

# Workers hit back at Haughey

**Before they were elected, the Fianna Fail government in the 26 counties promised to protect the health service. Today, three months later, they are facing massive opposition from workers throughout the service for their attempts to implement vicious cuts in health care. Doctors have imposed a nationwide indefinite strike affecting most hospitals and the Alliance of Health Service Unions have been waging a campaign of demonstrations, strikes and protests.**

70% of state aid to voluntary hospitals goes on wages. The Fianna Fail government accuses the previous Fine Gael-Labour coalition government of overspending by £55 million and want cuts which will cost at least 2,000 jobs this year and close 9 hospitals. It will be the first time in a decade that state funding for the health service has dropped below 7% of GNP. Ireland already has the second lowest spending per capita on health in the EEC. Unemployment in the country stood at 250,700 in May.

Resistance to the proposed cuts has been led by the Alliance of Health Service Unions, which includes the Local Government and Public Services Union (LGPSU) and the Federated Workers' Union of Ireland (FWUI). There have been protests since April, nurses' strikes and some opposition from Area Health Boards.

On 12 May over 5,000 workers from 14 hospitals in Cork marched through the centre of the city to protest at the health cuts. One union leader said that the health cutbacks had created an atmosphere of fear throughout the country not witnessed since the days of Cromwell!

One of the proposals most bitterly opposed is the introduction of fees charged to outpatients. These charges were introduced on May 18 despite opposition from the LGPSU which urged (but didn't instruct) its members to refuse to collect them. Many health workers refused to collect the charges and in some hospitals non-union and temporary staff were used to do the job. There were reports of patients being turned away

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**Haughey: under pressure**

because they did not have the £10 fee.

After the introduction of fees, hundreds of health workers demonstrated in Limerick on 18 May. Cork Health Board voted to refuse to make the cuts required and on 21 May 15,000 marchers demonstrated against them in Dublin. On the same day 2,500 health workers marched in Kilkenny and 1500 in Tullamone. Despite all this, the government is discussing further "rationalisation" and threatening widespread privatisation. The Health Minister, Dr.

Ruig O'Hanlin, insists that the government will not retreat from plans to severely cut spending on the health service in 1987. In addition they have announced plans to make more detailed and sweeping cuts in public expenditure generally.

Perhaps the most dramatic development was the decision by over half of Ireland's non-consultant hospital doctors to go on an indefinite strike from Saturday 6 June. The doctors, members of the Irish Medical Organisation, are pro-

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testing at a proposal to sack 200 doctors — without even consultation or negotiation — and against attacks on their pay and conditions. Emergency services were negotiated for some hospitals and provided by consultants at others. On the day the strike began the Mid-Western Health Board was told by the government that it was to make a further cut of £800,000 in services if it was to remain within the budget estimates.

In Cork, after union members refused to move patients as part of the 'rationalisation' the Gardai (police) were called in to do the job!

By 8 June routine operations and admissions had been stopped in most hospitals and they were relying on emergency services provided by consultants. At that stage the IMO were considering escalating the action because of the lack of response from the government and the militancy of its members at mass meetings. Finally on 13 June the dispute escalated into a nationwide strike with no exemptions.

The battle over the health cuts has had major repercussions in national politics. The two major opposition parties originally agreed to accept the government's budget because they themselves had also planned severe cuts. Public opposition has forced them to alter that and they (Fine Gael and the Progressive Democrats) have been critical of the methods employed by Fianna Fail.

In May there was serious dissent in the Fianna Fail parliamentary party. Some TDs (MPs) were forced into opposing specific cuts because of massive opposition from public, health workers and doctors in their areas.

Charles Haughey, the Prime Minister, faced the first threat to his government's stability. He began by sorting out his internal opposition to ensure that the cuts programme went through. His backbenchers were faced with a choice: vote for the cuts or be expelled from the parliamentary party. Later this instruction was extended to party members and local Health Boards and subsidiary bodies. So far it seems to have quelled the opposition within Fianna Fail.

Haughey knows that he must succeed in getting these cuts through if he has any hope of launching a wider programme of austerity and making the Irish working class pay for the severe economic crisis in the country.

Of the parties in the Dail only the Labour Party and the Workers Party have consistently opposed the cuts. The Labour Party blame Fine Gael and the Progressive Democrats as much as Fianna Fail. They say that it was this issue that forced them to leave the previous coalition government with Fine Gael. They have organised a national campaign against the cuts in consultation with the Irish Congress of Trade Unions.

Meanwhile the struggle against the cuts through direct action continues to involve traditionally non-militant unions. The Irish Nurses Organisation,

which has organised impressive strikes and demonstrations, is not an affiliate of the JCTU. The nursing profession in Ireland has a far higher status than in the UK. The doctors are pressing their organisation to step up the action and attempting to decide the future of their campaign through a series of mass meetings.

The strength of the resistance to this first round of cuts was clearly not expected. It will probably have an effect on future plans, the thrust will have to be the same but the methods may be

more cautious. It isn't a style which will suit Charles Haughey but the resistance so far will have to be built on and spread if it is to be effective. The outcome is still undecided as I write. Whatever the outcome, the resistance in Britain to Thatcher's plans for the health service can learn a great deal from the spectacular resistance which has dominated Charles Haughey's "first 100 days". Speak Irish to Mrs Thatcher! After 11 June it's probably the only language she will listen to!

Patrick Murphy

## South Africa: treason trial documents

# Free Moses Mayekiso!

**Moses Mayekiso, one of South Africa's leading black trade unionists, is on trial for treason. If found guilty, he could be hanged.**

Moses was recently elected general secretary of COSATU's newly formed giant metal union, the National Union of Metalworkers of South Africa (NUMSA). At the time of his detention he was general secretary of MAWU, one of the most openly socialist of South Africa's independent unions.

The charge against Moses and four others accused with him is that in attempting to organise street committees and democratic structures in the black township of Alexandra they were attempting to overthrow the state.

The state has launched an attack against the trade unions in an attempt to stop them being 'political'.

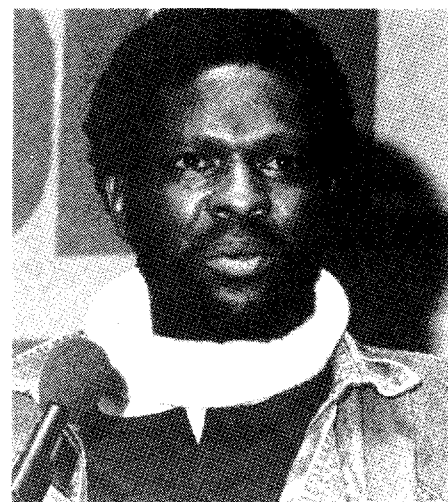
COSATU, the 750,000-strong trade union federation, has increasingly been at the forefront of the struggle against the racist state, as well as against the employers. All sections of the liberation movement have accepted the necessity of the working class's 'leading role', and in COSATU the working class has forged a weapon with which to make its 'leading role' a reality.

The massive township-based revolt that began in the autumn of 1984 has petered out under the impact of heavy repression, and because of a lack of clear direction. The unions, which began to organise in the 1970s and especially in the period running up to the recent 'unrest', have taken on increased importance in this situation.

The apartheid state needs urgently to decapitate the unions as it represses the township struggle. Thousands of unionists have been rounded up under the State of Emergency — but the unions have survived.

The government was forced to back down by a long rail strike it had provoked, believing that it would be easy to crush. But COSATU's offices have been attacked, and the drive against the unions continues.

The trial of Moses and his comrades is a significant milestone. The Alexandra Action Committee was a firm attempt to develop union-type democratic structures within a township struggle — stronger than the usual rather loose township organisation. So it is no accident that this Committee, and Moses in particular,



Moses Mayekiso

should face this attack.

Now the government is repeating in Alexandra what it did in Soweto after the revolt there eleven years ago: spending a fortune to develop it and buy off its militant population.

Solidarity with these working class leaders on trial is an urgent priority for the international labour movement. Workers' Liberty here reprints extracts from the State's indictment against them.

## Preamble to the indictment

**This shows that the main charges against Moses and the others are that they organised the township along democratic lines.**

\*Whereas the Republic of South Africa (hereinafter referred to as the State) is and was at all relevant times a sovereign State.

\*And whereas the accused at all relevant times owed allegiance to the State.

\*And whereas during or about the period 1985 to June 1986 and at or near Alexandra, in the district of Randburg, or elsewhere, the accused unlawfully and with hostile intent to coerce, overthrow, usurp or endanger the authority of the state and

\*with the intent to achieve the objects, or any of the objects set out in section 54(1) of Act No. 7 of 1982, and

\*with seditious intent to defy and to subvert the authority of the state, conspired and/or associated in a common

purpose with one another and/or with the organisations and with members and supporters of the organisations set out in Annexure A, and/or with any of them

- \*to seize control of the residential area of Alexandra and/or to render the area ungovernable by the State, by
- \*establishing so-called organs of people's power and/or of self-government and/or so-called popular organisational structures, and
- \*forming the Alexandra Action Committee (hereinafter referred to as the AAC) and by participating in the management and/or activities of the AAC, and/or
- \*promoting the aims and objectives of the AAC, to wit the aims and objectives set out hereinafter, or any of the said aims and objectives, and
- \*organising and uniting the residents of Alexandra into yard, block and street committees under the AAC;
- \*forming their own courts (hereinafter referred to as People's Courts);
- \*forming a group known as the Marshals or Comrades *inter alia* with the duties to investigate 'misbehaviour' by residents; discuss disciplinary measures; liaise with the block and street committees on heavy punishment; execute discipline; act as functionaries of the People's Courts; enforce and carry out the decisions and policies of the AAC and its committees; act as a people's army or an army of the comrades.
- \*launching a campaign against the South African Police Force and the South African Defence Force and members of the said forces; the Town Council of Alexandra and its councillors and employees; so-called collaborators.
- \*launching a rent boycott and a consumer boycott of the industries and businesses referred to in the annexures hereto and;
- \*attempting to coerce the State into meeting their demands and by making demands upon the state and
- \*changing the existing names of streets in Alexandra to MK, Steve Biko, Soviet, Mandela, ANC, Lusaka, Katrida, Mabhida, Slovo, Mbeki, Vincent, Sobukwe, Basooka, Oliver and Dos Santos streets...

## Popular organisational structures

**This is a leaflet which, it is alleged, was written by Moses.**

The suffering in this Township of ours has forced the people to form the people's organs of power. The workers have been oppressed by the big bosses, and at their homes they are oppressed by the same government. In the factories the workers have already formed their workers' organs of power like the trade unions. They elect their own shop stewards, they have their own leaders. They have their constituency and their leaders are democratically elected.

Here in Alexandra, the people's organs of power have been started. Unlike the other Townships, the lowest structure is the yard committee, the reason for this is that each yard in Alexandra has more than one family. Above the yard committee is the block committee. After the block, is the street committee which in turn there is the highest structure which is the AAC.

## Minutes of the Alexandra Residents General Meeting held at Freedom Park, 7th Avenue, Alexandra, 86/02/05.

The purpose of introducing street or avenue committees in Alexandra is to unite the people of Alexandra and to look at people's problems in order that they be solved. The struggle in Alexandra is backward, and therefore the street committee is a step towards conscientising and building unity amongst residents, to fight their problems. Further it is to encourage discipline in our society conscientising people of their struggle. To ensure mass control of the struggle and proper democracy.

The street committee is a common thing in other townships at the Cape, e.g. Queenstown, and this has helped to unite people. This structure has been discussed by some of the progressive organisations. Alexandra is moving very slowly and is backward in the struggle because of reluctant parents.

All these structures and committees shall not discriminate racially, ethnically but shall unite the Alexandra residents regardless of their beliefs, colour, age and religion.

**Yard Committee:** This committee will be the committee of the people in the yard. They could choose a committee and have their own general meetings and could make that general meeting a committee. They should choose their representatives to the Block Committees and elect their office bearers; general meeting weekly and when there's an urgent need.

**Duties:** to unite the people in the yard; to encourage comradeship/brotherhood and working together as one family of the people in the yard. To look to the welfare of the people in the yard; to promote peace and discipline in the yard; for people to help each other financially, physically, morally and otherwise; to defend each other when there is a need, against any enemy attacks; to look to the cleanliness — clean the yard of dirt and crime.

N.B. Any unsolved problem or a matter that involves residents in other yards should be referred to the Block Committee.

**Block Committee.** This committee comprises of resident reps from all yards in that block, making a committee. There shall be general meetings to discuss block matters. These meetings shall be once per fortnight and whenever the people need at the same day, time with other block committees, 6.00 p.m. The block shall elect four reps to the Street or Avenue Committee. The volunteers may attend the meetings. The block shall elect its own office-bearers.

**Duties:** To do all that is mentioned as the duties of the AYCO in a broader scale for the block; to tackle unsolved problems from the yard committees of that block; to discuss residents' problems, needs and requirements — family, inter-family, house to house hooliganism, crime, hazards, crisis unemployment, rent, etc.; to introduce harmonious relationships amongst the residents through discipline, working together; to promote family life, accom-

modation and food for all. To deal with matters mentioned at AYCO, ABCO and ASCO in a broadened way for the whole township.

**Street or Avenue Committee.** The committee will be composed of representatives elected from ABCOs. It shall hold its own general meetings and committee meetings. The general meeting shall be once per month and O/Bs once per fortnight. It shall elect its own office bearers and two representatives to the AAC.

**Duties:** To deal with matters not dealt with at ABCO and AYCO; to deal with matters referred to it by ABCO; to deal with all matters that affect the street people; street marshals are responsible to this committee; to deal with matters dealt with at AYCO and ASCO in a broader scale.

**Alexandra Action Committee**  
It shall be composed of two representatives elected from ASCOs and some appointed people by ASCO. The AAC shall meet once per month and urgently when there is a need. There shall be general meetings of the Community every quarter of the year and urgently when there is a need.

## Summary of the substantial facts.

**Accused (i.e. Moses Mayekiso)** held or expressed *inter alia* the following views:

- \*that the working class (also referred to as the proletariat), as the vanguard for liberation, should be in the centre of and in control of the struggle,

- \*that the working class, including the unemployed, the youth and other members of the community should be mobilised, organised and united against the capitalist system and the State,

- \*that the working class or its unions and the so-called progressive organisations should seize control of the means of production and of the residential areas,

- \*that the so-called capitalists must be forced into a situation where they are unable to exercise control ●

## Stalinism

# Gorbachev and the workers

**Some 5,000 delegates, supposedly representing 140 million Soviet workers, gathered in the Kremlin Palace of Congresses at 10 am on Tuesday 23 February for the opening of the 18th Congress of the ACCTU (All-Soviet Central Council of Trade Unions).**

It says much about this congress of a supposedly "socialist" "trade union" organisation that the most left-wing

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statement expressed at it was made by TUC General Secretary Norman Willis when he spoke out briefly in support of the Polish free trade union Solidarnosc.

Despite the treatment of the Congress by the Soviet media, it was not a significant event for the Soviet working class. The ACCTU, like its equivalents in other Stalinist states, is not a genuine trade union movement, but an appendage of the ruling state bureaucracy. It does not represent the workers' interests against the bureaucracy, but the bureaucracy's interests against the workers.

This was reflected in the composition of the platform at the congress when Soviet Communist Party General Secretary Gorbachev delivered his keynote address. It was not workers who were on the platform but the leading members of the Soviet government — including the head of the KGB secret police.

The rulers of the Soviet Union are confronted with an economy in crisis. In terms of technological innovation, it lags even further behind the West than the Politbureau's taste in clothing: their taste for '50s-style trilbies and raincoats merely reflects the backwardness of the Soviet economy as a whole.

A return to Stalinist levels of repression would be no solution. Even the longest working hours and worst rates of pay under threat of the severest penalties would not make up for the extent to which the Soviet economy lags behind the Western capitalist economies. Slave labour cannot compete with the micro-chip.

The answer of Gorbachev and his colleagues is "Perestroika" — the reorganisation, modernisation and reconstruction of the Soviet economy. In an attempt to open the economy up to productivity-raising innovations, the screws of repression have been slightly released.

The Soviet government's "peace offensive" is merely a different aspect of the same strategy. However much arms spending represents a burden for leading capitalist economies, it is an even greater burden for the stagnant Soviet economy. A truce in the arms race would allow the switching of financial resources from arms to modernisation of the economy.

The way in which the whole strategy has been developed proves that it has nothing to do with genuine democratisation. The initial decisions were made at the April 1985 Plenum of the CPSU Central Committee. The subsequent CPSU Congress rubber-stamped these decisions. The strategy was reviewed and updated at the January 1987 Plenum and the subsequent ACCTU Congress was a rubber stamp like the CPSU Congress of a year earlier. The real decision-making powers remain vested in the hands of the inner circle of the leadership of the CPSU.

ACCTU President Shalayev stressed the commitment of the "trade unions" to "increase their contribution to the ac-

celeration of the socio-economic development of the country, and to develop the initiative and creativity of the workers," and, like a number of other speakers, dwelt upon ways in which "socialist competition" could be improved in order to raise productivity, as one example of this commitment.

Genuine working class liberation in the Soviet Union will not be achieved by the ACCTU nor by Gorbachev's policy

of Perestroika, but by the struggles of the working class itself. If workers in the West allow their unions to align themselves with the ACCTU, then they will find themselves on the wrong side of the barricades in the fight for the creation of workers' democracies in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union. ●

Stan Crooke

### Union mergers

## The new super unions

**A major re-shaping of the trade union movement in Britain is presently taking place, comparable in its scale and implications, to the formation of the great industrial unions of the 1920s, and the merger wave of the late 1960s.**

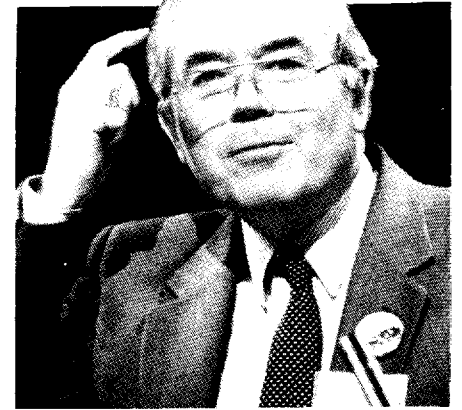
Membership of the TUC-affiliated unions is down from a 1979 peak of over 13 million to just over nine million. Over £100 million in annual income from membership dues has been lost since 1979. Failing to mobilise an effective industrial counter-attack, the unions have moved increasingly into the field of services — cheap holidays, insurance discounts, mortgages, etc., etc. — in their efforts to attract members, but this in turn has massively increased administration costs, which cannot be offset by increased contributions because of competition for members. So, for the bureaucrats, the only answer is rationalisation and economies of scale. Hence the present drive towards mergers.

Socialists are generally in favour of union mergers.

But things are not always as simple as that in practice.

The question that has to be asked in each case is, will the benefits of the merger (breaking down sectional divisions) outweigh the possible disadvantages (increased bureaucracy, less rank and file control) as far as the ordinary members are concerned?

The ASTMS conference in May was dominated by discussion of the proposed merger with TASS, which would create a 650,000-strong union, the third or fourth largest in the TUC. The delegates gave an excellent example to all rank and file trade unionists, in their approach to the question: overwhelmingly, they supported the merger, seeing that it would massively strengthen the position of both unions' members throughout industry. But they did not let their enthusiasm for the move blind them to possible risks to their democratic rights within the new organisation. In particular ASTMS members are anxious to retain their branch-based structure against TASS's more bureaucratic "divisional" system, which presently gives the 'Broad Left' (i.e. Stalinist) leadership around Ken Gill complete domination of TASS. The two unions' respective national conferences reflect their different structures with TASS having just 135 divisional delegates at their 1987 conference, while



### King rat

ASTMS had almost 1,000 branch delegates.

ASTMS members voted overwhelmingly to retain the branch-based conference, and to protect the rights of the rank and file with regard to distribution of dues and delegates to Labour Party and TUC Conferences. They also demanded elected representatives to TUC general council, and instructed the NEC to reach agreement with TASS on that basis. Perhaps most important of all, the delegates overturned the recommendation of the NEC and called for a special rules conference involving 1200 delegates from each union within six months of the merger. The NEC had reached an agreement with TASS for a much smaller conference.

Thus ASTMS members look set to achieve a successful merger, and to enhance the democratic rights of the rank and file within both unions.

In stark contrast to this, the proposed AEU/EETPU merger does not augur well for either the members directly affected, or for trade unionism as a whole. The proposal has been kicked around by the bureaucrats of both unions since the mid-1970s, but has recently been given fresh impetus due to the break-up of the AEU/TASS amalgamation and the election of Bill Jordan (who makes no secret of his liking for the EETPU) as the engineers' president last year. The AEU is in serious financial difficulty (it recently announced extensive redundancies and a wage freeze for its staff and full-time officials and is anxious to regain access to white collar workers and technicians denied to it since the departure of TASS. A major obstacle to the merger is the fact that the AEU elects its officials while the EETPU appoints. But Jordan has already suggested in the course of informal talks with APEX,

UCATT and the EETPU that this and other "problems" posed by the AEU's relatively democratic constitution can be circumvented by drawing up a rulebook from scratch for a new union.

But the danger posed by an AEU/EETPU lash-up goes deeper: paradoxically, a merger between these two unions (plus, perhaps one or two of the smaller right-wing managerial unions like the Institution of Professional Civil Servants) could well prove to be the catalyst for an historic split in the ranks of the British trade union movement. Despite successfully defying the TUC general council and Congress over ballot money, Wapping and single union/no strike deals, the EETPU remains largely isolated within the TUC, shunned even by the mainstream right "New Realists". General Secretary Eric Hammond now makes little secret of his willingness to contemplate life outside the TUC.

Politically, it could well align with the Alliance, and EETPU press officer John Grant has already stood as an SDP candidate in the general election.

Already, Hammond has made his intentions clear over the issue of single union/no strike deals: the EETPU's willingness to offer companies a comprehensive package which gives the union sole bargaining rights in return for an agreement not to strike, has brought the electricians into conflict with NUPE, the TGWU, and — in particular — the GMBATU. John Edmonds, the mainstream-right general secretary of the General and Municipal has put forward proposals (supported by NUPE and TGWU) for September's TUC Congress that would strictly limit the EETPU's ability to sign such deals. Hammond's response was summed up in an article he wrote in the May edition of the union's journal: "I must warn that these proposals imply a restrictive practice of considerable magnitude and one which is fundamentally against the public interest. If these unions wield their big block votes at this year's TUC conference, it could lead to another critical situation over our continued TUC membership."

Hammond has now presented a provocative counter-proposal that would turn the TUC into a single national union with affiliated unions becoming, in effect, branches. Such a structure would, however, be a far cry from the Wobblies' objective of "One Big Union" to maximise working class power and militancy.

Hammond's plan would allow "free movement of members", and be a charter for "beauty contests" between unions, in which they compete to present the most moderate image to employers in exchange for sole bargaining rights. Hammond surely realises that such a proposal is unacceptable even to right-wingers like John Edmonds. It is not, in fact, a serious proposal, so much as a deliberate provocation designed to take the EETPU one step nearer walking out of the TUC altogether. If Hammond could be sure of taking the AEU with him, he would almost certainly split after September's TUC Congress. So for AEU members, the reasons for opposing any moves towards a merger with the

EETPU are twofold: to defend their democratic structures, the District Committees and elected officials, and also to prevent (or, at least, minimise) a split in the trade union movement as a whole.

For the beleaguered left in the EETPU the hard fight against the business-unionism and scabbing of Hammond and his cohorts goes on. A campaign to keep the union within the TUC could provide the left (mainly organised around the journal Flashlight) with an important opportunity to break out of its isolation, and group new forces around itself, in defence of basic trade union principles.

More mergers are certain to take place in the near future. The APEX conference in June voted by a large majority to proceed with negotiations with the GMBATU, and the latter is almost certain to respond positively. Although this would produce a new bloc on the right of the TUC, there is no reason in principle for socialists to oppose it, while of course insisting upon maximum democracy and accountability in the merger negotiations, and in any new union that results from them ●

Jim Denham

## Malta



The right triumphant

# Labour falls

**Nearly all the population of this small archipelago situated in the centre of the Mediterranean turned out to vote in the general elections on 9 May. The elections had been billed as "crucial" and "decisive" in the bourgeois press, both locally and abroad. But in fact there were few surprises.**

The Nationalist Party — which is of Christian Democrat inspiration and affiliation — won the majority of votes — but only narrowly. The share of the vote going to each of the two main parties was almost the same as in the 1981 election.

The Malta Labour Party, the national section of the "Socialist International", won 34 seats with 48.8% of first preference votes under Malta's single-transferable-vote system, down 0.2% on the 1981 election. The Nationalist Party's vote fell by an insignificant 0.01% to 50.91%. But the electoral boundaries favour Labour and the Nationalist Party obtained a mere 31 seats. The Nationalists were saved by the constitutional amendment passed earlier this year according to which the party which pools an absolute majority of the valid first preference votes cast is assured of a majority of seats in parliament. The Nationalists were

granted an additional four seats to bring their total to 35.

The tribal nature of Maltese politics can perhaps be evidenced by the meagre harvest of votes reaped by the two minor parties which were contesting the elections for the first time. The Democratic Party, which although unaffiliated with any international political grouping, espouses Thatcherite economic policies, obtained a mere 0.16% of the first preference votes cast; the "Communist" party, which is a Stalinist party modelled on the present-day CPSU, polled even less. Indeed, it obtained a derisory 0.5%.

Wherein lies the real significance of these results? Not in the policies of the new government which are likely to be little different in substance from those of its predecessor. Certainly there will be some changes: moves to join the EEC; greater economic links with Western countries; improved Church-State relations; introduction of local government; and the removal of most import controls. But the real significance of the election result is to be found in the reasons for Labour's electoral defeat. There can be no doubt that Labour's failure to address the needs of the working people and to work for the overthrow of capitalism played an important role in ensuring its return to the opposition benches.

Shortly after Labour was elected into office way back in 1971, it did manage to carry out some important reforms. It nationalised some key sectors of the Maltese economy; it introduced a number of new social services and improved existing ones. But Labour's progressive degeneration was absolutely inevitable in the absence of any left-wing perspective other than the thoroughly reformist one of "compelling" the capitalist system to hand out a few more crumbs to keep the working class in line. This became evident after Labour's re-election in 1976.

During its second legislature, Labour brought the General Workers Union, Malta's major trade union, completely under its control and suppressed industrial action by other trade unions. It did not hesitate to resort to such reactionary measures as the lock-outs and suspensions of striking workers. Labour refused to tolerate any hint of internal dissent and expelled the members of a would-be Marxist pressure group within it. Its only positive achievement during this second legislature was the withdrawal of British troops from Malta on 31 March 1979.

Labour failed to heed the warning of the 1981 December general elections when it was re-elected only because of the way in which the boundaries of the electoral districts had been drawn. In that election the Nationalist Party won a majority of the votes by cynically exploiting the justifiable disappointment of many Labour supporters with their party's record in office.

During its third legislature, Labour

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continued on its merry march rightwards. It slapped a seemingly interminable freeze on wages and reintroduced streaming — with a vengeance! — in the government educational sector. Unemployment continued to rise during this legislature, decreasing somewhat only as the general elections approached and Labour desperately tried to salvage some credibility by offering government jobs to the unemployed.

Undoubtedly many who voted Nationalist, especially those with no experience of past Nationalist misrule, sincerely believe that the new government will live up to its electoral slogan: "Work, Justice and Liberty". But these laudable aims are impossible to fulfil within the framework of Maltese capitalist society. The task of revolutionary Marxists in Malta in the years to come is to explain to disillusioned workers who will experience ferocious attacks, the complete unattainability of "Work, Justice and Liberty" under capitalism ●

From a correspondent in Malta

### Australia

# Hawke's third term?

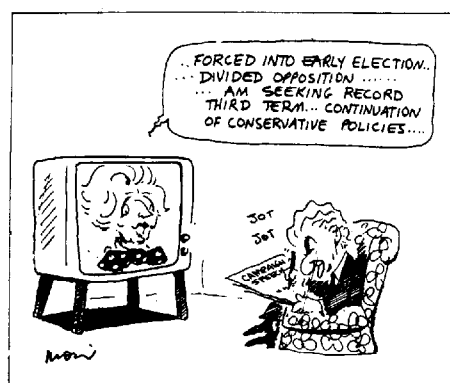
**Australia goes to the polls on 11 July, with the Labor Party seeking a third term of office. Labor leader Bob Hawke's line is that the Labor government is best for business and can work best with the unions. And he has even got the backing for this from three of Australia's leading capitalists, Alan Bond, Robert Holmes a Court, and Kerry Packer.**

The election was called because Hawke saw a chance after the break-up of the 38 year old coalition between Australia's main right-wing parties, the Liberals and the National Party. Both Libs and Nationals are in internal disarray, but both are pushing a hard right-wing line, accusing Labor of pandering to trade union power.

Labor is ahead in the opinion polls, and should win with the help of the majority of working class votes. But most workers will vote Labor with mixed feelings. Labor has moved rapidly to the right since winning office in 1983, and has attacked working class living standards substantially.

Now Hawke has started the election campaign by sacking Labor's advertising agency and replacing it with right-winger John Singleton.

The media have had a great time replaying Singleton's 1974 election ads with the old Estonian woman saying that Labor were disguised communists, and another with Singleton saying that socialists were lazy bums. Now he's tel-



ing us that the worst times are over and that we should work with Labor: we've come this far, and why throw it away now?

The left is disoriented. The Australian Socialist Workers' Party (like Socialist Action in Britain, but more Stalinist) says that people should vote only for protest candidates. The SWP may stand candidates itself in a few seats. Only four years ago they were proposing 'a Labor government with socialist policies'. The Hartley group, a Stalinist-oriented splinter from the Labor party in Victoria, will give first preferences (Australia has a transferable-vote system) to the small Nuclear Disarmament Party. Most of the Trotskyist groups are conspicuous by their silence.

The monthly *Socialist Fight* is arguing for a campaign for working class politics within the Labor campaign. It explains:

"The campaign should explain the problems of Laborism and attempt to gather support from those who see the need to try to change the labour movement. In this context we should call for a vote for Labor, to be accompanied by a call for Labor to break from its capitalist policies, and by a commitment from participants to organise against anti-working class policies of any government.

"To say that now is the time to campaign for the unions to break from the ALP is to open the question, is now the time to build breakaway revolutionary trade unions?"

"Organisational counterposition to the ALP is also self-isolation from trade union politics. Clearly there is no political development in the trade union movement which suggests that a decisive battle with the reformist officials is on the cards."

### The left and Labor

A great many left-wingers have become disillusioned with Labor in recent years. Many have left the Labor party. When the Hawke government legislated to smash the militant Builders' Labourers' Federation, only one Labor member of the federal parliament, George Georges, voted against. Now he has simply given up and quit the Labor party.

There is talk of creating "a new left-wing party" — a project supported by the SWP and by the ('Euro-) Communist Party of Australia. But *Socialist Fight* reckons that such moves will not produce much, and are an evasion of the central job of building a solid left wing

in the unions and ALP. "A break with Labor is not necessarily positive, and can be simple disillusion".

The fact has to be faced that Hawke and Keating have been able to do what they have done because of the unflinching support they have had from the leaders of Australia's trade unions. The job of changing those unions from within cannot be dodged.

Australia was ruled by the Liberal-National coalition from 1949 to 1972. Labor won in 1972 as a modernising reform party, in a parallel with Harold Wilson's Labour election victory in Britain in 1964. Australian Labor, under Gough Whitlam, made rather more reforms than Wilson. Whitlam, like Wilson, ended up turning on the working class but not harshly enough for the ruling class: the Labor government was sacked in 1975 in a legal coup by the Governor-General, the Queen's representative in Australia.

Labor returned to office in 1983 under Bob Hawke, a former leader of the Australian TUC. For two years the Australian economy did well, riding on the wave of a world economic recovery. Hawke gave the credit to the 'Accord', an Australian version of the British Social Contract, which limited wage rises.

But in 1986 the decline in world prices of raw materials — including Australia's main exports — brought balance-of-payments and foreign-debt problems. The Labor government has cut public spending sharply, and embarked on a semi-Thatcherite programme of 'deregulating' Australia's economy and dismantling its heavy import controls.

Liberal leader John Howard is an ultra-Thatcherite, closely linked to a 'New Right' group of union-busting bosses. But he does not go far enough for Joh Bjelke-Petersen, the National Party Premier of Queensland, who has been the motor force for the break-up of the Lib/Nat coalition.

Bjelke-Petersen has brought in a law in Queensland making strikes illegal unless every striker has given seven days' notice to the employer, the government, and every person who may be affected by the strike! (The federal Labor government wants to bring in a law restricting strikes more mildly which will override the Queensland law). Street demonstrations are already outlawed in Queensland. Not only is homosexuality illegal, the law forbids bar owners to serve 'perverts'. The penalty for possessing illegal drugs is life imprisonment.

Bjelke-Petersen has considerable backing from right-wing Queensland capitalists, who pledged A\$25 million to help him launch himself into federal politics. He preaches a right-wing populism, with the same hostility to the cosmopolitan south coast of Australia as a South-Western US right-winger like Barry Goldwater had to the East Coast of the USA.

So Australia's workers face hard times. But the Australian labour movement is still strong, and may soon begin to stir from the traditional easy-going attitudes bred by decades of relatively secure high wages ●

Janet Burstall and Tony Brown