INCREASINGLY, "Europe" determines what happens within the member states of the European Union. More and more, what "Europe" decides happens, especially where a second rate power like the UK is concerned. National parliaments are overshadowed. Democratic rights which in countries like Holland, Britain and France took centuries of popular struggle to win have in this way been increasingly nullified.

Now, socialists are for European unity, even under the bourgeoisie. The call for a United States of Europe was for long the cry of the left, not of the right. Undesirable things such as Maastricht notwithstanding, European unity is much better than the older Europe of competing and sometimes warring nations. The basis exists now as never before for working-class unity all across Europe and the basis too for a working-class struggle to create a socialist United States of Europe.

Europe today is under bureaucratic rule because it was united by the bourgeoisie and not by the working class. The development of Europe-wide democratic institutions lags far behind the development of European unity. To put this in perspective and know what needs to be done, we must cast a glance back over the history that shaped the European Union.

FROM the Pyrenees, on the borders of the Iberian peninsula, north to the borders of Sweden and east as far as Poland, with Switzerland as an island in the middle, Hitler had united most of Europe by 1940.

It was a Europe of peoples united by chains rather than bands of international solidarity, a Europe of enslaved peoples forced together in the maw of German imperialism, by way of conquest, not a Europe of free nations that had voluntarily come together in a United States of Europe.

Yet — and fifty years later there can be no doubt of it — that European unification, even under Hitler, was a distorted expression of a long-felt historical necessity. Europe needed unity because the existing big nation states were too small for the enormous economic dynamic which had developed within them. In the leading place was Germany.

The Anglo-American invaders of Europe in 1944-5 came to break German hegemony and to break down the walls of the Nazi prison-house of nations which Europe had become. All across Europe the invaders were supported by uprisings of peoples seeking national self-determination — French, Belgians, Italians, Poles, Czechs. After Germany was beaten and overrun, the peoples of Europe — outside of Stalin's new East and Central European empire — reverted to independent nation-states.

Indeed, one consequence of Hitler's brutal German-imperialist attempt to over-

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ride the peoples was a new upsurge of nationalism and chauvinism all across Europe, especially in the East, where ethnic Germans were its main victims. Germans to the number of perhaps thirteen million were driven out of East Prussia and Czechoslovakia and other areas where Germans had lived for many hundreds of years.

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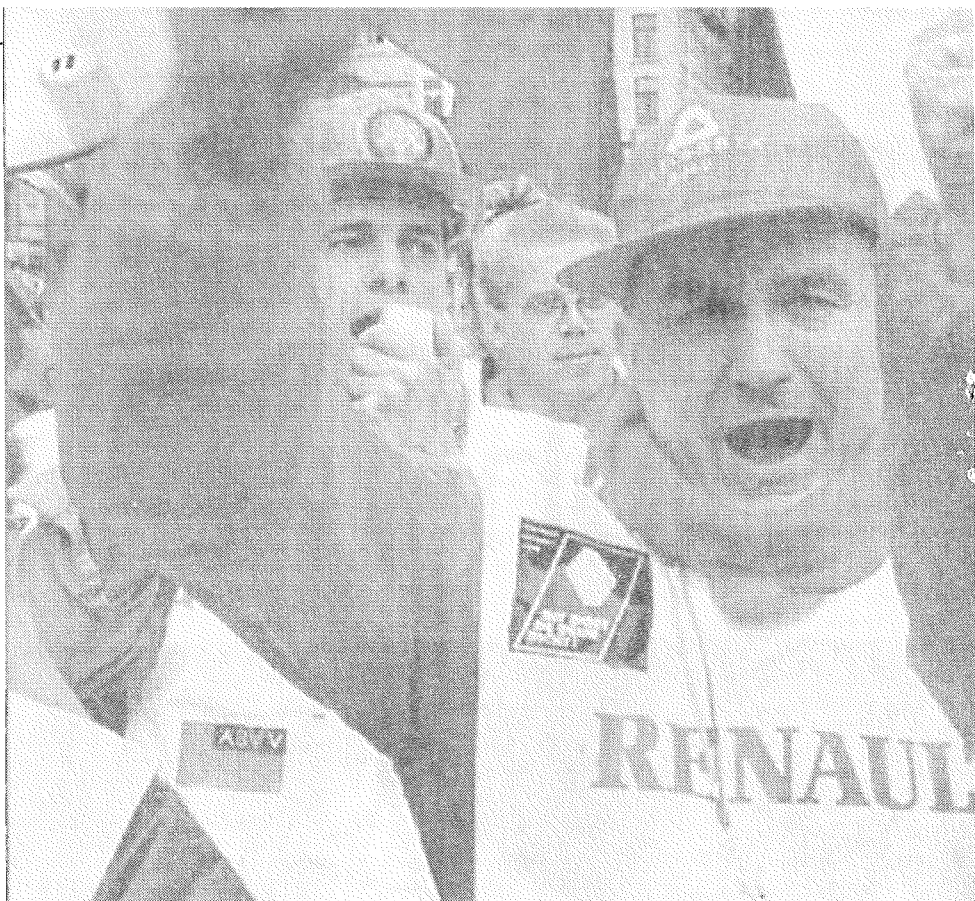
And yet, though much of Europe was economically in ruins. European unity was still economically, politically and militarily necessary. Political and military unity was made very urgent because it was likely that soon there would be war with Russia, whose vast army could in the mid '40s have advanced quickly from the centre to the

Western end of Europe.

Politically, however, formal unity was impossible, less possible than even before Hitler's "unification". An attempt in the late 1940s to create a single West European army proved still-born.

Yet unity could not be postponed. Now the European bourgeoisie drew on the experience of German history, where the dozens of big and little German states had been drawn together inside a customs union, the Zollverein, from 1833, and the basis laid for the unification of most of Germany under Prussian predominance in 1871.

FIRST, they created the Iron and Steel Community (1951), and then the Common Market (Treaty of Rome, 1957-8). This was movement towards union by way of bypassing insoluble political questions such as the recently re-won and therefore sacrosanct sovereignties of the various states and concentrating on economic knitting-together of the independent states. It was a bit like knocking down the internal walls in

socialist answer

kers unite! By Annie O'Keeffe

a row of houses, making them into one entity while preserving the facade.

Over time the economic barriers came down, and the original six countries of the Common Market achieved, despite the separate sovereign statehoods dividing them, a level of economic integration in some ways more intense than that achieved within the USA.

And, over time, a ramshackle growth of Europe-wide political and economic institutions grew up alongside and on top of the institutions of the nation-states. These institutions bear all the marks of their origins.

This Europe, which is at its core economically united, still resembles a political shanty-town. It is something thrown together higgledy-piggledy. It is neither rational nor properly and directly democratic.

There is now a European Parliament, which, though it increased its powers not so long ago, remains a feeble shadow of what a sovereign parliament should be. It does not yet effectively control the civil servants or the Council of Ministers. Relations between

the component states and the EU are disablingly ill-defined.

In short, much that the nationalist and other critics of the EU say against it is true. That is why *Workers' Liberty*, which believes in European unity, backed the call for a referendum on Maastricht: support for European unity does not have to imply back-

> "Campaigning for a constitutional Parliament, the left across Europe could undercut the rightists and the chauvinists."

ing what the dominant capitalists and their servants do, or the way that they do it.

European unity is as necessary now as it was in 1914 when Germany launched its first ill-fated attempt to unite Europe under its heel — and socialists such as Leon Trotsky raised the call for a United States of Europe. The anti-EU nationalists and chau-

vinists, even when they raise valid criticisms of the EU, have nothing to offer instead of "Europe", this imperfect, capitalist, and not yet democratic, West European unity. The alternative? Wars of the sort that two times in the first half of the 20th century brought Europe to ruin and devastation and turned it into a vast abattoir.

The only progressive way ahead lies in democratising Europe, not in a vain and reactionary attempt to scramble it back into its national components. That is why socialists must advocate the creation of a fully democratic European parliament, with full powers, and why British socialists must unite with European socialists to win it.

But how will such a parliament be achieved? By piecemeal evolution? That is how the European Union has developed and develops. It is simply not adequate. It is slow, it is uncertain; where the mass of the people are concerned, it is blind. It leaves both power and initiative in the hands of bureaucrats.

When great democratic states — and that is now what the European Union is — have been in the making, a Constituent Assembly or Parliament has been called to work out constitutional arrangements for the new state. That is what the USA did over 200 years ago; what revolutionary France did 200 years ago; what England did at the dawn of Parliamentary sovereignty, 300 years ago.

It is what Europe should do now. The European Union needs a Constituent Assembly.

A European Parliament should be elected to work out a constitutional framework for the United States of Europe. In that way the boundaries between the present national parliaments and the future sovereign European parliament, and similar perplexing questions, can be democratically worked out.

Campaigning for such a "constitutional Parliament", the labour movement and left across Europe could undercut the rightists and the chauvinists who make legitimate criticisms of the presently chaotic European political structures the basis for a reactionary attack on European unity.

Unfortunately it is not only the chauvinist right who oppose European unity. People on the left, too, oppose European unity under cover of just criticism of what exists now. The serious pro-European left must both take on board their legitimate criticisms, and disarm them.

European unity is better than any other capitalist alternative; and European unity is a prerequisite for European socialism. By campaigning for a Constituent Assembly we can point the way forwards towards a democratic Europe, and towards the Socialist United States of Europe.

Europe needs a European Constituent Assembly!