superpower

The strategic aim of a reorganised European capitalism is to enable its big corporations to meet the economic challenge of other power blocks – of Japan and the 'Tiger' economies of the Pacific rim, and the North American block around the United States.

This strategic aim has evolved out of the post-war European alliances and trading blocks, which were originally shaped by the emergence of the USA as the main victor of the second world war, and the world's overwhelmingly dominant capitalist power. US capital was key to the reconstruction of Europe, and the early alliances were encouraged by the US as a means to strengthen capitalist blocks to challenge the expanded power of the USSR.

The original European project of the Iron and Steel Community, and then the Common Market were both creations of the Cold War, as was the NATO alliance.

Historically British capitalism has been the most globalised of the European economies. A high proportion of its assets lay outside Britain, hence the special role of the City of London as a centre of international finance. But with the decline of the British Empire, British capital made a compromise, and became second string to the USA, clinging on to the 'special relationship'. British overseas markets, assets and financial operations became more and more dependent on US economic and military power.

France, under De Gaulle, reacted against US dominance in Europe, and refused to become a full member of NATO. This, along with the emergence of Germany as the most powerful capitalist state in Europe, began to erode US influence, and shape a more independent European project.

The relative economic decline of the USA during the 1970s and the shaping up of new power blocks stimulated a new drive towards European integration during the 1980s.

These developments created an increasing division of interests for the British ruling class, torn between its membership of the EC and its special relationship with the USA. The special relationship remained the main pillar of British

strategy under successive governments until the post-war economic boom ran out of steam in the 1970s.

France had opposed Britain's late application to the EEC for that reason. Britain's subsequent successful application to join the EEC in the early 1970s created profound contradictions between the expanding European market for British goods and its much wider international financial operations. During the 1980s there was a massive outflow of British capital, primarily to the USA.

The growing trade rivalry in the 3-way battle for markets between Europe, the North American and Japanese power blocks is now the crux of the drive for greater integration of the European Union. In this global struggle, the relatively small European imperialist states require bigger and more secure markets and a greater freedom for the movement and rationalisation of capital on a European basis if they are to compete.

Even Europe's biggest companies still need mergers and rationalisation if they are to compete with the generally larger American and Japanese giants. This is why the Europe based multinationals are overwhelmingly in favour of the EU and further integration. In fact a group of

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Maastricht Misery

multi-nationals representing multi-billion pound businesses meet regularly to pressurise for integration.

For a Socialist Alternative

Socialist Outlook is in favour of British withdrawal from the EU. We believe that such a step, which runs against the interests of British capitalism, would create the best conditions for the class struggle here in Britain. At the same time the withdrawal of a major partner would be likely to create a crisis within the remainder of the EU, opening up possibilities for workers in other European countries to fight for their demands and challenge capitalist rule.

Our aim is not a capitalist Britain outside of the EU. We fight for a socialist Britain as part of a socialist Europe. At every stage it is vital that socialists put forward a Europe-wide alternative to the bosses' project of capitalist integration and rationalisation at the expense of jobs and living standards.

We do not defend the illusory "independence" of the national state. We are internationalists. We favour a United Socialist States of Europe, linking working people, east and west, north and south.

The Europe we want is one that prioritises the needs of the working class against profit, promotes equality for women, fights racism and defends the environment. We want a real 'social Europe' - and that can only be a socialist Europe. -

We support the idea of a genuine Constituent Assembly of all the peoples of Europe to determine the future of Europe. We are for workers' solidarity against the capitalist trusts and multinationals. We are for building direct links and joint struggles between workers across Europe.

Indeed Socialist Outlook is the most committed internationalist current on the British left, with close working links with the Fourth International, the world-wide organisation of revolutionary socialists. The FI has national sections throughout Europe, many of which have emerged as the motive force building the broad alliances of trade unions, unemployed organisations and political parties that have led to the successful Euro Marches for Jobs.

As socialists and internationalists, we say that the workers' movement cannot simply abstain on Maastricht, Maastricht 2 or EMU on the grounds that if they fall the bosses will impose another form of capitalism. These Treaties represent a direct attack on the working class and their interests. In particular they represent a coordinated attempt to smash up the welfare state

Today it is easier for working people to see that EMU and the Maastricht treaty will lead to further attacks on their jobs and services, even if they retain illusions that the EU itself is a positive thing. That is why we have participated in many campaigns and debates against EMU.

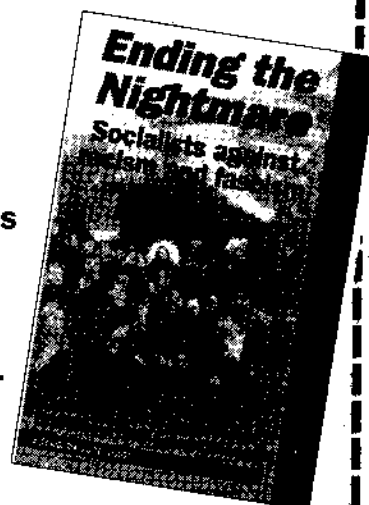
We must continue to broaden the debate in the labour movement, working so that those who today will take action against the effects of Maastricht will through action, come to realise that the whole project of European integration needs to be challenged.

From this point of view the decision that Labour will hold a referendum on the question of European Monetary

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Union is a welcome one. A referendum will stimulate broader political debate and allow us a broader audience for our ideas.

Obviously we would have preferred a referendum on the question of European Union itself. But if EMU, a crucial stage of European integration, is to be put to a referendum then we will campaign for a 'no' vote. We will do so whilst rejecting the right-wing nationalist arguments.

Only the independent mass action of the working class, as has been taking place across Europe, can confront and defeat the power of international capital and its state forms. A crucial part of this perspective is defeating the current plans of the employers to reorganise Europe to defend their profits and interests – at our expense.

Socialist OUTLOOK

What we stand for

IN THE NINETIES, millions of women and men have taken part in mobilisations against the evils of capitalism and the bureaucratic dictatorships. This reflects the fact that humanity faces widening dangers. Ecological, military, social and economic devastation faces millions of people.

Many more people recognise the barbaric nature of capitalism. In a situation where the inability of the social democratic and communist parties to provide socialist solutions is becoming clearer, the task of creating new leaderships remains ahead.

Socialist Outlook is written and sold by socialists committed to this struggle. We are the British supporters of the worldwide marxist organisation, the Fourth International. We stand for the revolutionary transformation of society and a pluralist, socialist democracy world wide.

The overall goal which we pursue is the emancipation of all human beings from every form of exploitation, oppression, alienation and violence. Socialism must be under the control of ordinary people, democratic, pluralist, multi-party, feminist, ecologist, anti-militarist and internationalist. It must abolish wage slavery and national oppression.

Unity

The working class is the backbone of unity among all the exploited and oppressed. The working class and its allies must fight uncompromisingly against capitalism and for a clear programme of action in order to gradually acquire the experience and consciousness needed to defeat capitalism at the decisive moment of crisis.

The movements of women, lesbians and gay men and black

people to fight their particular forms of oppression make an essential contribution to the struggle for a different society. They are organised around the principle "None so fit to break the chains as those who wear them". The whole workingclass needs to fully commit itself to these struggles. Furthermore we fight for a strategic alliance between workers and these organisations which respects their legitimate autonomy.

By simultaneously building revolutionary organisations in each country and a revolutionary International we aim to guide and encompass the global interests of the workers and oppressed. By building a united struggle against exploitation and oppression we aim to ensure the survival of the human race.

Join us. For more details write now to Socialist Outlook, PO Box 1109, London N4 2UU.

For a Europe of the peoples, not the Fat Cats

Huge mobilisations of workers across Europe, particularly the millions of workers in France who struck and demonstrated in December 1995 against the Juppé Plan and in defence of the welfare state – the biggest since 1968 – have highlighted the resistance to austerity.

Workers are increasingly challenging the consequences of the Maastricht process and fighting back as their governments drive against public spending and welfare provision in order to reduce deficits and public borrowing, as demanded by the Treaty.

But cuts in public spending and the tightening of fiscal policy are also deflating the economies of Europe, reinforcing and deepening the current recession and pushing up unemployment to the highest levels since before the last world war. This is a vicious circle, and can only result in the widening of the deficits because of the social costs of unemployment.

In the case of Britain, whose trade-cycle is desynchronised from the rest of Europe and where we have already experienced the Thatcherite counter-revolution, the more recent attacks have, for the time being, not been so new or dramatic, and the fightback has so far been much more limited.

However the Tory pre-election “mini-boom” has been very delicate and is already overheating: hence the current demands on Gordon Brown for interest rate rises and increased taxation.

Throughout western Europe the attempts of various governments to meet the Maastricht convergence criteria, essential if EMU is to work, are themselves producing serious social and political instability. If Tony Blair’s New Labour government is committed to fulfil the criteria to ensure Britain’s entry of the ERM on schedule, more attacks on the British working class will soon follow on those already made by the Tories.

So massive has been the resistance that, despite their public commitment to EMU on schedule, EU political leaders may yet be obliged to delay the full implementation of EMU.

The workers of Germany, France and elsewhere have shown us how Euro-bosses can be stopped in their tracks. British workers must organise to follow their example.

Exclusive club

The EU as it is presently constructed is and always has been an exclusive capitalist club. It is for all these reasons that *Socialist Outlook* is not just against the Maastricht Treaty and its convergence criteria, but against *all* the plans of the European governments to establish a European capitalist super-state, presently called the EU. Just as we reject the narrow national-

THE DECISIVE sectors of big business and their political representatives in Britain and the rest of Europe have already decided to go ahead with all the main objectives embodied in the Maastricht Treaty.

This means they will do everything in their power to implement European Monetary Union (EMU) on schedule. But there are still barriers to overcome.

Despite the impression given by the media, the main obstacle is not the technical hitches encountered by governments attempting to get under the limbo pole of the Maastricht convergence criteria, but the *working class* response across Europe to capitalist austerity measures.

This has led to many governments confronting a growing groundswell of opposition: some capitalists fear that social resistance and working class struggles could even bring down the whole house of cards.

Maastricht Misery

The proposed super-state would be truly a Europe of the bosses, not of the peoples.

ism of the Euro-sceptic right-wing in British politics, we must dismiss the phony "internationalism" of the EU which masks the reactionary dream of a racist and imperialist "Fortress Europe".

Collaboration with the closer integration of the capitalists and bankers across Europe would inevitably set the workers movement on a trajectory of sharpening competition and potential conflict with workers from other parts of the world – notably in North America and Japan – and it would be built at the expense of the workers of the east and the south who will be driven further into poverty and debt.

The proposed super-state would be truly a Europe of the bosses, not of the peoples.

Today, the confusion in the working class about the Maastricht Treaty and the process of economic union, confusion promoted in particular by trade union leaders and social democratic parties such as the Labour Party, is far less pronounced. Increasing numbers of working people have taken up struggles against the consequences of a capitalist Europe as the reality of the continental drive towards austerity has become more evident.

In this situation we move toward the European Inter-Governmental Conference (IGC) planned for Amsterdam in June. Although discussion of the single currency issue is not on the agenda, it is the underlying theme of the whole event, which is intended to change the European constitution, endorse a new, wider-reaching Treaty ("Maastricht 2") and reinforce the move towards a common currency.

The Euro-Marches which will converge on Amsterdam from all corners of the EU will therefore raise the stakes in the political opposition to these moves towards integration of a bosses' Europe. Up to now, of course, most of the struggles against unemployment and austerity have not been directed against the EU policy and institutions as such, but at the actions of particular national governments as they have implemented the Maastricht criteria.

The EU is being fashioned through the Maastricht process into a powerful weapon in the hands of capital, reinforcing attacks on post-war national welfare state provision, and creating conditions to drive down real wages and living standards in order to prepare for competition on a global scale.

The historic rivalries, national interests and cultures of the European nation states and their ruling classes remain stumbling blocks today. Each capitalist class pursues its own national interests within a fragile institutional framework. The traditional Franco-German alliance which has led the rebuilding of Europe since the inception of the European Community, continues to fray at the edges over conflicting national interests.

In particular the French capitalists would prefer to organise a political union of the existing 15 EU nations. But they are also finding it difficult to meet the requirements of the Maastricht criteria, because of the resistance of the French working class.

For its part the German bourgeoisie, aware of its strategic position in the middle of the continent, and still paying dearly for the unification with East Germany, is eager to look to the potential markets and cheap labour of the East to strengthen its position over its EU partners/rivals.

Germany's aim is to create a 'Greater Europe', with all the countries of central and Eastern Europe under its hegemony. But its current deep recession, and growing public sector deficit, worsened by the soaring costs of sustaining almost 5 million unemployed, is casting severe doubt over the future of the single currency.

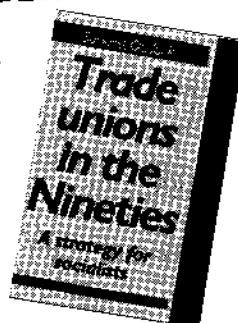
The British establishment is still partly wedded to the 'special relationship' with the USA which ever since the

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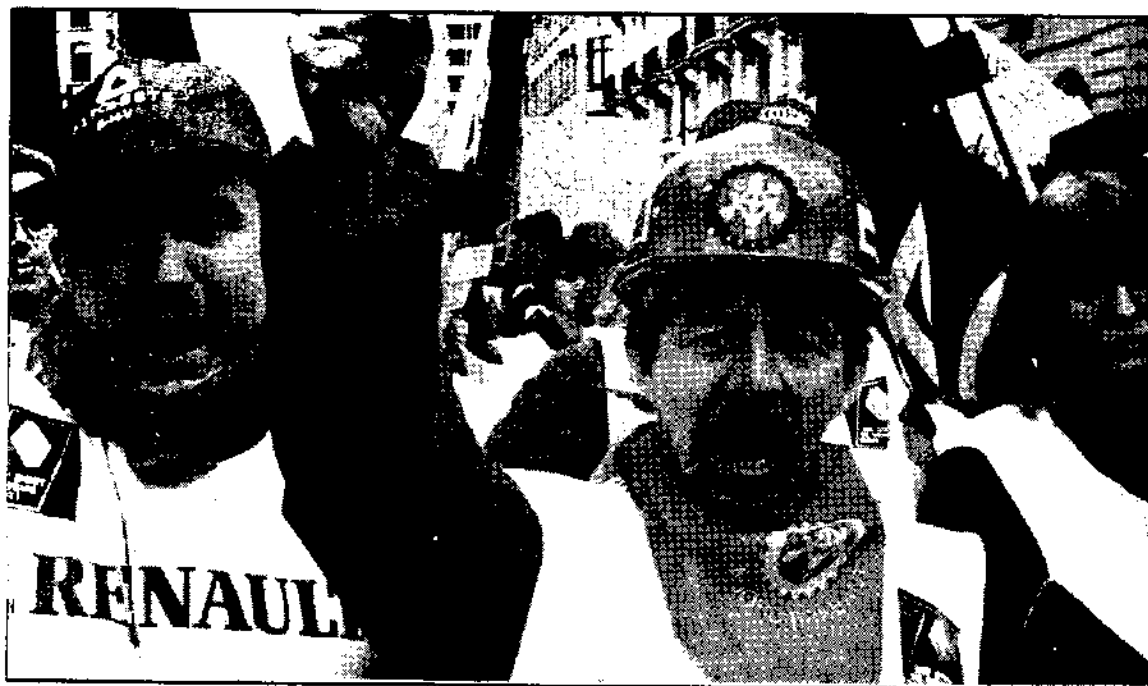


Maastricht Misery

post-war settlement has remained at the centre of its alliances. The ruling class also remains deeply divided over European integration, and this was a crucial factor in the catastrophic defeat of the Tories in the General Election.

The Conservative Party, once one of the most stable in Europe, is now in virtual ruins, with all the logic pointing towards a deep-going split. At best the majority of the party want Europe to be no more than a

'common market'. But some sectors continue to vacillate, with the nationalist Euro-sceptic right-wing totally rejecting the ERM and its implications for political union (thus setting themselves at odds with the wishes of the multinational corporations which have historically looked to the Tories as their Parliamentary voice).



A political vacuum on the left

In both Eastern and Western Europe there is a widespread sense of political malaise and a yearning for change. Despite the probably short-lived euphoria over the stunning victory of Tony Blair, New Labour offers workers no real alternative. On the contrary, they are presently perceived by bankers, by industrialists and by European governments as the best representatives of capital.

Similar political problems confront the workers throughout Europe: the main social democratic and ex-communist parties have offered little clear challenge to the drive towards EU economic and monetary union.

This bankruptcy of perspective on the left opens up a real danger. If the desire for change is not harnessed by a socialist alternative – an internationalist, revolutionary movement, then populist movements of the right will take advantage of the crisis. This could in the future be the extreme fascist right.

There are increasing frustrations with the status-quo across Europe in the context of this growing political vacuum.

On the one hand the traditional reformist workers' parties, which have repeatedly failed to deliver reforms in office or to defend their working class supporters when in opposition, have been through years of crisis (although as Blair's victory has shown, they have clearly not died or disappeared).

The failure of social democratic parties has reinforced and in turn rested upon the bankruptcy of the bureaucratic trade union leaderships, combined with the relative acquiescence over many years of the working class, which may be beginning to change.

On the other side we see a creeping crisis of bourgeois leadership and the morbid decay of late capitalist society, reflected in the growing gulf between the rich and the poor even in the capitalist heartlands, and the slow but steady disintegration of the social and material fabric of society. This latter process

This bankruptcy of perspective on the left opens up a real danger. If the desire for change is not harnessed by a socialist alternative – an internationalist, revolutionary movement, then populist movements of the right will take advantage of the crisis. This could in the future be the extreme fascist right.

Maastricht Misery

Theirs is a Europe that has opened the borders for the bankers, the speculators and bosses, but closed them for the workers, the immigrants and asylum-seekers, turning its fire inwards against social gains and democratic rights.

We are not against the principle of a single currency or a European federation – it's capitalism we are opposed to, whether its base is a nation-state or an international alliance.

underscores the corruption and fragmentation of traditional capitalist parties in Italy, France and other countries, especially Britain.

Unfortunately left alternatives are not the only choices on the menu: there is also right wing populism. In Western Europe today many of the once dominant parties, seen as corrupt and devoid of new ideas, unable to provide answers to pressing problems, are seeing their base of support being slowly eroded. Sections of the middle class and less class-conscious sections of the working class have looked to new populist leaders.

In Italy we have seen a period of government in which Silvio Berlusconi led a coalition including the neo-fascists). In France, the far-right National Front of Le Pen is gaining sway in important centres.

While strikes, demonstrations and youth agitation around democratic and environmental issues are the first signs of workers' resistance to the bourgeois offensive, the growth of ultra-right wing populists, nationalists and even open racists and anti-Semitic groups also reflect the crisis of bourgeois society.

Today Europe's bourgeoisie prefers the Blair option, but later it could be quite prepared to exploit other alternatives in order to divert the growing anger and frustration of the masses towards scapegoats declared responsible for all their problems.

As the long wave of recession deepens there is a danger that big capital may make a conscious turn to authoritarian populist leaders and toward developing the repression of a 'strong state' to stabilise its rule. If the working class fails to confront such developments and fight back, then in the shadow of populist leaders, fascist gangs could come together, creating the basis for fascist-type parties with a mass following.

Populist and potentially bonapartist leaders like Berlusconi are a political danger facing the workers' movement today; genuine fascist gangs like the BNP are building in their shadow.

For a socialist Europe of the peoples – East and West

The Europe we want is not the Europe supported by its heads of state when they signed the Maastricht Treaty.

Theirs is a Europe that has opened the borders for the bankers, the speculators and bosses, but closed them for the workers, the immigrants and asylum-seekers, turning its fire inwards against social gains and democratic rights.

We oppose their Europe of the banks and the multinationals. We reject their Europe of police harassment, of computerised "black lists"; we are against the exclusive Europe of the Schengen Treaty, which slams the door on what they call the "invasions" from Eastern Europe and the South [third world].

We are not against the principle of a single currency or a European federation – it's **capitalism** we are opposed to, whether its base is a nation-state or an international alliance. We are against a Europe of fat-cats, profiteering, exploitation and sleaze.

That's why *Socialist Outlook* is in favour of British withdrawal from the EU. For the same reason we are in favour of other states also withdrawing from the EU, and refusing to comply with reactionary EC laws or with the economic directives embodied in the Maastricht Treaty.

We stand for a Europe based on equality and solidarity, that is democratic, ecologically sustainable, anti-imperialist and anti-racist. We favour a Europe of the free association of peoples, open to the East and in solidarity with the South.

The United Socialist Europe we want is one which prioritises the needs of the working class against profit, promotes equality for women, fights racism and defends the environment. We want a real 'social Europe' – and that can only be a **socialist** Europe.

Maastricht Misery

Our alternative has nothing in common with the Euro-sceptic, capitalist dream of a Britain which is outside of the EU, but tied to a foreign policy hinged on the USA – a flea-bitten British lion clinging to a fading Atlantic Alliance.

On the contrary, *Socialist Outlook* wants a socialist Britain to be part of a socialist Europe linking east and west.

But we cannot just present a maximum programme. Today in opposition to Maastricht we call for action across frontiers, common campaigns that can show the way forward to a Europe of the workers and young people, not one exploited by capitalists and riven by divisions and inequalities.

In that way we can restore meaning to internationalism. The European bosses have discovered that **they** can work together on a European level – to attack the working class: the workers' movement must learn to think and act internationally if it is to fight back and win..

Europe-wide Campaigns and Internationalism

Socialists must turn towards setting in motion broad international campaigns that are necessary to get broad masses of working people into political action. There is no lack of examples, many of which are already under way at a national or embryonic European level:

- Against racism, immigration laws and for the right to vote for immigrants.
- For a 35-hour week with no cut in pay, looking toward a 30-hour week.
- Against the Maastricht ceiling on public expenditure. For a programme to rebuild the social infrastructure; hospitals, schools, the welfare state and integrated public transport systems and policies in defence of the environment.
- For the right to abortion, contraception and reproductive rights, bringing all European legislation into line with the most advanced gains.
- For immediate abolition of the third-world debt and a halt to arms sales and support for dictatorships and corrupt regimes, in particular in the "back yard" of the European imperialist powers – Africa, the Middle East, and Indonesia.
- For defence of political prisoners. We need a serious and thoroughgoing campaign for democratic and national rights for all the oppressed peoples in Europe. For the right of self-determination for all the dominated peoples, first of all for the Basque, Irish Corsican and Kurdish peoples.

This kind of programme must be translated into practical pan-European campaigns, based in the situation in each country, which challenge the implementation of national and EU policies and confront the institutions of the EU.

The European March for Jobs and Welfare Rights is a beacon of light in this respect. Such campaigns need to be built as broad united fronts, to include the widest possible spectrum of working class organisations while seeking to draw in the movements of the socially oppressed.

All this underlines the burning need for international organisation.

In the trade unions, socialists have to propose a Europe-wide alternative to the bosses' project. We are for workers' solidarity against the capitalist trusts and multinationals, and call for building direct links and joint struggles between workers across Europe and beyond.

We must expose all the links between the policies of the various European governments and the drive towards a European capitalist super-state.

We must build on the democratic sentiments of

Our alternative has nothing in common with the Euro-sceptic, capitalist dream of a Britain which is outside of the EU, but tied to a foreign policy hinged on the USA – a flea-bitten British lion clinging to a fading Atlantic Alliance.



In France, the Sans Papiers has become a mass movement of black people fighting state racism.

Maastricht Misery

the working class and show how the EU lacks any democratic legitimacy, and how in the future it will place social policy in the hands of an unelected European bank.

Reorganising the left in Europe:

As we have begun to see in the struggles that have already erupted, the independent mass action of the working class can confront and defeat the power of international capital and its governments.

Unfortunately most socialists and revolutionary organisations have emerged out of the past difficult decade weakened, and sometimes demoralised.

The old Communist Parties of Europe, shattered by the collapse of Stalinism in the ex-Soviet Union, have fragmented and transformed themselves into social democratic parties or small left reformist parties like Communist Refoundation (RC) in Italy.

On the other hand the socialist (social democratic) parties which in the recent past have been in government in continental Europe have one by one discredited themselves by launching huge attacks on the workers.

In Spain, France and Greece, as in Britain after 1979, they have been weakened by this, but not destroyed. As Blair's election victory shows, despite their betrayals these parties can retain the allegiance of the majority of the working class where they have been traditionally strong, primarily because there are still no mass left wing alternative parties to offer a way forward.

Filling this gap, and building across borders in capitalist Europe is still a difficult task. This can change – as the Euro-March for jobs has shown. The working class has the capacity to fight back, and in many countries is already fighting back.

This should give us confidence to rebuild and consolidate the socialist forces in Europe for the future.

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