

Workers power

Socialism, Internationalism, Revolution

British Section of the League for a Revolutionary Communist International

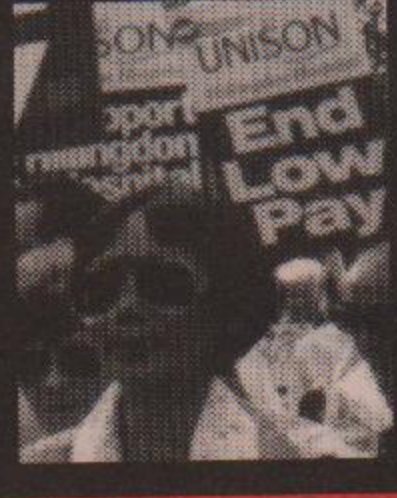
No 203 September 1996 ★ 50p

LOBBY THE TUC
Fight for a national
minimum wage!

TUC Congress, Blackpool,
Monday 9 September 11am
See inside for details



**On the
barricades
in Derry** pages 8,9 & 10



**Hillingdon
strikers
defiant** page 5



**Australia:
parliament
stormed** page 12

Tories—the real benefit cheats

Housing benefit change will throw under-25s onto the streets

£3.2 BILLION BENEFIT fraud—you won't be seeing that on any billboards or tabloid headlines. Because it's the amount of benefit that remains *unclaimed* each year, according to the Child Poverty Action Group, while millions of people live in poverty.

Meanwhile the new Job Seeker's Allowance, which starts in October, will mean an instant dole cut for those claiming benefits.

If you're on unemployment benefit, your income will go down to just £47.90 a week. Young unemployed people will suffer even more. Overnight

their dole will go down by £10 to just £37.90.

Meanwhile dole offices will be able to force claimants into low paid jobs—if they refuse their dole will be cut off altogether.

The Tories have axed the only national helpline for claimants. At the same time, to cover up the scale of the rip-off, the Tories are spending a fortune on a poster campaign calling on people to ring a new phone line with details of "benefit fraud".

The real benefit fraudsters are the Tories: they are robbing the poorest people in society to prepare for tax handouts to their

own rich friends.

Now the Tories have put Housing Benefit in the firing line. Already there are 600,000 people who don't claim the Housing Benefit that they are entitled to for their rent.

But the Tories are bringing in changes that will drastically cut the amount paid out.

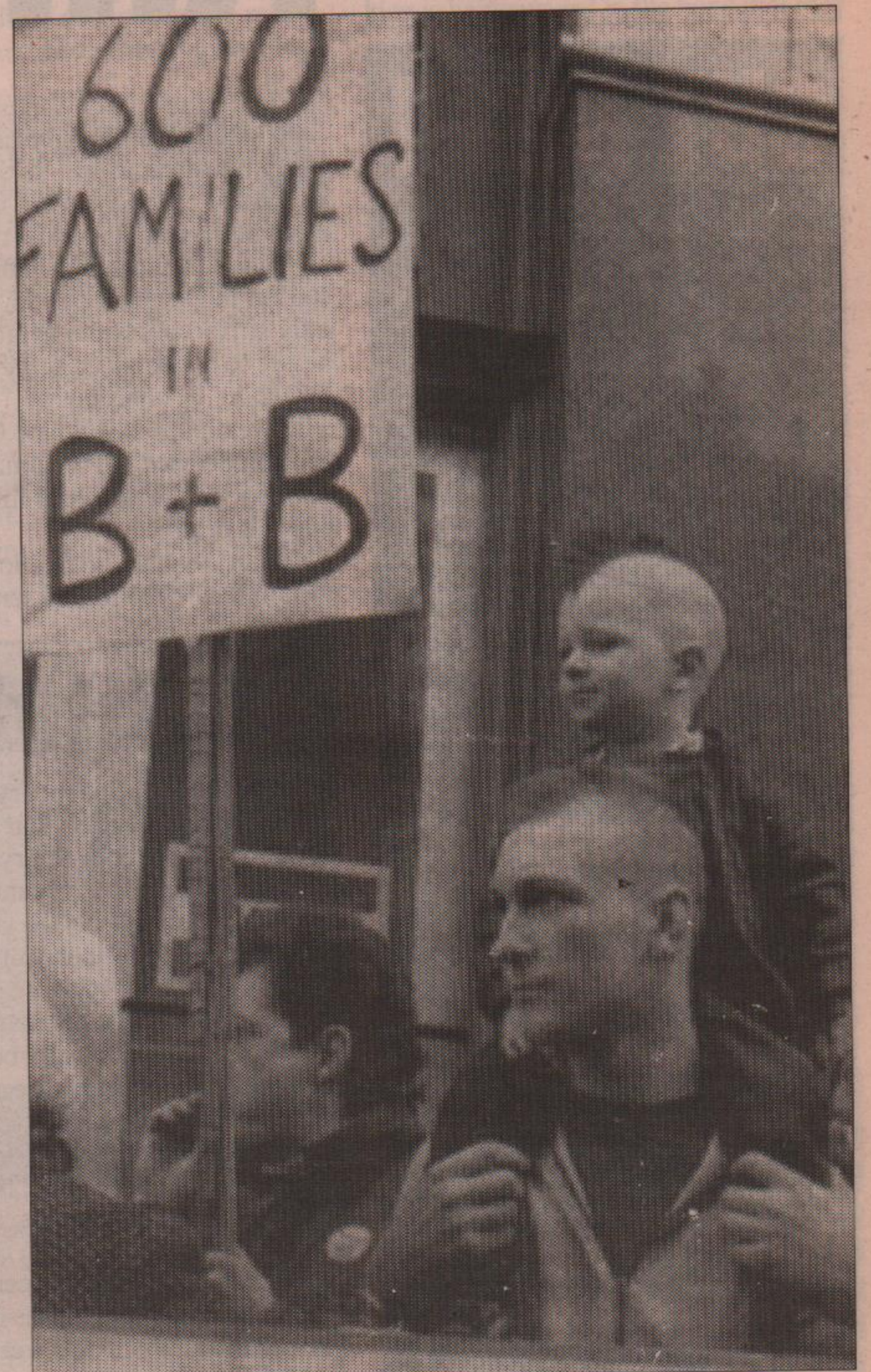
A new ceiling is being introduced. If you're under 25 your benefit will only cover rents based on the average for bedsits and shared accommodation in your area.

This will lead to mass evictions of young unemployed people, forcing them into hostels or

onto the streets. Of 1,300 homeless people staying at the Centrepoint emergency accommodation in central London, a staggering 40% of them are under 18. That number will grow.

We need a mass campaign to scrap the JSA. We need to mobilise the unemployed to fight back against the indignities being heaped upon them.

We should demand the Labour leadership pledges now to reverse the benefit cuts and make the rich pay for a universal benefit system that can meet the needs of all those thrown out of work by the inhumanity of the profit system. ■



Scrap the Job Seekers Allowance!

Activists Diary

Hillingdon Hospital Strike

Vigil outside Davis Service Group head office, 4 Grosvenor Square, Mon 2 to Fri 6 September, 10 am-2 pm every day.
Mass vigil on Fri 6 September, bring union branch banners.

Picket of HSS Hire shops, Sat 7 Sept, 10am-12 noon

Phone CFDU on 0171 477 2459 for details of an HSS Hire shop near you.

1st October

Demonstration on the first anniversary of the dispute, details from CFDU.

Job Seekers' Allowance

Sat 7 September: Smash the JSA! West London demonstration - assemble Shepherd's Bush Green, 12 noon.

Minimum Wage

Mon 9 September - Lobby of TUC for a £4.26 an hour minimum wage. Assemble North Pier, Blackpool, 11 am. Rally at 2 pm.

Liverpool Dockers

Sat 28 September - March on first anniversary of the dispute, assemble Myrtle Parade, Liverpool, 12 noon.

Revolutionary History

Summer 96 Issue: *Essays on revolutionary Marxism in Britain and Ireland 1950s - 1960s*. Price £5.95 from Socialist Platform BCM 7646 London WC1N 3XX

Press furore targets women's right to choose

Free abortion on demand!

BY DIN WONG

DURING THE summer the selective abortion of a twin and the Mandy Allwood case prompted the "pro-life" lobby to launch an attack on the 1967 Abortion Act.

Having been unsuccessful in several previous challenges in Parliament, the Society for the Protection of the Unborn Child (SPUC) and LIFE are attempting to turn attention away from the pro/anti-choice arguments and to focus on issues they feel the population (and MPs) have more "ethical" doubts about.

Whilst selective termination of an abnormal foetus in a multiple pregnancy and multifetal pregnancy reduction have been performed since 1978, the present controversy is around the question of whether it is morally acceptable to reduce healthy twins to a singleton.

Faith

The law allows abortions up to 24 weeks but requires that "two registered medical practitioners are of the opinion, formed in good faith, that the continuance of the pregnancy would involve risk to the life of the pregnant woman, or of injury to the physical or mental health of the pregnant woman, or any existing children of her family is greater than if the pregnancy were terminated. In determining whether the continuance of a pregnancy would involve such risk of injury to health,

account may be taken of the pregnant woman's actual or reasonably foreseeable environment."

As it stands, the law permitted doctors to abort one of the healthy twins of the 28-year-old woman, Miss B, in the 16th week of her pregnancy because they believed, in good faith, that the woman involved couldn't cope with twins and that continuing the pregnancy would have posed greater physical and mental risks to her and her existing child.

Indeed, the British Medical Association agreed that there are no new ethical issues involved in this case, and that it would be illogical to deny a woman the reduction of two fetuses to one when it was legal to terminate the whole pregnancy.

SPUC and LIFE, on the other hand, have revealed their true colours - religious bigotry, and a callous lack of concern for life. Their description of themselves as "pro-life" is a sick inversion of their real goals.

Concern

Their concern over selective abortion is totally hypocritical. They are opposed to any form of contraception or fertility treatment; they have never campaigned against botched back street abortions, only against safe and legal

ones; their offer of £80,000 to bribe Miss B to keep both twins shows their utter contempt for all other women in "straitened circumstances".

Their court injunction to stop the abortion going ahead shows their willingness to exploit a woman's private life for publicity; their exhortation to Mandy Allwood to keep all her eight foetuses shows their complete disregard for the health and survival of both mother and foetuses.

But does the fact that Miss B had a selective abortion mean that abortion was available on demand for social reasons as suggested in some tabloid papers?

Though doctors were careful to justify the selective abortion on the basis that multiple pregnancy automatically carries a greater physical risk, much emphasis was placed on the fact Miss B was a single mother in "socially straitened circumstances".

The controversy deepened, however, when it was later revealed that she was in fact a married, middle class professional who feels she cannot cope with twins.

Socialists argue that it is irrelevant whether the woman was a single mother or a middle class professional. The decision to continue or to terminate a pregnancy, for whatever reasons - social, economic, physical or mental - should be the woman's alone. It is her body and

her life that is involved. It should be her choice, free of compulsion from any outside agency.

Beliefs

Yet the 1967 Act denies women this basic right to choose.

At present, whether a woman has any say in what happens to her pregnancy depends entirely on where she lives and the personal beliefs of her doctors.

Britain already has one of the most restrictive abortion laws in western Europe, yet MPs like Alton, Peacock and Winterton are making use of the current abortion scare stories to build support for bringing yet another anti-abortion private members' bill to the autumn Parliament.

Should this happen, Workers Power will campaign for the labour movement as a whole to mobilise not only against any such bill, but for: free abortion on demand on the NHS; a woman's right to choose!

● *Roots of women's oppression - page 9*

READ: MARXISM AND WOMEN'S LIBERATION
■ An LRCI pamphlet.
Available from Workers Power, price £1

Killer police go free

BY KATE FOSTER

AUGUST SAW three cases of gross injustice, as the British legal system callously swept the deaths of three black men under the carpet.

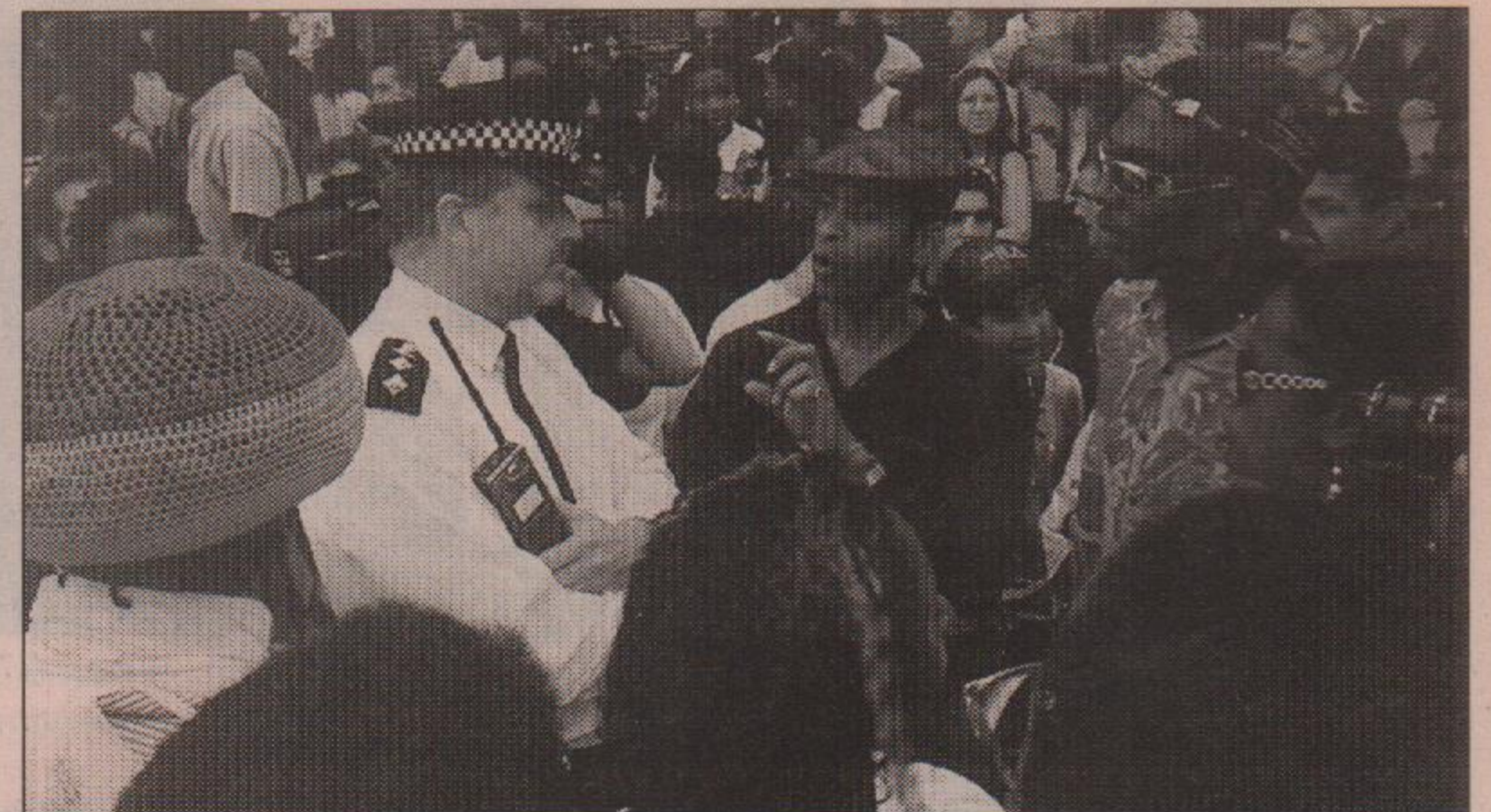
Wayne Douglas died in Brixton police station in December 1995. He supposedly suffered a heart attack, but witnesses to his arrest describe how he was beaten by 15 policemen.

Seven months later, the Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) announced that nobody would face trial in connection with his death.

Brian Douglas, no relation to Wayne, died in May 1995 from a series of blows

to the head, which fractured his skull and caused a massive brain haemorrhage.

The policemen who arrested him were using the new US-style, 24-inch baton. At the inquest into Brian's death, the officers described how the baton had "slipped" onto Brian's head. Last month, the jury at the inquest into his death returned a majority verdict of "misadventure". Despite overwhelming evidence, his death was explained as a tragic accident, not the result of a vicious police attack.



Donald Douglas, brother of murdered Brian Douglas, confronts police on Brixton demo

Withdraw CS Gas!

TORY HOME Secretary, Michael Howard, has decided that CS gas is a vital part of police armoury. The police Howard tells us "deserve the best available protection against the violence they sometimes face in their duties".

The truth about the use of the spray became apparent within days of its introduction. Police in Middlesbrough had used the gas in order to take a 10-month-old child away from its mother and into care. Were the police in such terrible danger from this woman? No. According to their own accounts, she did not attack them.

In a second case, two teenagers who had barricaded themselves into a room in a children's home were sprayed with CS gas.

The agreement to allow the use of CS gas has come after trials lasting only six months, involving 16 police forces.

Howard confidently announced that "all scientific evidence shows that CS presents no serious risk to human health".

This is a gross insult to the family and friends of Ibrahima Sey. Ibrahima died in March this year after police in Ilford, Essex sprayed him with CS gas while he was handcuffed. The investigation into his death continues. The effect that the spray had on Ibrahima is still uncertain.

But Michael Howard has chosen to wilfully ignore evidence that the gas may well have contributed to, if not caused, the death of a physically fit 29 year-old man.

CS gas should be withdrawn from use immediately. Even the strictest guidelines for its use will not prevent police using it as an offensive weapon and will not prevent possible future injuries and deaths. ■

The jury in Brian's case consisted of 11 people, ten of them white. It failed to reflect the local population in south London as a whole.

The following day the CPS announced that no police officers would face charges in connection with the death in custody of Shiji Lapite, a 34 year-old Nigerian asylum seeker.

He died on 16 December 1994. His windpipe had been crushed, one of 45 injuries documented in the coroner's report. In February 1996, an inquest had decided that he was "unlawfully killed", but his murderers will go free.

On average, 15 people die every year in police custody in London alone.

Even where the police themselves are suspected of responsibility, they are allowed, through the Police Complaints Authority, to investigate themselves. The PCs who attacked Brian Douglas were not even compelled to co-operate with the inquiry.

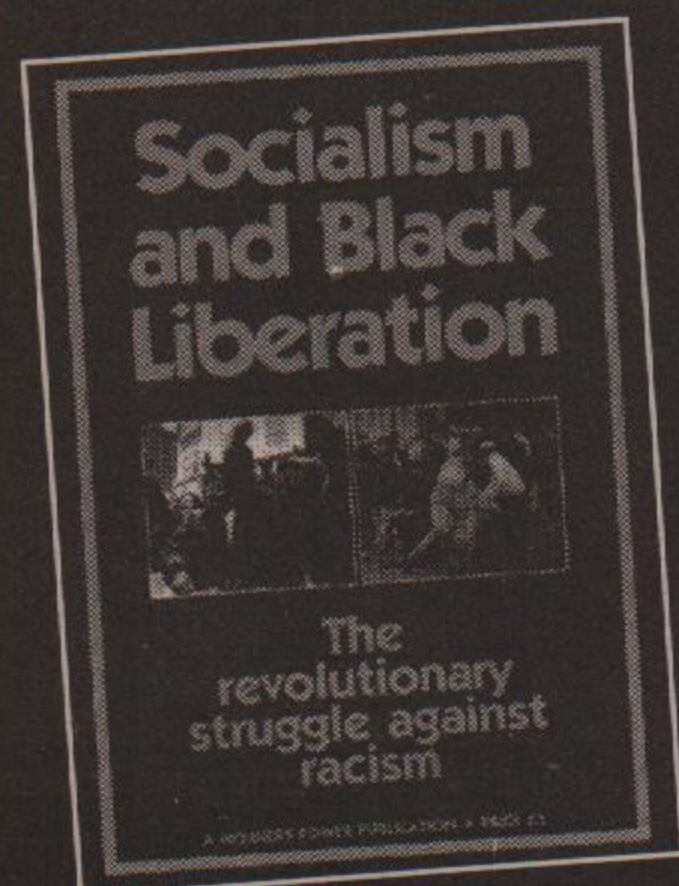
There is no justice in such cases. The police are getting away with murder. Why? Because the job of the police is not to protect the community, but to uphold the rule of private property in a society that is thoroughly racist.

They hold an unwritten licence to terrorise black people. The criminal justice system in Britain cannot afford to admit that the world's "best police force" harbours racist killers.

But such injustice does not go unchallenged. After the death of Wayne Douglas, riots broke out on the streets of Brixton. In response to the inquest verdict in Brian's case protests have taken place outside Brixton police station and in Balham, south London. Demonstrations were organised to demand justice for Shiji Lapite.

The anger which fuelled these protests can and must be focused to fight, not just for justice for each individual, but also to change the society which legalises these killings. ■

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EDITORIAL

WORKERS POWER 203 SEPTEMBER 1996

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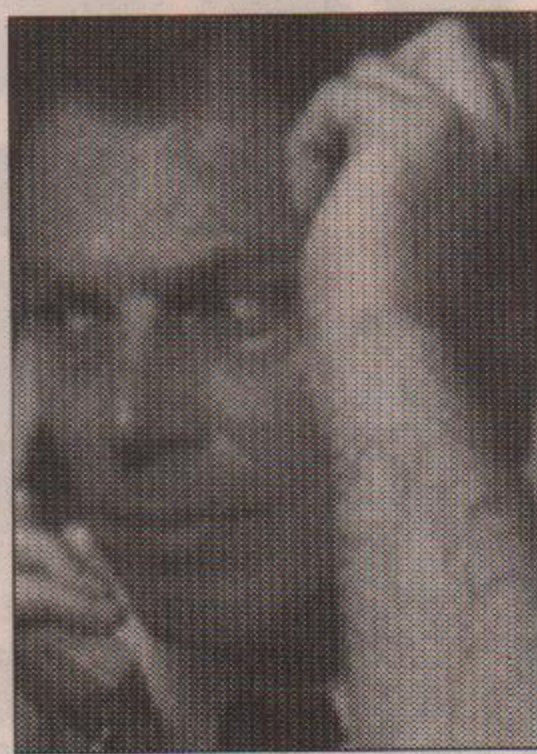


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- P is for Proletariat ● History of the FI - the genesis of "Pabloism"
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LABOUR: Blair's Summer of Dissent

Shadow boxing

IT WAS a troubled summer for the Labour leadership. Sniping broke out amongst Labour backbenchers. The Party's opinion poll lead slipped. And Chancellor Kenneth Clarke gave the clearest signs yet that he is preparing a pre-election "boom-let" to buy back the votes of the middle class. Pollsters delving into what sociologists call the C1/C2 classes—skilled and better paid workers, seen as the crucial battleground in the coming election—found the consistent refrain that Blair was "too right wing".

What does it all mean? Is there a revival of the Labour left? Will the divisions open the way for a Tory poll resurgence, fuelled by tax cuts in November? Clare Short, Roy Hattersley, Austin Mitchell and others have all criticised Tony Blair for his authoritarian style of leadership and for the way in which he allows "spin doctors" like Peter Mandelson to present Labour's policies.

Short was demoted by Blair for mooting the possibility of legalising cannabis, for hinting at the need for higher taxes for the better-off and for refusing to condemn the London Underground strikers. In revenge she accused Blair of allowing himself to be turned into "macho man" by his advisers, "the people in the dark".

Hattersley targeted Mandelson, as a man "who seems to take himself, and be taken, more seriously than I think is appropriate". He attacked the shortage of hard policy commitments from Blair and the substitution of "soundbites" for substance.

Austin Mitchell went furthest, likening Blair to the late Kim Il Sung, North Korea's long-time Stalinist dictator. Mitchell added:

"In reality members, trade unions, branches, councillors and the rest are bit-part players in Tony's power game."

Returning from his Tuscan holiday, where he read Thatcher's biography for inspiration, Blair denounced the rows as "trivia" and the perpetrators—his fellow MPs—as "flotsam and jetsam". While such comments underscore Blair's authoritarian style, there is a grain of truth in his dismissal of the "summer of dissent". It does not represent a civil war in the party, much though the Tory press has painted it as one. It does not mean that Labour has returned to the old divisions of

the early 1980s.

Tory chairman Mawhinney was mischief-making when he commended Clare Short for her honesty and suggested that she had exposed that "the leadership of the Labour Party hate each other and do not trust each other or Tony Blair."

If this were true then there would undoubtedly be a movement against the Blair leadership. The left of the party would be able to make serious advances. Dissent would be widespread on Blair's right-wing policy revolution. And Mandelson would be where he belongs—nowhere.

But this is not the case at all. The left remains cowed and cowardly. Blair's victory over Clause 4 traumatised it into a silence it has yet to break. Blair's attack on the London Underground strikers, and his latest outrage in suggesting the postal workers should ballot on a lousy management offer and go back to work, have provoked only minor protests in the party. Despite the bluster of Scottish Labour MPs, the Scottish party executive meekly voted for Blair's "two question" referendum plan designed to limit the powers of a

Scottish Assembly.

As for Blair's critics—they have quickly fallen into line. Austin Mitchell was soon on the radio explaining how he was wrong and how he'd only been joking anyway. Clare Short said there were no policy differences between her and Blair. Hattersley stuck to his guns—but he is not standing for re-election.

There is no major division between a right and a left wing in the Labour leadership. From Prescott and Short through to Blair, Brown and Mandelson the Labour leadership is fundamentally united in its total rejection of "old Labour" policies. Short was last year's darling of the right for the disgraceful role she played in witch hunting left winger Liz Davies in the Leeds North East constituency selection battle.

This does not mean that there are no factions within this right wing leadership. There are, and the summer dissent revealed this very clearly. Blair, Mandelson and Brown are long standing members of the "modernising" faction. Their project is not simply to break with old Labour policies but to forge an entirely new party, one preferably with no organised links to the trade

unions, free to become an open and unfettered party of the ruling class.

Prescott and Short belong to a different faction. They, together with Margaret Beckett, were close allies of Blair's predecessor, John Smith. They are at one with Blair against the left, but they have a vision of Labour as a right wing reformist party which retains its links with the unions.

The debate, such as it is, relates to the imminence of the election. All factions of this right wing leadership believe that Blair is a winner and will tolerate anything he does so long as he delivers victory at the polls.

But the old right and the remnants of the centre left want a Labour victory and not just a Blair victory; one credited to the whole party not to the chief election campaign strategist—Peter Mandelson. This is why Prescott had a full blown (private) argument with Blair over the leader's attempt to attach Mandelson to Prescott's campaigning team. Prescott refused to have him and Blair backed down.

The timid fight of this old Smith faction is being waged in the hope that they will win enough cabinet seats in a new Labour government to prevent themselves being crushed by Blair's modernisers.

In contrast to this jockeying for position, back stabbing and manoeuvring between factions of the right wing, socialists and trade union activists need to wage a real fight against the policies and promised sell-out in government that they all agree on.

We should fight to force the Labour leadership, against its will, to carry out policies in the interests of the working class—for a minimum wage, for a 35 hour week, for a massive boost to the welfare state, for the renationalisation of privatised industries and utilities. It should fight the authoritarianism of Blair by defending the union link, democratising the block vote and utilising it to prevent Blair's attempt to sideline the annual conference.

Every success we enjoy in such struggles will weaken a Blair government's attacks on us and strengthen the chances of winning Labour's millions of working class supporters to class struggle and a revolutionary challenge to the capitalist system. ■

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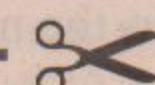
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UNIONS: Summer strike wave shows limits of one-day actions

A new upturn?

BY JOHN MCKEE

TENS OF THOUSANDS of members of the postal workers' union (CWU) in Royal Mail have carried on striking throughout the summer. London's tube drivers staged seven 24-hour stoppages for a shorter working week. Just as the underground workers settled, RMT train conductors and catering crews launched a series of strikes against some of the new rail companies.

Civil service trade unionists held strikes against the Benefits Agency over safety issues, tied to the introduction of the Job Seekers' Allowance. And firefighters in Derbyshire continued their action over service cuts by the Labour-controlled council.

The bosses complained that Thatcher's anti-union laws were supposed to rid us of these disruptions and yet virtually all this summer's disputes have taken place entirely within the framework of the Tory legislation.

The Tories immediately declared that new anti-union laws were needed, promising measures to make the unions liable for the costs of industrial action and talking of bans on strikes in "essential" services. Tory Party Chairman, Brian Mawhinney, quickly put Labour on the defensive by organising a photocall for a leaflet headlined, "New Labour, new union power". New Labour responded in typical fashion with shadow Employment Secretary David Blunkett publicly urging tube drivers to call off their action and agree to binding arbitration.

Of course, much of the alarm about "strike waves" and resurgence of union power is manufactured by the Tory press precisely to attack Labour and see how far Blair would go towards con-



The lessons of these strikes are clear. While a membership that wants to fight can push some leaders into endorsing and even leading strike action, without rank and file control even the left-talking leaders will sell the struggle short.

demning strikes outright.

However, that is not the whole story. Strike statistics for 1995 show the first annual increase for many years. The number of strike days in 1995 was 415,000 compared to 278,000 in 1994 and the figures excluded the ongoing Liverpool dockers' dispute, because the dockers had been "dismissed". But one swallow does not make a summer. After all, 1994 was a historic low for strikes in this country. But the monthly figures for June 1996 reveal the highest num-

ber of days lost to the bosses in any month since 1990.

In a period dominated by election fever, these figures point to something significant for socialists. Further confirmation of a revival comes with a much slower decline in union membership. Seven of the largest unions have actually put on members. These include the CWU, which has recruited 7,500 since the strike action in Royal Mail began.

While major sections of the union

bureaucracy, such as the GMB, MSF and Unison, have used their conferences to exhort members not to rock the boat before an election and to "wait for New Labour", others have been less willing to pledge absolute loyalty to Blair.

The leaders of the RMT and CWU have felt mounting pressure from sections of their memberships to oppose management attacks and to struggle for improvements in wages and conditions. Postal workers have been at the centre of unofficial, "illegal" walkouts, resisting casualisation, suspensions of fellow workers and the victimisation of union reps for months prior to this summer's national dispute.

Many of the management attacks in the post and elsewhere are linked to the drive for greater profitability, fattening up state industries for potential privatisation.

New Labour refuses to countenance any renationalisation. Its *Road to the Manifesto* effectively endorses Thatcher's anti-union laws: "The key elements of the trade union legislation of the 1980s, on ballots, picketing and industrial action will stay". Blair will not commit the party to a minimum wage figure. All these realities have opened up a growing division between him and sections of the union leadership.

A recent survey of 12 union executives by the *Sunday Times* revealed that 70% wanted a Labour commitment on the minimum wage before the general election and a similar number wanted repeal of all laws against secondary picketing.

Against this background, some bureaucrats are prepared to give the green light to their members to flex a bit of industrial muscle to send a warning signal to Blair – albeit within the context of limited, one-day actions.

But the fact that some union leaders are not willing to sacrifice all in order to get Blair elected does not make them born-again class fighters. The RMT leadership is a prime example. The tube strike was called off over the heads of its members, who voted by nearly 4 to 1 to reject a deal, which offered a 35-hour week by 1998 only at the expense of a real pay cut, tying pay increases to 2% below the level of inflation.

On Wednesday 21 August Bob Crow, assistant general secretary of the RMT and member of the national executive of the Socialist Labour Party, declared the vote a "clear mandate to maintain action until a settlement is reached which my members consider to be fair". Only 24 hours later, he and his executive had unanimously called off the action on the basis of a meeting at ACAS which left the 2% wage cut firmly in place. There was no further consultation with the membership!

The lessons of these strikes are clear. While a membership that wants to fight can push some leaders into endorsing and even leading strike action, without rank and file control even the left-talking leaders will sell the struggle short.

To turn the growing mood of anger and militancy amongst many groups of workers into a movement that can smash the union laws and defeat the bosses' attacks means a rank and file movement in and across every union.

Such a movement would challenge and oust the leaders who sell out, while posing an alternative strategy that actively defies the anti-union laws and fights for the kind of all-out action and industrial solidarity that can still win important victories. ■

FIRE BRIGADES: Derbyshire FBU members' 3-month battle continues

Labour implements Tory cuts

WP: Derbyshire County Council threatened cuts of £1.3 million. Three months into the dispute the figure is £731,000. Where did the latest figure come from?

AB: Every area of Council spending was meant to take a 4% cut, but for the Fire Service this was more than any other department because it didn't achieve last year's cuts due to the hot summer. The Chief Fire Officer has found £660,000 to deduct from the £1.3 million.

This is made up of underspending and the freezing of vacant posts, which is illegal under the Fire Service Act without permission from the Home Office. Trying to cut the remaining £731,000 would mean attacking frontline services. The County Council wants to force this on a service that has already suffered £6 million of cuts over the last five years.

WP: What have been the other key issues in the dispute?

AB: They aren't threatening redundancies but posts will go and people will be redeployed. This is an attack on the frontline service—putting the health and safety of the public and our members at risk. Overall they want to cut four engines and one specialist turntable ladder. We used to have six of them five years ago; this would take us down to three. The 12 posts they want to lose are attached to the vehicles. Elsewhere they want to run the station with

Derbyshire Fire Brigades Union (FBU) members held their ninth strike on 24 August in an escalating three-month battle to defeat massive cuts planned by Derbyshire County Council. Workers Power spoke to **Andy Brickles**, Assistant Secretary of Derbyshire FBU.

retained staff, volunteers, redeploying the 14 full-time staff. The crazy thing is we're busier than ever.

The number of fires has increased by 52% since 1994. In Chesterfield we've gone from 84 firefighters four years ago to 64 now.

WP: What is the strike costing Derbyshire County Council?

AB: The Green Goddesses are paid for by the week so that's £45,000 a time which amounts to £400,000 so far. They're also paying money to the police because they use their communications room and they need police escorts for the Green Goddesses because they don't know where they're going!

They won't tell anyone how much this is costing—but we reckon by now it will probably be the amount they wanted to save in the first place. They aren't bothered about saving money—they want to break the union.

WP: How is the strike organised?

AB: Senior officials like myself do most of the day-to-day organising – setting strike dates, dealing with the press, sorting out problems on strike days.

We also do the negotiating with

the authority, but we always report back. We have regular meetings. Any offer from the County has been communicated to all members straight away and branches report back the response of the members to the brigade committee.

All their offers have been totally rejected by our members.

The latest offer was worse than the original one—it's got strings attached, or cuts within a cut, i.e. they'll take money from the retained firefighters to pay for some of our demands. All FBU members are solidly behind the strike—830 of us. And I'm confident it'll stay that way.

WP: Are there any plans to escalate the dispute by balloting for all-out indefinite action?

AB: We initially decided to run the nine-hour strikes for two months. After that officials went back to the branches to see what they thought of the strategy so far.

The membership called for stepping up the action with more frequent nine-hour strikes and a ballot for additional two-hour strikes to give us more flex-

ibility. As for all-out action, I don't see it happening for now—we're losing money but it's affordable. We had nine weeks all out in 1977/78 but this is a better strategy at the moment.

WP: What support have you had from other branches or other unions?

AB: The FBU is a close union—we've had members all over the country collecting for the hardship fund, as we did when Liverpool were out, this station sent thousands.

The other brigades know that if we're beaten it's the green light for the

same thing to happen elsewhere. There are eight or nine other brigades under attack as it is. We've also had support from Unison, TGWU, NAS/UWT, NUT and NUKFAT (National Union of Knitters, Furniture Workers and Allied Trades).

I think the government will be facing a national strike either this year or next if things carry on like this. The FBU has resolved that if any whole time firefighter is made redundant anywhere, then conference is recalled and we ballot for a national strike.

I don't think Blair will make much difference if Labour get in. I'm not impressed by the way he's treating the unions. But we've had a lot of support from the local MPs—Tony Benn, Dennis Skinner and Harry Barnes.

All the local authority have ever done is implement Tory cuts—in their last manifesto Labour promised to "protect and increase fire services"—we're doing that, protecting services, doing the job they were elected to do!

WP: What should other workers be doing to support you?

AB: Asking for donations from your union branches and inviting speakers to your branch meetings. This is especially important in Derbyshire.

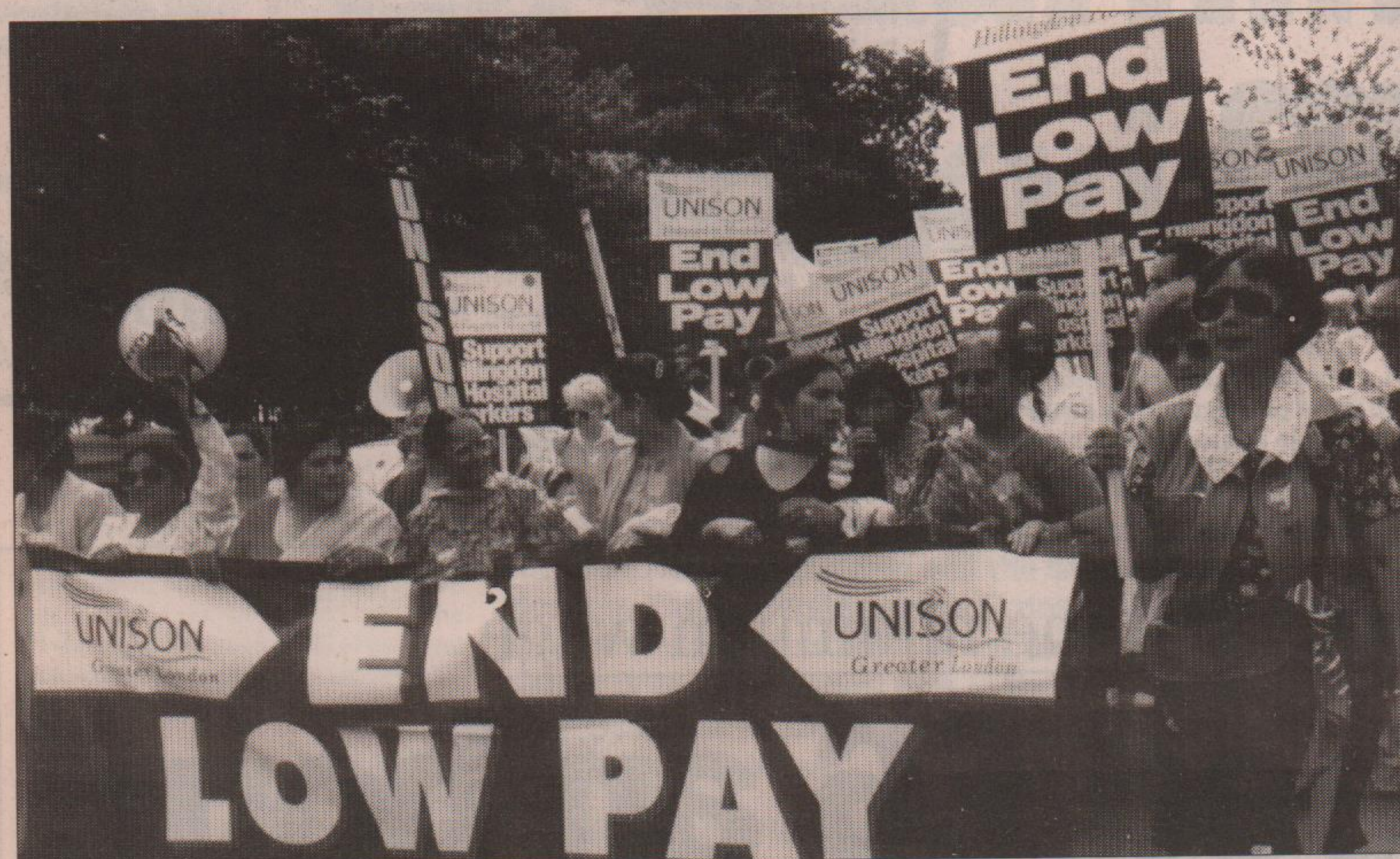
If any union member in the county sees the tactics they're using against us they'll realise: if they beat the FBU they'll go through the others like a dose of salts. ■

Solidarity

Send donations, messages of support and requests for speakers to:
Steve McNeill
4 Gascoigne Drive
Spondon, Derby
DE21 7GL
 Cheques payable to:
Derbyshire FBU Hardship Fund

Hillingdon:

An inspiring fight



Spirited strikers lead 14 July March

Photo: Workers Power

THE FIRST OF October marks one year of the Hillingdon dispute. The strike of mainly Asian women in Unison began when they refused a pay cut. Their employer, the multinational contractor Pall Mall, sacked all 53 workers from west London's Hillingdon Hospital.

Despite their tremendous battle against the effects of privatisation in the NHS, it has been an uphill struggle to continue in the face of indifference and even open hostility from Unison's national leadership and local officials.

The strikers' tenacity is an example to all who wish to stop privatisation. Many of the women have worked for 20 years in the NHS. They have endured low pay and stinking conditions, while maintaining decent standards for fellow workers and thousands of patients. The Tories claim that hiving off NHS ancillary services is a boon to taxpayers and patients. But the strikers highlight the essential link between

BY JASMIN KHAN
workers' conditions and service provision.

Pall Mall did not expect any serious opposition to their quest for a quick profit. Last October they slashed ancillaries' average pay by £30 a week, cut holidays from five to three weeks and scrapped London weighting. The same day the strike began and Hillingdon became a synonym for struggle against the profiteers.

The strike meetings are still vibrant and productive. They have debated tactics for taking the strike forward and organised a host of activities, including pickets of Pall Mall's HSS hire shops and a mass rally to commemorate the strike's anniversary.

The strikers agree on the importance of building solidarity with other Hillingdon Hospital workers. Unison should be playing a vital role in doing just that. But as Malkiat Bilku, the chair of the strike committee, explained to the 11

August meeting, the branch secretary had failed to call a branch meeting despite a flurry of telephone calls, letters and faxes. Instead, the branch secretary condemned Unison activists who had joined the Hillingdon picket in a letter to the national executive. It specifically targeted an activist in Campaign for a Fighting and Democratic Unison (CFDU), who has consistently supported the strikers.

At Unison conference the strikers, bolstered by CFDU militants, forced the national executive to modestly increase their support for the dispute. However, the strikers need much more if their action is to achieve full reinstatement with no pay cuts. The Hillingdon strikers have learnt much this year, not least that their battle for reinstatement requires a battle to transform their union. All trade unionists and socialists should redouble their efforts in support of their heroic struggle.

• See page 2 for details of activities supporting the Hillingdon strikers.

CWU: With the outcome in the balance postal workers must up the action

All out to win!

IF THE Tories make this dispute any more political, it could be the last nail in their coffin". This was the confident response of one Communication Workers' Union (CWU) picket outside central London's Mount Pleasant sorting office.

The dispute over the bosses' team-working scheme has rumbled on, with another four one-day strikes in August and early September. The executive threw out one lousy deal promoted by general secretary Alan Johnson in late July, but as we go to press the union's national executive is meeting management under the auspices of ACAS to discuss the details of the bosses' "final offer". The executive will then decide on further action or a ballot over Royal Mail's proposals.

CWU members have dashed the hopes of Royal Mail's managing director Richard Dykes that the action was about to crumble. Whilst there has been a slight increase in scabbing, especially in weaker rural branches, more than 90% of the union's 134,000-strong membership has remained solidly behind the action.

But unless the fight swiftly escalates

beyond a series of one-day strikes, there is a danger of morale flagging.

When the dispute began in June, Royal Mail's top bosses told sorting office managers to tread carefully and not provoke wildcat walkouts, in order to stitch up a deal with the CWU leadership. Now local management are taking a harder line.

Each strike day brings attempts to discipline activists for trivial incidents on picket lines. According to another Mount Pleasant activist: "One meeting listening to the governors here is our best recruiting advert for the picket line".

From Edinburgh to Southend, there have been unofficial strikes in support of fellow workers threatened with victimisation.

The most sustained action has taken place at Milton Keynes, where workers walked out spontaneously on 27 August in response to the suspension of the CWU branch treasurer. They are still on strike as we go to press.

Royal Mail workers are still in a strong position, despite all the delays and the national leadership's lack of stomach for a real fight. To press home

their advantage, CWU members need to make a real challenge for control over their dispute, channelling the anger and energy displayed by thousands of ordinary members. Each branch should be electing its own fully accountable action committees around the dispute. These committees should be convening regular and frequent mass meetings to discuss the state of play and exercise a veto over any agreement reached between the bosses and the union bureaucracy.

Committees should organise:

- Mass pickets to keep up morale, get updates and keep scabbing to an absolute minimum;
- Full access to all talks between the national officials and Royal Mail bosses;
- Collection and administration of hardship funds;
- Support for unofficial action in defence of colleagues victimised;
- Links with militants in the Parcelforce division, where pressure is mounting for a strike ballot and
- An all-out indefinite strike until all teamworking proposals are withdrawn, with no strings attached.■



Struggle on the Mersey

The historic Liverpool dockers' fight against casualisation and union-busting sees its first anniversary in late September. At a mass picket of the Royal Seaforth Dock on Monday 5 August, Workers Power spoke to **Tony Nelson**, a Liverpool docker and shop steward. We asked him to explain his view of the current state of the dispute.

AT THE MOMENT the TGWU have asked for talks with the MDHC (Mersey Docks and Harbour Company) but the men, the 500 sacked dockers, are making it quite clear to the T&G that it's 500 men reinstated and no deals are to be done. Our position is the same as from day one: for the 500 men to be reinstated into the port.

We are reinforcing the support groups at the moment. We have got support groups, in London, Glasgow, Liverpool, South Wales and Birmingham, Southern and Northern Ireland. Today, although it is 6 o'clock in the morning, many of those support groups have turned up. Next Monday we have got a march and rally, a community rally, from Bootle to the dock gates. At the end of this month (August) we have got an international steering committee, reinforcing our position with workers around the world.

We have addressed over 5,000 meetings now. To be honest, the financial support around the country has been average, but there seems to be a widespread mood that says that if the Liverpool dockers win their dispute then it will be a rallying call for the rest of the labour movement.

Unfortunately, the Labour Party sees it that way as well and that's the reason why they are not helping us.

They are worried about the media saying this is the bad old days again. The local Labour Party MPs have been helpful, but the Labour Party as a party, for the same reason as they haven't been getting involved in other strikes, as a national party have done nothing for us.

Most of our support has come from abroad, the United States, Europe and Canada.

The MDHC share prices went into freefall after ACL left. (ACL is the port's biggest company which temporarily withdrew from the port in June). At the start of the dispute the share price was £4.85. It dropped 20% during the dispute. The financial newspapers have said that during the dispute £100 million has been wiped off the shares.

Two ports have now put in bids for the ACL; that's Thamesport and Felixstowe. Only five days ago Swedish dockers in Gothenburg put a blockade on ACL for 14 hours. We believe that sort of pressure will make ACL think again and we know for certain that they have not committed themselves long-term to the Port of Liverpool.

At the moment we are asking all workplaces to set up levies. Although collections are good, we need consistent income to come in every week, because it costs us more than £28,000 per week to pay the men £50

per week. So we are asking all workplaces around the country to organise levies. We have got levy forms now and there was a delegation which recently came back from Edinburgh where five factories have committed themselves to have a levy for the Liverpool dockers.

We have set a lobby up with Unison at the TUC, but we are also hoping that we have got a fringe meeting. We are trying to get it for the Monday night, the first night of the TUC. We are also still trying to get a speaker to the conference as a whole.

We are being turned down at the moment, but we have got delegates at the conference and hope to get them up to speak on the platform. It will be the same at the Labour Party conference. The day before the Labour Party conference starts, we have got a march and rally in Liverpool, and hope to go from there on to a lobby of the Labour Party on the Monday.

The position at the moment is that the TGWU have asked for negotiations but our position is quite clear. We are solid, as we were on day one, there is no compromise. The issue is over jobs, it's not over money. It's 500 Liverpool dockers who we demand are reinstated. Anyone who wants to take severance, men who have served 40 years, then they can negotiate retirement with dignity once they are reinstated. But that is the issue, 500 dockers reinstated."

Since this interview, police arrested Tony Nelson, shop steward Tony Teague and three supporters during a protest at the Brocklebank Dock on 20 August. Tony and the other four face charges in magistrates' court in late September. Their current bail conditions preclude them picketing outside the dock gates. We urge the labour movement to demand the dropping of all charges and vigorously oppose this state intimidation.■

DEMONSTRATE to mark the first anniversary of the dockers' fight.

Assemble 12 noon, Saturday 28 September, Myrtle Parade, Liverpool.

Rush cheques and postal orders, payable to Merseyside Port Shop Stewards' Committee Appeal Fund, to: Mr J Davies, Secretary, c/o 19 Scorton Street, Liverpool L6 4AS.

To invite a docker to address your meeting phone 0151 207 3388.

Labour's Road to the Manifesto

Credit Card Socialism

TONY BLAIR is touring the country at the moment armed with his *Road to the Manifesto*. For those who prefer not to read the full version, there is the literary equivalent of the soundbite: Labour's manifesto on the back of a credit card.

It sounds like a joke from the left—Labour's promises could be written on the back of a postage stamp—updated for a 90s audience. But this is the way Labour has chosen to promote itself. Not many promises, but here they are in a convenient form that fits into the wallet.

In fact the full *Road to the Manifesto*, published in July, contains many more pledges: pledges to the bosses that a Labour government will do all it can to rule in their interests.

The Labour manifesto has become ever more right wing since 1983, when, under pressure from the left in the constituencies and the unions, it contained commitments to taxation aimed at wealth redistribution, unilateral nuclear disarmament, repeal of anti-union legislation, renationalisation of privatised industries, and to reduce unemployment to less than one million within five years.

The *Road to the Manifesto* proclaims: "There has been a fundamental reconstruction of the party—its ideology, its organisation and its politics."

There have clearly been massive shifts in these areas, including the dropping of Clause Four, an end to any commitment to redistribution, a virtual annihilation of inner party democracy and the ditching of any left wing policies.

In the *Road to the Manifesto*, the overriding aim for the economy is "to provide the stable platform for higher investment and sustained growth", with a promise to "save to invest not tax and spend".

Positive commitments on poverty, welfare, education and the NHS—such as the minimum wage, reducing class sizes, expanding nursery education and slashing waiting lists—are all conditional on a growing economy and their approval by industry.

These minor reforms go alongside a number of totally reactionary promises—maintaining the anti-union laws, introducing workfare, streaming in secondary schools, sacking "poor" teachers, punishing parents of kids who don't dress right or do their homework, promoting community snooping, tax breaks for businesses but not for workers—all in the belief that this will attract more voters.

Blair thinks "ordinary" people will be repulsed by old fashioned talk of class and socialism, and attracted by words like "community", "responsibility" and "opportunity" not "equality".

Last year Blair told a union conference of some of the poorest workers in the country:

"There is no doubt that there are massive social divisions, but to analyse society today in terms of Marxist definitions of class is unhelpful." (USDAW conference April 1995)

A recent Gallup poll survey shows that he is out of touch; 76% of people believe there is a class struggle in Britain. "Ordinary people" know that the poor are getting poorer and the stinking rich stinking richer.

Blair is getting a taste of what people think during his *Road to the Manifesto* Roadshow. In Manchester the audience refused to play the Mandelson game and started to ask difficult questions such as, "what is wrong with

BY HELEN WATSON

taking some more money from the rich to give to the poor", and "why not put a figure on a minimum wage?"

In answering such questions the Labour Party leadership can only reveal to more people that it is a servant of capitalism and that it cares nothing for the needs of ordinary workers. ■

BRIEFING: Labour and the minimum wage

We need £6 an hour!

WHEN WILL the Labour Party commit itself to the introduction of a minimum wage? And how much will it be? These are the questions that millions of workers struggling to get by on poverty wages are asking. But although millions would see a promise to eradicate low wages as a vote-winner, New Labour sees it differently.

The Labour leaders argue that if they are too specific it would hand ammunition to their opponents in the coming election, with Tories claiming that the introduction of a minimum wage would lead to massive job losses.

Instead of answering these lies, Labour has committed itself to a minimum wage in principle—but without actually putting a figure on it. Rather than work on the basis of what we actually need to live decently, the Labour Party prefers to begin from what would be good for the interests of the employers.

Tony Blair summed this up in an article in the *Guardian* last year:

"The minimum wage is right and, sensibly introduced, will help establish a fairer and more rational labour market, as well as saving on the huge benefits bill. But how can we, here and now, without knowing the economic circumstances and before those responsible for implementing it are consulted, fix a figure? No other country has done it in that way. They have done it by a process of consultation on

the basis of the real economy. We should do the same."

The Labour Party's idea of a minimum wage is meaningless to all those who would benefit from minimum earnings set at even quite a low figure. And in Britain today that would include many millions of people, depending on what rate is chosen.

More than a million people currently earn less than £2.50 per hour. More than 2.5 million earn less than £3.50, and a total of 4.7 million people earn less than £4.15 per hour, the rate around which activists were campaigning last year.

Under the Tories, the situation has been getting steadily worse for those low-paid workers. At the same time, Labour's commitment to doing something for them has all but disappeared.

At the time of the 1992 election Labour pledged itself to setting a minimum wage once in government at a figure worked out at half of male median earnings, a formula equivalent to £4.15 an hour last year.

Their election manifesto stated: "Britain's Wages Councils set minimum wages for about 2.5 million people. But there is no minimum wage for all employees. We will end the scandal of poverty pay and bring Britain into line with the rest of Europe by introducing a statutory minimum wage of £3.40 an hour. This is a major but long overdue reform which will bene-

Keep this card and see that we keep our promises.
New Labour's early pledges are:

- cut class sizes to 30 or under for 5, 6 and 7 year-olds by using money saved from the assisted places scheme
- fast-track punishment for persistent young offenders by halving the time from arrest to sentencing
- cut NHS waiting lists by treating an extra 100,000 patients as a first step by releasing £100 million saved from NHS red tape
- get 250,000 under-25 year-olds off benefit and into work by using money from a windfall levy on the privatised utilities
- set tough rules for government spending and borrowing; ensure low inflation; strengthen the economy so that interest rates are as low as possible.

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Labour

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fit around four million low-paid people, 80 per cent of whom are women. We will consult widely to ensure smooth implementation." (Labour Party election manifesto, April 1992)

Just over a year later, the Tories abolished wages councils, which had afforded at least some protection for low-paid workers, particularly in areas such as retailing and catering work—traditionally low-paid and poorly organised sectors of the economy. This meant that these workers now had no legal protection whatsoever from low pay for the first time since 1909, and left Britain as the only country within the EU with no legal protection for low-paid workers.

The Labour Party's commitment to a minimum wage has since gone the same way.

In June last year the Labour Party's National Policy Forum met to consider what Labour Party policy on the minimum wage should be.

The Secretary of the GMB, John Edmonds, put in a plea for Labour to repeat its 1992 commitment. This was rejected.

Instead the Policy Forum concocted the current position of support for the idea of a minimum wage but with no commitment to any set amount.

They proposed that Labour establish an independent Low Pay Commission, with representatives from both unions and employers' organisations. This would set a figure depend-

ing on the economic circumstances at the time. Labour is trying to guarantee employers that no figure will be set that might harm their profitability. When the interests of workers and bosses collide, Blair rushes to side with the latter.

As this policy was being debated at last year's Labour Party conference, Harriet Harman, then shadow employment secretary, even hinted that the Labour Party's minimum wage policy might not apply fully to young people.

In the run up to the Party conference it seemed that Blair and Harman might have a fight on their hands as many unions geared themselves up to force a concrete commitment on the figure.

In the event, much wheeling and dealing between Tony Blair and the main unions dissolved this opposition to Blair's plans. The motion calling on Labour to commit itself to £4.15 was withdrawn after the TGWU was persuaded to oppose the motion by the promise of two seats on a future low pay commission.

The fact is that British capitalism has easily enough wealth to ensure that a national minimum wage could be introduced overnight and abolish poverty pay altogether.

To carry this out would mean rejecting the complaints of the employers and putting the interests of millions of workers before those of a few thousand parasites. If any company or private boss refuses to pay a minimum wage, or if they declare redundancies as a result, they should be nationalised without compensation. Taxes on unearned wealth and profits to squeeze the super-rich could fund every penny of the minimum wage in the public sector.

The unions and the working class movement need to be putting the maximum pressure on Labour now to bring in a national minimum wage immediately after an election victory.

That is why events like the 9 September lobby of the TUC are so important, bringing together trade unionists in the fight for a £4.26 figure.

This would be a massive step forward, but we are going to have to fight to force Blair to carry it out. Nor should the fight against poverty pay stop there. The EU has established a decency threshold of around £6 an hour: why should British workers earn less? As a safety net to protect the most exploited and vulnerable sections of the workforce, we need a national minimum wage of £6 an hour, and it is this that socialists and trade unionists will need to be campaigning for up and down the country in the months and years to come. ■



Labour's front bench will have to be forced to implement minimum wage



Part 6: Stalin-Tito split heralds political collapse

1948: A turning point for Trotskyism



Tito was hailed as an "anti-Stalinist"

TROTSKYISM WAS born in the fight against the rise of Stalinism inside the USSR. Under Trotsky's guidance the Left Opposition and then the Fourth International laid bare the material roots of Stalinism: a counter-revolutionary conservative caste within the workers' state. The FI developed a programme of political revolution to forcibly overthrow this caste and open up the transition to socialism.

As a result, Trotskyists had been murdered or marginalised within the international workers' movement, slandered and physically attacked by the mass Stalinist parties. Reduced to small propaganda groups in a few dozen countries, the FI's real strength lay in its programme and propaganda. It gathered "the vanguard of the vanguard" together, educating and steeling its cadre, preparing for future victories.

But the FI's post-war leadership threw this legacy away. The FI abandoned the struggle for political revolution and replaced this with the search for self-reforming centrist factions among the Stalinist overlords.

Collapse

The immediate cause of this disorientation and eventual collapse is to be found in a crisis inside the Cominform—the Stalinist international.

On 28 June 1948, *Rude Pravo*, a Czech Stalinist newspaper, attacked the Yugoslav Communist Party (YCP) for being "nationalist" and "adventurist". In subsequent documents, Moscow was to describe the YCP as "Trotskyist" and finally "criminal fascists".

The whole world—including the FI—was taken by surprise. Up until then, nothing had suggested that Yugoslav Stalinism was in any way an exception; indeed, Tito had been a "hardline" Cominform spokesman.

The basis of the split lay in Tito's desire to turn the most backward, agrarian country in Europe into an industrially developed part of the Soviet bloc. Moreover, he aimed to do this by promoting a Federation of the Balkan countries under Yugoslav hegemony. Both policies were anathema to Stalin.

The first project contradicted Moscow's plans to keep Yugoslavia as an essentially agrarian country, supplying food and raw materials for Russia. The second ambition represented nothing less than a challenge to Moscow's monolithic domination of international Stalinism. At a time when the Cold War was beginning, Moscow wanted to be certain of the loyalty and discipline of Tito's party, in power on the outer edges of the "Soviet empire".

Unique

The unique character of events in Yugoslavia was not determined by the fact that local Stalinists harboured national ambitions—Trotsky had foreseen and predicted as much in 1928. Rather, it lay in the ability of Tito to carry them out. As a result of a long, partisan war against Nazi occupiers in the Second World War, the YCP was relatively independent of Moscow; its victory in 1945/46 did not rest essentially on the Soviet Armed Forces, as it had elsewhere in Eastern Europe. In short, Tito had both a programme and a state machine free of the iron grip of Moscow.

THE SECOND CONGRESS of the Fourth International (FI) in April 1948 was the last revolutionary gathering of the Trotskyist movement's most authoritative body. Within months the FI was confronted by a major split in Stalinism between Tito in Yugoslavia and the Stalin clique in Moscow. The leadership of the FI drew false, opportunist conclusions from this split. In our continuing series on the history of the FI we show how in the three years up to the Third Congress in 1951, the leadership engineered the FI's collapse into centrism.

The conclusions from this should have been clear from the previous positions of the FI on Stalinism—no support for either bureaucracy. Indeed, this was the first reaction of the SWP (US) who commented in the July 1948 Militant:

"the workers will surely reject this trap of choosing between the type of gold braid worn in Belgrade as against the type Stalin prefers in the Kremlin."

But the International Secretariat (IS) was already drawing different conclusions. On 13 July, the IS published *An Open Letter to the Congress*, to the Central Committee and to the members of the YCP. Describing the danger of the two main choices apparently open to the YCP—fall in line with "Stalinist monolithism" or ally itself with imperialism—the IS tried to use the split with Moscow to push the YCP leftwards, towards "a return to the Leninist conception of the socialist revolution, a return to the global strategy of the socialist revolution".

The IS proposed that the YCP base itself on the "revolutionary dynamism of the masses" by the transforming the "popular committees" set up by the YCP into "genuine state organs", by introducing freedom of political parties, nationalising the land and transforming the plan through the participation of the masses.

Break

The *Open Letter* represented a break with the revolutionary analysis of, and tactics towards, Stalinism. Firstly, despite its title, this letter was aimed at the leadership of the party. There were no proposals or demands aimed at the rank and file of the party in order to oblige the Tito leadership to break not only with Stalin, but with the methods of Stalinism. And as to the creation of a section of the FI in Yugoslavia, the IS did not breathe a word. It is clear that in 1948 the leadership of the FI was placing all its hopes on the self-reform of the Titoite caste.

The letter did not ignore the pitfalls of Stalinist doctrine or the need for institutions of proletarian democracy. It was simply that they hoped and anticipated that Tito could abandon the former and embrace the latter. The *Open Letter* even urged the members of the YCP to "resist pressure to change its leadership", saying this would be "an irreparably tragic error". Rather this leadership "had to undertake the re-education of your cadres in the spirit of true Leninism."

As the ex-Trotskyist Hal Draper noted in the *New Internationalist*:

"The Fourth International has come full circle back to the days of the Left Opposition, when the Trotskyist movement considered its task to be the reformation of the Communist Parties. . ."

It only remained for the logically con-

nected idea—namely, that Yugoslav Stalinism was a form of centrism—to make its appearance.

The IS's position was confirmed at the IEC meeting in December 1948. Events during 1949 led the IS to deepen its errors. The split between Moscow and Belgrade worsened. Because of the suppression of Soviet subsidies, the YCP was obliged to adopt a more autonomous economic policy, and to use left rhetoric to mobilise mass support. The "crimes of Stalin" and the "fascist methods" of the CPSU were denounced; the "degeneration" of the Russian Revolution was underlined; and the YCP prepared itself to bureaucratically impose Titoite "self-management".

Faced with this the IS decided that the break was even more profound. In a circular to the sections of the FI on 5 October 1949, the IS explained that,

"In general the Yugoslavians have remained on a Leninist basis, they have on their own reconstructed certain fragments of Trotskyism on important questions (...) This is a left centrism, which has broken with Stalinism and which is struggling to return to Leninism."

How was it possible for the IS to adopt a line so clearly at odds with its specific resolutions on Stalinism adopted in April 1948?

The answer lies in an unresolved tension within the positions adopted by the post-war FI. The international had entered the war with the perspective that Stalinism could not survive it; either it would succumb to imperialist war or the revolutionary masses would overthrow it.

Basing itself on the undeniable key structural feature of Stalinism, that it

is an historically unstable social caste—both hated by imperialism and doomed to undermine the social foundations on which it rests—the FI kept predicting its imminent demise long after the war ended.

By the time of the Second Congress the Cold War was underway and the FI suggested that this would lead to world war and "an international civil war" in its wake. Instead of recognising the relative stabilisation of capitalism and the relative strengthening of Stalinism, the FI was impatient to detect signs of the break up and collapse of Stalinism.

With the Tito-Stalin split it was said to have arrived. The contradictions within Stalinism had "intensified". By expanding its rule outside the USSR Moscow had merely embraced new social forces and contradictions. For the Pablo-led FI it was the mass base of the YCP and its "specific evolution" during the war which accounted for Tito's leftward trajectory.

Referring to ignore the tight Stalinist bureaucratic control exercised by the YCP over its peasant-based partisan army, and the absence of working class control over the state apparatus, Pablo and the FI insisted that the organs of popular acclaim were forcing Tito to break with Moscow's immediate aims and hence with Stalinism.

The FI got the whole dynamic of the

situation upside down. Tito was a trained Stalinist with an independent power base. He manipulated and used that base to legitimise his stand against Moscow. The FI wrongly saw Tito as an expression of a powerful movement from below, a pressure that was forcing him to go further than he may have wished: hence his centrism.

The role of revolutionary leadership in shaping and directing mass movements towards the seizure of power was set aside; the objective contradictions of Stalinism would propel the masses to find a solution by making use of whatever leadership was at hand.

With this error, variously called "objectivism" or "processism", the FI during 1948-51 adopted a centrist political method.

Evolution

The IS declared that, "the ideological evolution of the YCP, which has followed the outline of Trotskyist thought and theory, constitutes a historic justification of our movement, has substantially increased our prestige, and has allowed us to appear more than ever as the only pole of attraction around which a new international workers' leadership can be assembled."

But the centrist method adopted by the international leadership had the opposite effect, it led inevitably to the weakening of the FI as a "pole of attraction" because according to Pablo and the majority of the IEC, a Stalinist party could evolve towards revolutionary positions without the slightest intervention by Trotskyists.

This processism and misunderstanding of the nature of Stalinism was to lead the FI to lose all confidence it is own historic role, preferring to transfer this function to Stalinist, social-democratic or later petit-bourgeois nationalist forces. The centrist method adopted in relation to the Titoism was to be used repeatedly at various points by the degenerate FI, and has been one of the key defining features of degenerate Trotskyism, leading it to capitulate towards, for example, Mao Tse Tung in China, Ho Chi Minh in Vietnam, the FLN in Algeria and the FSLN in Nicaragua.

These mistakes were later codified in resolutions at the 1951 Congress. With this abandonment of Trotsky's position on Stalinism, the leadership destroyed the revolutionary FI. ■

Next Month: The 1951 congress codifies a centrist method. The politics behind the 1953 split.

FIGHTING CENTRISM

The process of degeneration did meet opposition. The British section, the Revolutionary Communist Party (RCP), which had previously opposed the perspectives adopted at the Second Congress, started to fight the new Tito line and protested the open letter.

In Spring 1949, Ted Grant, member of the RCP leadership, wrote in the internal bulletin:

"We cannot and must not capitulate before these events, or have any illusions as to the motives, the aims and the methods of the Yugoslav bureaucracy. Just as Stalin was not converted into a Trotskyist, unconscious or not, by his struggle against the bourgeoisie, so Tito does not become an unconscious Trotskyist because he has broken with the Kremlin and uses correct arguments on the national question and the right

of self-determination."

Explaining the nature of the Yugoslav government, Grant made an important analogy:

"Tito has taken over in toto, the organisation, the ideology, the technique of Bonapartist rule. The only difference between the regimes of Stalin and Tito is that the latter is still in its early stages."

The RCP leadership was unable to take this struggle forward in the international.

In 1949 it abandoned its perspective of independent work outside the Labour Party and re-fused with Healy's section of the FI in the Labour Party. Healy, a fervent supporter of Pablo at this period, proceeded to bureaucratically expel the old RCP majority leadership. Grant himself was expelled in August 1950. ■

Loyalist reaction on

THE IRISH "peace process" was dealt a severe blow in March, when the IRA called off its ceasefire and bombed Canary Wharf. But the social explosion in Northern Ireland in July and August dealt an even bigger blow to the plans of British imperialism.

In the space of 24 hours the illusions of the anti-unionist population in the peace process were shattered. The RUC performed a U-turn at Drumcree, standing aside to let the Orange pogromists march. Then the security forces surged into the nationalist areas, subjecting Derry to state-organised terror on a scale not seen for a decade.

As nationalists organised the defence of their areas against the imposition of a loyalist march through the Ormeau Road, according to the *Londonderry Sentinel* (17 July):

"Soon the air was filled with the fumes of burning petrol and the machine-gun like sound of plastic bullet guns being fired almost incessantly."

The RUC admitted to firing over 2,500 plastic bullets in Derry alone over the three day period following Drumcree. Three hundred and twenty six people were reported to have been hospitalised or treated at first aid posts for plastic bullet wounds.

If the bombs in Canary Wharf and Manchester represented the breakdown of the ceasefire, they did not represent the breakdown of the fundamental strategy which led the IRA/Sinn Fein to the ceasefire. The bombs were designed to speed up the process of negotiating a reactionary settlement of the Irish national question.

With the mass uprising in the nationalist areas following Drumcree things were different. The risings were a response to the blatant demonstration, before the eyes of millions, that the Northern Irish statelet, sectarian to the core, cannot be reformed.

The "unionist veto", discussed for months as if it were some diplomatic formality, was revealed on the streets for what it really is: the right of the sectarian state forces, and the mass reac-

BY COLIN LLOYD

tionary loyalist movement behind them, to violently crush the democratic rights of the Catholic population. As long as the unionist veto exists there can be no progressive solution to the Northern Ireland conflict.

After Drumcree it should be obvious, even to many republicans who were prepared to suspend disbelief, that the peace process is a reactionary dead end.

What is left of Sinn Fein's strategy? And what are the chances for an emerging working class, anti-imperialist alternative?

Failure

For the republican movement, the peace process was a direct consequence of the failure of the guerrilla strategy. The IRA managed, at great cost and heroism, to hold down the British forces, but became convinced it could not defeat them. The global collapse of Stalinism fostered "peace processes" from Colombia to South Africa to Palestine. The Adams-McGuinness leadership of Sinn Fein believed that British imperialism, itself war-weary, was prepared to offer tangible reforms in return for a permanent end to the armed struggle.

But the period of the IRA ceasefire proved that, for Major, the peace process was just another method of securing the complete surrender of the republican movement. First there was the insistence on the "permanence" of the ceasefire, then the insistence on the unconditional surrender of arms, then written support for the "Mitchell Principles". The Downing Street Declaration, the Framework Document and the Mitchell Principles all enshrined the unionist veto.

The only hope Major had for real reform of the Orange state was either the abject surrender of the republican movement or the inability of loyalism to turn verbal fireworks into mass resistance.

But the IRA did not surrender, despite the ceasefire and despite Gerry



Adams stated preparedness to sign up to the Mitchell Principles. And loyalism veered rightwards, hardened its attitude, with the mainstream bourgeois UUP electing hardliner David Trimble to the leadership – in effect putting "two Paisleys" in control of the loyalist veto.

At Drumcree that veto was used decisively. The biggest internal security force in Western Europe, 18,000 troops and 20,000 armed police, declared they could not control the province if they were forced to repress the rights of the loyalists to hold racist parades through anti-unionist areas.

The loyalists' ability to put talk into action has left them supremely confident of being able to sabotage any attempt to bring even the minuscule reforms necessary to placate the Catholic middle

class who support the SDLP.

For the moment Major's plans are in ruins. Yet all the strategic problems which prompted the peace process remain.

There is a contradiction between Unionist politics and the economic imperatives of capitalism in Northern Ireland. The Southern Irish economy is booming as a low wage, low tax entry point to the richer countries of the EU. The border, which effectively killed off economic trade and development between Northern Ireland and the South, is clearly an anachronism.

So are the marginal privileges awarded to the Protestant workers to keep them loyal to the Union. Northern Ireland remains a haven of state capitalism and relatively lavish public

spending, not counting the billions poured into the maw of the state machine, compared to the rest of Tory Britain.

When Major and Mayhew declared that Britain had no "selfish or strategic interest" in the Six Counties they were not lying. Britain's principal interest in the North is how to reform the Orange state without risking a revolutionary overthrow of the imperialist presence altogether.

As long as there was mass support for revolutionary nationalism, a grinding armed struggle punctuated with outbursts of mass resistance, it seemed that this was a forlorn hope. The window of opportunity for British imperialism opened when the IRA/Sinn Fein turned, as early as 1988 in the "Pathways to

SWP: class versus commu

EVENTS THIS summer in Northern Ireland tested the politics of the Socialist Workers' Party (SWP) and its sister organisation in Ireland (SWPI) and found them wanting.

The SWP had welcomed the 1994 IRA ceasefire as an opportunity to re-establish "class politics"; the "politics of community" could be replaced by the common struggle of Protestant and Catholic workers against their bosses in Ireland and Britain. Then came the Orange marching season.

Loyalist bigotry took to the streets. At Portadown the Protestants paraded through Catholic areas to spout their hate; the Protestant paramilitaries told the RUC to back down and let their parades through or face a resumption of sectarian killings of Catholics. The RUC duly obliged and battered the resident Catholics into submission.

Socialist Worker (SW) did not blanch. This reactionary carnival, we were told, was a sign of the desperation of the Orange Order. The paper's editor, Chris Harman, explained that the "resort to sectarianism was a sign, not of the strength of (Trimble's) hold over the mass of Protestant workers but of its weakness." (SW 20 July)

According to this line of argument the Orange Order has declined in numbers and is a predominantly middle class organisation. Meanwhile, Britain and Northern Ireland's economic decline has



meant that the historic privileges given by Orange bosses to their Protestant workers have shrunk to almost nothing. For SW only intimidation by Orange bigots against ordinary Protestants and an anachronistic attachment to symbols prevents greater unity.

This picture is a self-comforting illusion. It is the SWP's alibi for refusing to fight to get Protestant workers to consciously support the justified struggle of Catholic workers against the sectarian state machine.

Socialist Worker rightly reports every example of Protestant and Catholic workers coming together to fight against low pay or a management offensive. In July it reported that in disregarding an official union instruction not to join the national strike,

"Postal workers in Derry showed last week that class can still come before community in Northern Ireland". Indeed, this kind of unity has happened many times since Ireland was partitioned in 1921.

Recognise

But the SWP refuses to recognise the limits of this unity; namely, that it fragments when the struggles go beyond immediate economic grievances and develop to the point where the existence of the sectarian statelet itself is put in question, as did the struggles of 1932. Within two years these common fights gave way to pogroms of Catholics by Protestants.

The Catholic anti-unionists have always refused to accept the legitimacy

BY KEITH HARVEY

of the Northern Irish state; today a majority still want unity with the south. Despite the reforms that have occurred since 1972 in housing allocation and public sector employment, a hard sectarian core of Protestant privilege remains, protected by an unreconstructed repressive apparatus.

Events at Portadown showed up the RUC for what it is. It remains over 90% Protestant. Its size has increased by over 200% since 1969 while the province's population has decreased by 2%.

The main task of revolutionaries in the North with regard to the most class conscious Protestants is to get them to unite with Catholics to destroy this apparatus of repression. It is to win those Protestant workers prepared to make common cause over economic issues to also make common cause over the key class political question in the North – the national question.

This the SWP will not do. For all their correct denunciations of loyalist bigotry and placing themselves on the side of nationalist barricades over the summer, the SWP crudely counterpose "class" to "community" in such a way that the class struggle is reduced to the struggle in the workplace for economic demands.

Unfortunately, the consciousness of workers in Northern Ireland is not formed

The SWPI called a rally in Derry against sectarianism "on both sides" but were shocked when only around thirty-five people attended.

primarily by the experience of cross-community struggles in the workplace.

Consciousness is first forged in schools; only 2% are integrated. This is reinforced in family life; only 11% of marriages are between Catholics and Protestants. Since 1969 the two populations are more residentially segregated than ever before.

This sense of "otherness" is experienced by Protestants as a sense of superiority over Catholics; by the Catholics it fuels a sense of injustice. Nor is it just "ideological", a throwback to the past or an attachment to symbols. Everyday economic life reinforces it. Over 23% of male Catholics are unemployed compared to 9% of Protestants. Twice as many Catholic households depend on social security; levels of ill health are higher. Less than 30% of the workforce in large private companies are Catholic, whereas they form 43% of the population.

And in a period of economic decline the fact that Protestants are getting worse off does not automatically pro-

in the march

Peace" document, towards compromise.

A section of the British ruling class advocates and has taken steps towards a protracted decolonisation of the North, the indispensable condition of which is the surrender of the IRA. But, while this may even be the optimum scenario for the British ruling class, the slightest attempt to get Britain out of Northern Ireland founders on the resistance of the loyalists.

Britain's nightmare is that in the attempt to extricate itself from the North it may provoke a mass movement that could destabilise capitalist rule north and south of the border and even spread to mainland Britain. After Drumcree Major and Mayhew had a glimpse of that nightmare.

The nationalist uprising in response to the Drumcree U-turn was not, despite some reports, on the scale of the uprising of Derry in 1969. Even if it was on the scale of the mass protests which accompanied the Hunger Strike campaign of 1980-81, it did not maintain their momentum, nor did it actively ignite sections of the Southern Irish working class in the same way.

What the latest nationalist mass resistance showed however was two things, both of them frightening for the imperialists, both of them the product of tangible disillusion in the peace process.

First of all was the growing mass support for Sinn Fein/IRA; despite the ending of the ceasefire, the extension of its popular vote and the widening of its acceptance as front runner in the pan-nationalist coalition, even by sections of the Catholic middle class.

While Sinn Fein's strategy is in a cul-de-sac, it is not yet felt to be so by the mass of republican supporters. They, and the leadership, believe that a break in the logjam could occur with Blair in Downing Street, Clinton secure in

the White House and Fianna Fail leader Bertie Ahern in charge of the Irish Parliament.

Instead it is the strategy of the constitutional nationalists which is being felt, subjectively, to have failed. John Hume, since the Canary Wharf bombing a hoarse, broken shadow of his former self, is the human embodiment of the SDLP's crisis.

An equal and opposite development is no less foreboding for British imperialism: the possibility of a split in the IRA, the reduction of the current peace-brokering Sinn Fein leadership to mere cyphers, and the emergence of independent mass organisations such as the myriad of residents and community groups which have organised the resistance to sectarian marches.

While there is not yet an organised

and demands: to end plastic bullets, to disband the RUC and replace them with an "acceptable force"; to demand "consent" for Loyalist marches. At the same time the Sinn Fein leaders brandish the rhetoric of resistance and continued armed struggle to placate the angry nationalist youth.

After Drumcree, and in Derry twice within the space of a month, Sinn Fein activists took to the streets to calm mass resistance by the youth. Their ability to do this is a key bargaining tool with imperialism – as it was for Arafat and for Nelson Mandela.

But the problem they face in the coming months is that, whereas Mandela and Arafat (initially) at least had some meagre, sham and partial reforms to placate their supporters with. Coming up to the third anniversary of the ceasefire Sinn Fein can show the anti-unionist masses nothing, other than the conditions of peace themselves, as a result of the compromises made with imperialism.

The task in Ireland now is to build a new leadership for the national struggle, committed to the strategy of permanent revolution: working class methods to win national unity and democratic rights, indissolubly linked to a fight for the socialist transformation of Ireland, North and South.

In the here and now that means fighting for independent residents' committees, linking them up to organised anti-unionist workers and demanding the support of all those – Protestant and Catholic – who claim to be real democrats in Northern Ireland.

It means fighting for organised self defence of the nationalist areas and of the beleaguered isolated families currently subject to ethnic cleansing at the hands of the loyalist paramilitary parties. And it means fighting every manifestation of the general capitalist offensive against the working class in Ireland.

Workers Power and the Irish Workers Group have consistently argued that what it must not mean is a return to the dead end, elitist guerilla struggle. The IRA should not give up its arms, but it should be prepared to throw open the arms caches to the masses faced with life or death resistance. It should place itself and its units at the disposal and under the control of the organisations of the mass struggle against imperialism – not substitute itself for such mass organisations.

Weapon

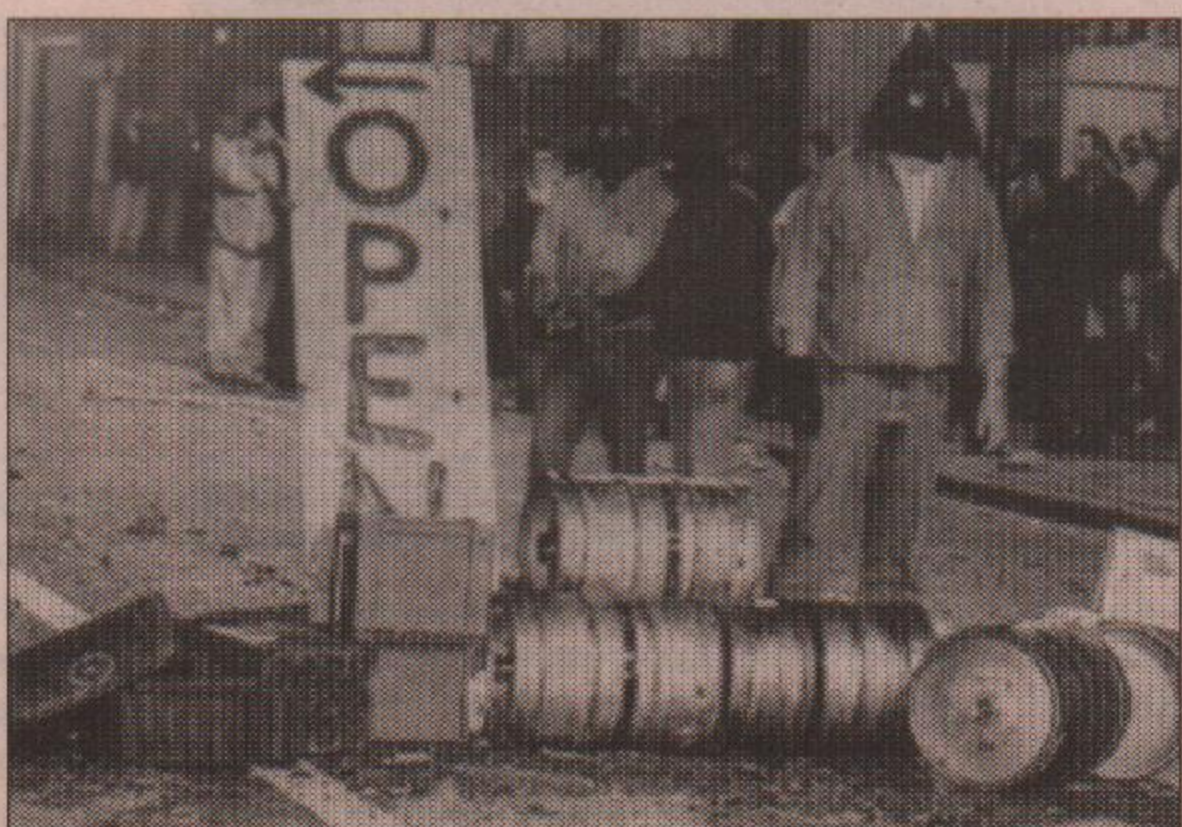
Ultimately the most powerful weapon for the anti-unionist minority in the North is the active support of the Southern Irish working class. To mobilise that support means breaking with the Catholic reactionary bosses' parties who run the Irish Republic for the imperialist multinationals – the very same semi-colonial stooges who Sinn Fein has reserved a seat for in the pan-nationalist bloc.

We have been proved right against Sinn Fein which held illusions in the peace process. We have been proved right against the centrists of Militant and Socialist Worker who welcomed the peace process sell-out because it would remove the "thorny" problem of the revolutionary nationalist struggle.

We have been proved right as against the nationalist hardliners of Republican Sinn Fein, whose strategy of a retreat to the guerilla war has little resonance amongst the most advanced nationalist and socialist youth.

A new leadership is needed in the Irish class struggle, North and South. The LRCI is fighting to build that leadership. ■

● Eyewitness Derry – p10



break to the left of Sinn Fein amongst the masses, all reports of the resistance on the ground suggest that there is growing resonance for a class struggle rejection of the peace process, which wants mass resistance but does not see any benefit in the return to the armed struggle in the six counties, unless it is one to defend the Catholic ghettos from loyalist and state attacks.

Sinn Fein's current policy is to attempt to straddle both developments. They are trying to incorporate the Catholic middle class support into a variety of single issue reform campaigns

This is not a diversion from the class struggle; it is an essential component of it. Earlier this century the Irish bourgeoisie abandoned their struggle for national independence. In 1921 they accepted a deal with Britain whereby the North-east would be kept as a Protestant preserve, imprisoning hundreds of thousand of Catholics inside this statelet. From that time on it has fallen to the workers of Ireland, North and South, to finish the class struggle for national independence.

The SWP refuse to accept this. For them, the national struggle gets in the way of Protestant-Catholic worker unity. They are wrong. It is the Protestant working class' refusal to help bring down the apparatus of repression and discrimination that obstructs lasting unity.

Failure

The failure of the SWP/SWPI to recognise this and develop a revolutionary answer to the national question, based on the strategy of permanent revolution, is why nationalists, like Sinn Fein, have been able to dominate the anti-unionist working class. So long as socialists ignore or downplay the national question and counterpose economic questions, in the way the SWP/SWPI do, that domination will continue.

It will be strengthened every time the national question is poised point blank – as it was this summer.

A revolutionary socialist answer to the national question – the fight for a united workers' republic of Ireland – is the way to break this domination, and break the Protestant workers from their loyalty to the Unionist bosses and the British state. ■

O The A to Z of Marxism is for Oppression

BY CLARE HEATH

THE VAST majority of people in the world experience oppression. Women, youth, black people, lesbians and gay men all suffer from specific forms of oppression. But working people in general – workers, poor peasants – are also oppressed. Oppression is the denial of rights and opportunities that would enable people to achieve what they are capable of and live in a dignified way.

The word oppression is often wrongly used interchangeably with exploitation. Marxists distinguish between the two. Exploitation is an unequal economic relationship in which the exploiter extracts surplus value from the exploited. Under capitalism workers are exploited because the value they create working is greater than the value included in their wages.

The exploitation of workers leads to their oppression. When the boss shouts or harasses you, insists that you dress a particular way, tells you when you can and can't take a break – that is oppression.

Specific sections of the population are oppressed, but they are not necessarily exploited. There is no doubt that the oppression of women affects all women. Women are unequal in

Not all women are exploited. Some women do not have a job outside of the home, others are managers and bosses. But all women are oppressed.

relation to the law, property, taxation, and benefits. Women are pressured into subordinate roles in the family through moral codes, religion and popular culture. The law, the state and the family all regulate women's fertility. Women earn less than men. Millions of women are battered, abused and raped.

Not all women are exploited. Some women do not have a job outside of the home, others are managers and bosses. But all women are oppressed.

Oppression has existed as long as society has been divided into classes, with one group owning property and gaining rights to use that property for their own ends. With each form of class society the nature of oppression has changed, and under capitalism it has generally become the most naked.

Oppression

All the features of women's inequality, lack of opportunity and denial of rights are features of their oppression. Some women experience these more acutely, particularly when they are combined with poverty. A minority of women who are wealthy have managed to minimise many aspects of their oppression, partly through employing other women as servants. But even they do not escape oppression completely.

Women's oppression is systematic, and a very fundamental feature of class society. It is a form of what we call social oppression. Without it, capitalism could not function, because it provides an army of free domestic workers to care for children and other dependants in the home, and it weakens and divides the working class.

The family structure under capitalism, and the function of this structure – the production, maintenance and reproduction of labour power – lies at the root of this social oppres-

sion of women.

Youth, children, lesbians and gay men are also socially oppressed. The family model – even when it is more myth than reality – dictates this oppression. Children and youth are denied independence in order to preserve this family model. They can suffer anything from casual mistreatment through to sexual abuse and death in its name.

Sexuality which challenges this structure, such as homosexuality, is condemned. Oppression follows condemnation.

Other major forms of social oppression relate not to the family but to the nation state. The oppression of one set of nations, nationalities and peoples by others is a fundamental feature of the imperialist epoch.

Exploit

Imperialist countries like Britain or the USA exploit semi-colonies in Africa, Latin America and Asia. But they also oppress their people, through racial oppression and, for example, the denial of basic human rights of people from semi-colonies who seek work in imperialist countries.

On the basis of the nation state racism, chauvinism and nationalism

have led to the cruellest imaginable oppression of entire peoples – the African-American people of the USA who live with the legacy of slavery and the daily reality of systematic discrimination; the European Jews and Romany peoples who live with the nightmare of the Nazi Holocaust.

These are direct products of social oppression, direct products of the capitalist free market which requires such oppression. They are not historical accidents or quirks of fate.

The formal commitment to women's equality in many capitalist countries – through equal pay legislation and anti-discrimination laws – shows that inequality and oppression are not simply about the law, but based on a fundamental oppression rooted in the nature of capitalism.

Because oppression affects broad sections of society, struggles against it have been waged by all classes – including movements of middle and upper class women, black people, lesbians and gay men.

Marxists support all struggles against oppression, whoever wages them. But for us, oppression is not just about bad laws and discrimination. Oppression is a fundamental, necessary part of capitalism, and can only be destroyed along with it.

Workers, therefore, share a common goal with the vast majority of the oppressed: the destruction of capitalism. And workers have the power to achieve that goal. That is why we call for working class movements of the oppressed – to lead the struggle against their oppression and exploitation, and to carry out a struggle against any elements of oppression that exist within the workers' movement and divide it in its common fight against the class system of oppression and exploitation. ■

personal view

RICHARD BRENNER

One night in Derry

I ARRIVED IN Derry on Friday 9 August. The next day the sectarian Apprentice Boys were due to march through the overwhelmingly Catholic city, beating their drums and roaring out slogans of anti-Catholic bigotry and Protestant supremacy. People were tense and angry. With good reason.

Only the month before a mob of loyalists in Drumcree had easily got the RUC police to back down and allow them to parade through a Catholic area. The RUC - 93% Protestant, 100% loyalist and armed to the teeth - had shown uncharacteristic restraint in the face of Orange provocations, then gave in altogether and allowed them to march.

Wave

Across the province, these events had been coupled with a wave of vicious anti-Catholic violence. A taxi driver was killed simply for being a Catholic. Hundreds of Catholics were driven from their homes. This was ethnic cleansing UK-style. Now the anti-unionists of Derry were preparing for mass action to prevent a repeat performance in their city.

I met up with a group of comrades from Workers Power's sister organisation, the Irish Workers Group. Together we headed for the Bogside, the heart of the no-go area imposed by nationalists in the early seventies. As we made our way to the republican stronghold of Brandywell in the heart of the Bogside, where an anti-unionist march was due to assemble, I could see just why the residents of the Bogside were so concerned and angered by the imminent Orange march.

Throw

The Apprentice Boys' parade was to follow the route of Derry's ancient city walls. Along one stretch these overlook the Bogside. Those Catholic homes nearest the Butcher Gate were already boarded up, a stone's throw (literally) from the walls. It was as if racists were set to march through Moss Side or Brixton, carrying burning crosses and wearing white hoods. But the nationalist community were never going to take this lying down. Slogans and murals illuminated the sides of buildings with a message of defiance and militancy.

The nationalist march assembled with great discipline in three single files—old die-hards mingled with anti-unionist youth and children. As the feeder march from the Creggan estate met up with us our numbers swelled to around 6,000.

Accent

From time to time a marcher would hear my English accent, uncomfortable with the accent of the occupying army. Eventually one marcher handed me an anti-unionist sticker, "so nobody gets the wrong idea about you", he explained. I fastened it to my lapel gratefully. "No, no", he said, smiling broadly. "Stick it on your feckin' mouth!"

The march went off peacefully: there was not an RUC van to be seen, though helicopters buzzed menacingly overhead. At the end Martin McGuinness spoke for Sinn Fein. He lambasted the hypocrisy

and sectarianism of the Apprentice Boys and the RUC. But I was struck by his silence about the role of the British. And entirely absent from his speech was any mention of how the Orange parade might be stopped. When he finished speaking, I detected a desultory mood among the marchers, who dispersed quietly.

A rally had been called at Free Derry Corner in the Bogside for 2pm the next day. The Apprentice Boys were marching at 8am—the RUC blocked off whole sections of the city to allow them to go ahead. The anti-unionist population were sealed off from their own city—one could hear the pipes and the crashing of the bigots' drums for miles. But nothing was being done to stop them.

Tense

Clearly this was not to the liking of many nationalists. A large and tense crowd gathered at the Butcher Gate, determined at least to show resistance to the sectarian parade. There was a stand off with the RUC, whose vans and armed officers blocked the way. Martin McGuinness again addressed the crowd. This time his message was even less ambiguous. He said nothing could be done, and people should effectively go home.

But hundreds stayed. Many shook their heads at his argument that because the eyes of the world were watching, they should simply let the Orange march go ahead, and that this would help preserve "international support".

War zone

By nightfall I was starting to think that Sinn Fein had succeeded in convincing the entire nationalist community to let the Orange march go completely unanswered. But when we came out of a city centre pub around 1am, we found ourselves in the midst of a war zone.

A van was burning on Strand Road. Young people, many dressed in their clubbing gear, were standing around as if this were the most normal thing in the world. Then an Escort van plummeted through the crowd and was met with a hail of stones and bottles . . . and exploded into flames 100 yards down the road. Youths emerged from shop doorways with bags of bottles and armed with petrol bombs. A night of confrontation with the RUC was underway. No sectarian attacks were made on Protestant property.

Barricades

In the morning I heard that Sinn Fein had been touring the barricades across the city centre calling on people to go home. The entire confrontation with the state forces had taken place against the will and against the advice of the leadership of the nationalist population.

As I made my way back to Britain a thousand questions were buzzing in my mind. Foremost among them, if Sinn Fein and the IRA won't lead a mass struggle against the sectarian state, if the peace process is paving the way for even further climbdowns, where will the most revolutionary of the young anti-unionists turn? ■



INDONESIA: Riots in Jakarta threaten to

Break up the "New Order"

BY MICHAEL GATTER

THE MASS RIOTS of 27 July could mark the beginning of the end for the authoritarian dictatorship in Indonesia. Thousands, mostly the urban poor, students and workers, fought with the army and burned down several buildings in the capital, Jakarta. Three people were killed and 90 injured. Many of the 250 arrested in the aftermath of the riots are activists from the left and the independent trade union movement.

Protest

The mass protest was provoked by the government, led for the past 30 years by former general Suharto. The regime organised a coup inside the Indonesian Democratic Party (PDI) of Megawati Sukarnoputri. The PDI is one of the two officially registered opposition parties. They replaced Mrs Megawati as party leader with Sujadi, a man who is absolutely loyal to the regime.

When pro-Megawati forces objected to this and occupied the party headquarters, the regimes answer was typical. The army stormed the building and demolished the PDI headquarters.

Megawati, the daughter of the nationalist leader General Sukarno, has become a symbol of opposition to the dictatorship. She is seen as a potential threat by the regime as they approach the 1998 Presidential elections. Suharto hopes to pre-empt any danger by this manoeuvre: you are not allowed to be a candidate if you are not nominated by either the governmental party GOLKAR or one of the registered opposition parties—the PDI or the Islamist PPP.

The Indonesian ruling class know that there is more to the riots than an internal party row over the PDI leadership. The street protests reflect the growing popular discontent against a political system, called "New Order", which amounts to dictatorship, exploitation and an increasing gap between a small elite of big businessmen and millions of workers and poor peasants.

Indonesia is seen by western bosses as an example of a successful free market economy. And indeed there has been a huge growth of GDP (nearly 500% since 1966). Foreign investment in 1995 alone was \$4.5 billion.

But this growth is no "miracle". It is based on the blood and sweat of millions of workers who have very few rights. Just 6% of them are organised in the official trade union SPSI—a semi-company union often led by military officers to "guide" the workforce!

Land distribution is characteristic of a semi-colonial country. Eleven percent of the landowners control

almost 50% of the land, throwing the majority of peasants into poverty and dependence.

The Indonesian working class has a proud and impressive tradition of class struggle. It was here that the first revolutionary communist party in Asia was built, organised by the Trotskyist, Sneevliet.

President Suharto's dictatorship was created by a coup d'etat in 1965. Falsely claiming to be thwarting an attempt by the communists to seize power, his regime slaughtered half a million activists and sympathisers of the pro-Peking Communist Party (PKI). Every shadow of an independent labour movement was extinguished.

The savage repression of 1965 resulted in a historic defeat for the Indonesian working class, despite some mass demonstrations in 1974 (the Malari protests). This successful counter-revolution was the key precondition for the ensuing capitalist boom.

Strikes

But recent years have seen the rise of a new independent labour movement, both on the trade union and political level.

In 1990 a new independent trade union, the Solidarity Workers' Union (SBSK), held its first congress. The SBSK was replaced in 1992 by the Indonesian Workers'

Welfare Association (SBSI). This union stood at the forefront of several strike movements in recent years including the violent strikes and riots of April 1994.

One of its most prominent leaders Muchtar Pakpahan was arrested after that strike and is once again in custody after the July riots.

The main target of the govern-

ment witch-hunt in the recent weeks is the Peoples' Democratic Party (PRD). The PRD is illegal. It is relatively small claiming around 800 members and 126 cadre activists. The PRD works closely with the SBSI and has been involved in organising the strikes.

Its 27-year old leader, Budiman Sudjatmiko, is now charged with subversion and could be sentenced to death. Nine other PRD leaders are being held and 52 other detainees are "suspected" PRD activists.

Whilst the PRD uses some Marxist rhetoric and Suharto justifies its repression on the basis that they are the modern equivalent of the PKI, it is not a revolutionary communist party. Budiman insists that: "We choose the ideology of democratic socialism because it is the actual need of society".

But the Indonesian working class needs a revolutionary programme and a revolutionary party. It needs to fight for every democratic right but while refusing to confine the struggle for these rights within a whole stage of bourgeois democracy before socialist revolution.

Overthrow

The pressing needs of Indonesia's workers and poor peasants cannot be met by capitalism and bourgeois democracy. Only the overthrow of the system of exploitation of workers and poor peasants can open up a better future.

The Indonesian labour and democratic movement is under enormous pressure.

The government is trying to liquidate them organisationally. It is the duty of the international labour movement to give a practical demonstration of international solidarity. The Australian TUC has begun by demanding that its government cancel joint military exercises with the Indonesian Army. ■

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INTERNATIONAL
Where next?
Scargill's Socialist Labour Party at a crossroads

France: Police storm hunger strikers' sanctuary

Thousands march against state racism

BY EMILE GALLET

AT 7.30 in the morning, more than 1,000 riot police axed their way into Saint Bernard's church where 300 Africans were demanding the right to stay in France. Ten of them were in the eighth week of a hunger strike.

Brushing aside hundreds of protesters who had spent the night standing guard, the police stamped over the altar as the priest tried to say mass to ward off the attack, ignoring the shouts of the thousands who came from all over Paris as the news of the assault was heard on the radio.

They succeeded in clearing the church and arresting all the Africans, none of whom had residence papers (hence their title, the Sans-Papiers).

Everything appeared to be going the government's way, but the raid proved to be the high point of their day.

That evening, Friday 23 August, more than 10,000 people – trade unionists, activists and ordinary Parisians revolted by the government's brutality – marched through Paris to protest against the attack.

The demonstration ended in a pitched battle with riot police outside the detention centre where the Africans were being held. Mobilisations took place in a number of other French towns, an unprecedented level of protest for the traditional holiday month of August.

The next day it became apparent that all was not going the government's way. First, they had arrested "only" 220 Africans following the attack. Over



French police evict immigrants from church

60 of the protesters, fearing imminent police intervention, had left the church the previous evening.

Secondly, a mixture of police incompetence and legal skill on the part of the defence meant that the courts began to free the detainees.

Two days later, all but a handful of them had been temporarily freed, several dozen of them now armed with the residence papers for which they had fought so hard. The hunger strikers, who had also been arrested, gave up their strike once they were freed.

The government's victory was turning into a débâcle. Having tried to show itself to be resolute against the "menace" of immigration, in order to gain

votes from the racist electorate of Le Pen, the Chirac-Juppé government has revealed itself to be both weak and vicious.

As we go to print, 10 days after the attack, less than a dozen of the Sans-Papiers have been deported, although several dozen have had deportation orders confirmed by the courts.

A national day of mobilisation saw tens of thousands of people on the streets, including 15,000 in Paris. Far from having stamped out the spark represented by the Sans-Papiers, the government has merely fanned the flames of anti-racist protest. Another national day of action has been scheduled for a month's time.

All the signs are that this struggle,

which many people thought would never attract mass support, is merely the first in a long series of struggles to come against the government's reactionary policies in every sphere of society.

Last autumn, the French strike wave rocked the whole of Europe. According to a recent opinion poll, over 75% of the population expect strikes of similar or greater force in the next months.

The Sans-Papiers, by exposing the profound racism at the heart of the French state and mobilising tens of thousands in support of their just cause, have struck a significant blow against a government that is looking increasingly shaky. ■

Pouvoir Ouvrier

FOLLOWING the arrest of the Sans-Papiers, the key task was to stop their expulsion.

Air France workers had already pledged not to participate in their deportation by air.

On the evening of the 23 August, comrades of Pouvoir Ouvrier gave out the only leaflet on the demonstration, underlining this initiative and calling on all transport workers to refuse to participate in the imminent deportations. Civilian air-traffic controllers, for example, could effectively prevent even military aircraft taking off.

We also called for a wave of mass meetings and strikes throughout the country in support of the Sans-Papiers and for the free movement of all workers. Our comrades in Nantes took the initiative of calling a demonstration on the Friday evening. They mobilised 600 youth and workers, supported by the CGT trade union federation.

If the movement of the Sans-Papiers does turn out to mark the beginning of a new wave of the class struggle in France, our comrades are ready to make the most of it, as they were last November and December. ■

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USSR: End in sight for Chechen War?

Lebed deal rocks Tsar Boris

BY DAVE STOCKTON

LESS THAN two months after his victory in the second round of Russia's presidential election, Boris Yeltsin's handling of the Chechen crisis has strengthened his strongest potential rival and heir apparent, Alexander Lebed.

A successful Chechen assault on the capital of Grozny threw Yeltsin's regime into crisis. The Russian Army fled in headlong retreat, humiliating Yeltsin on the eve of his inauguration.

Yeltsin, and the Kremlin clique behind him, rushed to shift responsibility for repairing the debacle in Grozny onto the shoulders of Lebed, the new chief of the President's Security Council who had just assured them of victory in the second round by delivering two-thirds of his original voters to Yeltsin's camp.

Payment

Lebed was suddenly a major threat to the Bonapartist gang in the Kremlin. He was demanding payment for his services with a share of real power, hinting that he wanted to be nominated as Yeltsin's successor and given a big chunk of executive authority.

A Bonapartist system – where a single figure embodies executive power, unchallenged by any real powers for the legislature or judiciary – cannot toler-

ate two centres of power within it.

So, Lebed was packed off to Chechnya, against his will, to "solve the war" as he had promised to do during the first round of the election campaign. What powers he had were left deliberately vague.

Yeltsin did this in the hope that Lebed could win a breathing space for the retreating Russian forces but, in the longer term, discredit himself by failing to come up with a peace deal.

Obstructed

The Kremlin clique did not want a solution. All they wanted was time to enable the Army and Interior Ministry forces to mount a counter-offensive to crush the Chechen forces occupying central Grozny. That is why the Interior Minister, General Anatoly Kulikov, obstructed Lebed and threatened a massive onslaught against the city.

Lebed, however, did not fall into this trap. The military chaos amongst the Russian forces was worse than Moscow realised. Sections of the Army, as opposed to the Interior Ministry, were sympathetic to Lebed. Moreover, the dominant section of the Chechen leadership was ready to do a deal which would defend the gains they had made

in the July-August offensive.

In the negotiations, Lebed reportedly established a close rapport with the two Chechen leaders, Zelimkhan Yandarbiyev and Aslan Maskhadov, and negotiated not only a short-term ceasefire but also the outlines of a deal to end the war.

Yeltsin and his cronies set about undermining Lebed's authority on the ground in Chechnya. The Interior Ministry forces, who were doing most of the fighting, repeatedly refused to observe the ceasefires which Lebed negotiated. They committed horrible atrocities on the civilian population, both ethnic Russian and Chechen, fleeing Grozny.

Again, however, the Yeltsin faction's tactics failed. The threatened all-out assault on the city never materialised. The Chechen forces were well dug-in and highly motivated. They would have inflicted terrible casualties on the attacking forces. Lebed was, therefore, able to press on with the negotiations, despite Yeltsin's open criticisms of him.

Withdrawal

The deal that he has done with the Chechen leadership involves a suspension of the Chechens' claim for immediate and total independence in return for the withdrawal of Russian forces

from Grozny and the southern mountainous regions and a referendum on total independence in five years' time.

Yeltsin has so far refused even to meet Lebed. But for all his presidential powers, including over Lebed's position as National Security Adviser, Yeltsin has found himself in a cleft stick.

If he rejects the Lebed deal this would force its author into resignation. Yeltsin would still face an all-out war in Chechnya, which would probably slide into a full-scale bloodbath.

Block

Lebed would then almost certainly enter into a bloc with the Communist Party of the Russian Federation (KPRF) and would have a hugely popular cause: ending the war. Against a background in which the Far East miners only won their promised back pay through strike action in July, and millions more are threatening to follow their example, such a block would seriously undermine Yeltsin's electoral victory.

If, on the other hand, Yeltsin were to accept Lebed's deal, this would make the former general a still greater national hero and make it difficult to ditch him in the future. Already, it seems that substantial sections of the army, resentful at the way they have been treated in Chechnya, are rallying to Lebed's side.

Russian workers have nothing to gain from a war against Chechnya. Indeed, the successful implementation of the Chechens' right to self-determination would weaken the common enemies of both Russian and Chechen workers.

Solution

A free federation of peoples would be a better solution than the foundation of a small, isolated state ruined by war, but the Chechens must be able to decide without any coercion.

The divisions between Lebed and Yeltsin offer workers a major opportunity. Lebed is only too well aware of this:

"The country is forced to the brink of social explosion. Colossal damage is done to Russia's reputation and the nation's morale. This brings about all kinds of crises, financial, banking, energy and the crisis of (wage) non-payments. A revolutionary situation is quietly creeping up. Any two of these ingredients can make such an explosive cocktail that it would shake the whole world," (Radio interview, 16 August).

Russian workers must prepare to deepen and ultimately resolve this crisis with a positive answer: the long-overdue restoration of working class political power through revolution and a federation of soviet republics. ■

AUSTRALIA: Austerity budget hits workers, students and Aboriginals



Storming Parliament

On 19 August the Australian Congress of Trade Unions (ACTU) called a demonstration outside Parliament in the federal capital Canberra to protest at the new government's massive budget cuts and proposed new anti-trade unions laws. What the bureaucrats planned was a routine speechfest but the demonstrators had other ideas. Comrades from **Workers Power (Australia)** were there. **Peter Main** explores the background to the current attacks and the prospects for a strong working class response.

LESS THAN six months after its sweeping election victory, Australia's right wing Liberal/National coalition government has unveiled its plans for an all out attack on the working class. The immediate thrust of the offensive is the "breakthrough budget" presented by Finance Minister Peter Costello on 20 August.

This will force through \$A4 billion (approximately £2 billion) worth of cuts in public spending this year and a further \$A5 to \$A4 billion the next year. These include \$A1.8 billion from tertiary education, \$A1.5 billion from employment programmes, \$A570 million from spending on the elderly and a complete end to all public spending on dental care. Workers won't be able to bite, but the cuts sure will!

In the public sector this will mean thousands of jobs being slashed, as well as services for millions disappearing. In education the cuts could mean up to 21,000 student places being lost, depriving working class youth of the chance of higher education.

The coalition was elected on promises that the sale of public assets, like the state telecom company Telstra, would be used to finance improved public services. This sounds good on election hustings, but it was nothing more than a lie to conceal the attack on those very public services.

Divide and rule

As with Chirac in France, reality has not been long in coming. But the Premier, John Howard, has done his homework and hopes to avoid the kind of mass strike response that hit France last December.

As well as the budget proposals, the Coalition has brought in a range of measures which are intended to divide any potential counter-attack and to whip up reactionary racist support for the government. There are to be \$A400 million cuts in programmes that support Aboriginal interests, a campaign against "dole fraud" and the introduction of a "youth payment" to replace the dole or grants for those under 21. Racism is a key part of Howard's gameplan. Aboriginal land rights, immigrant and positive discrimination legislation have long been targeted by right wing MPs. Now they are all under direct attack from Howard's legislative programme.

Important as these attacks are, they will not bring about the fundamental shift of power and wealth to the capi-

talists which the government is aiming. For that, they need to cripple the basic organisations of the workers—the trade unions.

Anti-union laws

After 13 years of a Labour government that cut living standards by 10% through backroom deals with the union leaders, the Australian unions are not as strong as once they were. But, as the events in Canberra show, they are very far from being beaten. Important strikes in car manufacturing, oil refining, coal mining, glass production and the docks show that union members see the need to stand and fight immediately.

On 23 May, the government introduced new anti-union laws in Parliament. The "Workplace Relations and other Legislation Bill", if enacted, will do away with most collectively negotiated national contracts and replace them with individual contracts. It will also drastically reduce the unions' rights of access to workplaces, give employers the right to veto which union workers can join, remove the unfair dismissal laws and re-introduce a ban on secondary picketing.

Howard and his Industry Minister, Peter Reith, have learned from the experience of other countries, in particular from Britain and New Zealand. They know full well that once such laws are in place the possibility of workers being able to take effective action against wage cuts, redundancies, unsafe conditions and victimisation is seriously undermined.

They also realise that the most efficient way to enforce such laws is to encourage the union leaders themselves to police them. With this in mind, the new Bill allows for unions to be sued for damages if members break any of the provisions of the law.

General Strike

Australian workers also need to learn the lessons of their brothers and sisters abroad. These laws must be stopped in their tracks, before they ever reach the statute book. This was the central message of the leaflet distributed by Workers Power (Australia) at the Canberra demo:

"Class Wide Attacks Demand a Class Wide Defence . . . the only class wide defence that will be effective in defeating the government's offensive will be a general strike, an indefinite withdrawal of workers' labour power on a mass scale . . . Such action is

both necessary and possible."

That is exactly right. The fight against the anti-union laws is absolutely central. It is the strategic heart of the bosses' offensive.

But, as the leaflet also says, "general strikes don't fall from the sky". And they certainly won't be handed down by the bureaucracy. Australian Congress of Trade Unions (ACTU) president Jennie George has threatened to go to the high court to try and oppose the bill. But since when have judges been the friends of workers' rights?

Bill Kelty, the ACTU secretary isn't even sure he's opposed to the laws. He thinks they are necessary to "create wealth for the nation" but just wished they could be brought in "a little slower".

These whingeing bureaucrats don't inspire confidence. But workers can't simply ignore them. The only body that can call a general strike of the whole union movement is the leadership of ACTU. They do not want such a strike, but thousands of members of affiliated unions can force them to call it. And building a movement for a general strike from below, to force the leaders to act, is the best way to build a new fighting leadership to replace the timeservers and ditherers.

The arguments for a general strike must be taken into the unions right up to ACTU. But general strikes are not born simply from resolutions. They must be organised for, and the arguments for all out and indefinite action have to be popularised in workplace bulletins, union branches and on the picket lines of every strike taking place now.

A general strike paralyses the normal functions of society. For the workers themselves to be able to control events they need to have their own base organisations. In Britain in 1926 these were called "Action Councils" but, whatever the name, what will be needed are locally based organisations made up of elected delegates from the main working class organisations in the factories and communities.

A start can be made by building action committees to campaign against the Workplace Relations Bill. These should take the initiative in explaining the dangers of the Bill to the working class through leafleting workplaces, organising meetings and building solidarity with workers already in dispute.

Although the anti-union laws are so central to Howard's strategy that noth-

On the front line in Canberra: an eyewitness account

THE OFFICIAL ACTU platform was set up across the road from the entrance to Parliament, facing away from the building. Various ACTU hacks and speakers from the Australian Labor Party (ALP), the Democrats and Greens, gave dull-witted speeches. Meanwhile hippy music designed to pacify the masses filled in the gaps.

As the crowd grew to about 30,000, it became clear that the "official" rally was being upstaged by an "unofficial" one between Parliament and the back of the main stage. This began with around 3,000 Aboriginal protesters who marched on the forecourt area of Parliament where they were stopped by police. At the urging of the rest of the crowd chanting "Let them through", these militants, who were quickly joined by hundreds of trade unionists and students, smashed through the blue barricades and massed directly outside Parliament.

The first breach of the Parliament doors occurred around 1pm. A crowd of several hundred, including Aborigines and scores of CFMEU (Combined Forestry Mining and Engineers Union) workers, identifiable by their T-shirts and caps, smashed down the front doors and stormed into the foyer where they were met by ranks of riot police at least ten deep.

ing short of an indefinite general strike is likely to stop them, this does not mean that other action cannot be used as part of the campaign against them.

Building for a general strike can and should include protest strikes and mass demos, like the one at Canberra, timed to coincide with key stages in the Bill's progress, or state and city-wide strikes, solidarity actions where disputes highlight particular aspects of the legislation.

One of the reasons why Howard's coalition is confident enough to risk such vicious legislation is the size of his parliamentary majority: 100 seats out of a total of only 148. But despite Howard's majority, there is every reason to believe that determined and militant mass action can defeat him.

A quick response is crucial

The fact that he heads a coalition is a potential weakness. Several sections of the Australian bourgeoisie are doubtful of the wisdom of his aggressive tactics. This was reflected in the Senate decision in May to defer the Workplace Relations Bill to a special committee

Over the next two hours there were several violent confrontations, with 70 cops and an unspecified number of protesters injured. At one stage there was a mass arrest when 40-50 protesters were surrounded by cops and isolated from the main contingent. This was followed by further breaches as the crowd forced its way further inside. During this time, there was no shortage of replacements for the "front line" who were being rotated by a sort of spontaneous rank and file organising committee.

The cops regained control when several hundred reinforcements arrived and baton-charged the protesters inside, causing injuries to many. By 3pm or thereabouts, all protesters had been cleared from inside Parliament and the rally was over.

The ACTU, the ALP, the Democrats and the Greens, have all condemned the violence as the actions of a tiny minority but this is an absolute lie. At the time of the actions, there were at least as many people involved in the "unofficial" as the "official" rally and the sympathies of the majority were clearly with those who had stormed Parliament. All in all, the rally, and the storming of parliament, were an undeniable expression of working class anger at the government's budget and the new Industrial Relations Bill. ■

that would not meet until late August. They sensed the need to take stock of the working class response, wary of provoking a potentially unstoppable backlash.

But because of Australia's short election cycle Howard has got to move fast in this term of office. He wants to go for a second term with the workers' movement already hamstrung and demobilised.

But, if time is precious for him, it is of the essence for the workers' movement. A determined counter-attack now, on the divisive budget cuts, on the attacks on Aboriginal rights as well as on the anti-union laws, is not an optional extra, not one possibility among many. For militants it is an absolute necessity to defeat a potentially paralysing blow.

Australian workers, as recent events have shown, have not been beaten. They will fight back. The task now is to generalise that willingness, organise and direct it towards smashing the coalition offensive. Such a fight could put socialism, not just a return to a wage cutting Labor government, firmly on the agenda. ■

BOSNIA: Elections legitimise ethnic carve-up

Imperialism rewards the butchers

BY MARTIN SUCHANEK

THE PARLIAMENTARY and presidential elections in Bosnia are due on 14 September. They represent a further ethnic carve up of the country which is a direct result of the imperialist-sponsored Dayton Accord.

In November 1995 the US government forced the Serbian, Croatian and Bosnian governments to sign a settlement ending the Bosnian war.

This treaty, the Dayton Accord, was a result of US imperialism's willingness and ability to reassert its role as the hegemonic power against the divided European imperialists. It was also the result of imperialism's success in forcing the warring parties to the negotiating table.

The bourgeois media, throughout the world, has presented the emergence of three ethnic statelets within Bosnia as a failure to implement the Accord. Nothing could be further from the truth. The "violations" are the logical results of the Accord.

The Accord was not an attempt to rescue or reconstruct a multi-ethnic Bosnia, but a reward for Serbia and Croatia's war gains at the expense of the Bosnians. It was a recognition of their key role as regional powers that could stabilise the Balkans in the interest of imperialism.

The Accord represented a strengthening of imperialism's role in the region. All the ruling regimes are highly dependent on imperialist aid to reconstruct their economies and to push through capitalist restoration.

But the Accord could not be implemented by economic pressure alone. It depends on the presence of 60,000 foreign troops under imperialist command (IFOR). The troops are not likely to be withdrawn until the US achieves its aim: the creation of a military balance of power between Croatia, Serbia and the Bosnian Muslims that would deter all forces from restarting the war of conquest and annexation.

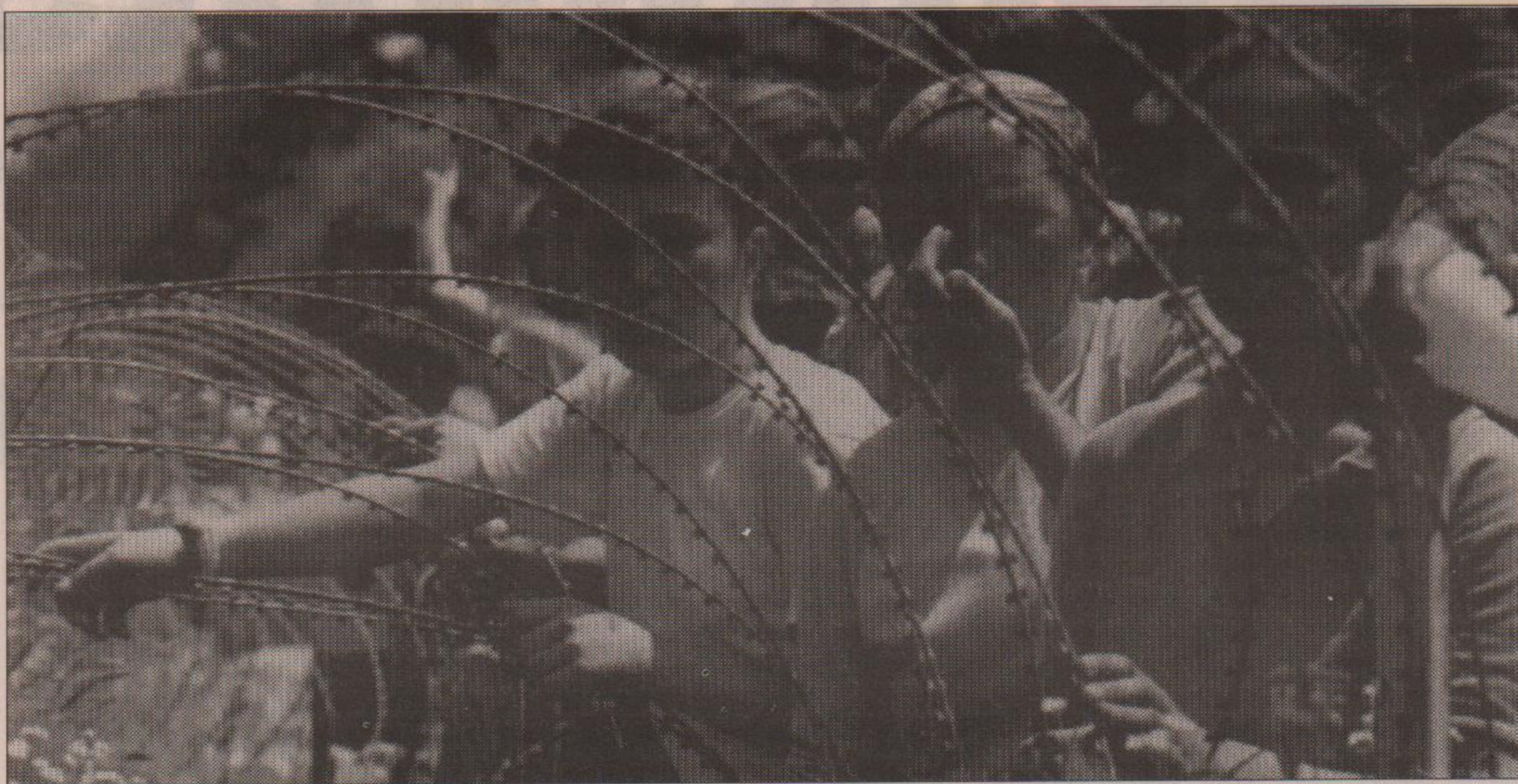
The Accord formally committed the signatories to preserve and rebuild a "unitary" Bosnian state. But this state has a very special character. Even under the terms of the treaty, two states (the Serbian and the Bosnia-Croat Federation) effectively exist, each with its own police and army. Neither is under the control of the Bosnian government.

A third statelet, Bosnian Croat "Herzeg-Bosna", run by the reactionary HDZ, also exists. Despite numerous promises to "dissolve" it, such as the last one given after the elections in Mostar, this will not happen. On the contrary, the fake character of this federation was most sharply revealed in the last elections in Croatia, when the Croats of Herzeg-Bosna were allowed to take part in the election of president Tudjman, despite nominally living in a different state.

The last year has not seen any real steps towards rebuilding Bosnia as a multi-ethnic state.

The policy of dividing Bosnia into ethnically "pure" areas has been pursued by all sides since the Accord has been signed. This was illustrated in Sarajevo at the beginning of the year, when the Serbian chauvinists as well as the Bosnian government did everything to destroy what was left of the multi-ethnic character of the city. The IFOR troops in and around Sarajevo did nothing to prevent it.

The Accord allowed for the return of displaced workers and peasants to their former homes, especially ethnically-cleansed Bosnian Muslims. The Bosnian Serb and Croat authorities refused the necessary authorisation, and neither



Victims of Srebrenica genocide

they nor IFOR troops will extend protection to those who want to return.

The most reactionary political forces have been able to remain in power. Despite all the calls for bringing the "war criminals" to court, it is these war criminals who are still in military and political control in the Serbian and Croat territories.

The Bosnian ruling party, Izetbegovic's SDA, has given up most of its multi-ethnic aspirations. This is evidenced by the rise in influence of the reactionary Islamist Hasan Muratovic, the new prime minister, and the resignation of the bourgeois democrat Haris Silajdzic who has split with the SDA.

The leader of the Bosnian Social Democratic Party has been prevented from standing in the elections by physical threats from the Bosnian Serbs. In the elections in Mostar, Croat candidates who stood on joint lists with the Bosnian Muslims were beaten up in the Croat part of the town and their homes raided. In Muslim areas, SDA squads and police have repeatedly attacked candidates and meetings of other parties.

All in all the elections will be a further step towards consolidating the territorial ethnic divisions of Bosnia. The major parties are "persuading" as many of the electorate as they can to register in areas they control, not where they lived before the war.

The coming elections are important for the imperialist forces as well as for the reactionary leaders in Bosnia itself.

In the USA, they will be used to demonstrate a foreign policy success for Clinton. The elections are also a test

for the European imperialist powers whose institutions are overseeing the elections.

The holding of the elections, and the creation of parliamentary and governmental bodies legitimised by them, will give the green light for the deportation of hundreds of thousands of Bosnian refugees all across Europe.

The various nationalist leaderships in Bosnia are quite happy with the elections. Within their ethnically cleansed enclaves, they are likely to win.

The elections will give democratic credentials to those parties whose aim is to split their ethnically "pure" regions from Bosnia, fuse them with their respective "motherlands" and thereby prepare a way to achieve the aim they previously pursued by war—the carve up of Bosnia.

This is why the Bosnian government is least keen on the elections. Izetbegovic's whole policy has led him into this trap.

Over the last year, the Bosnian government has become the force most reliant on imperialism's support and aid. And Izetbegovic's SDA is likely to finally accept the split up of Bosnia if that is the price for controlling their own mini-state.

The warmongers, the nationalists, the enemies of the working class will not be removed from power by the elections. Their power will be consolidated. The elections are a fraudulent attempt to bolster imperialism's plans and to establish the ethnic parties in dictatorial positions in the three statelets.

The Bosnian workers' movement

War crime hypocrisy

THE INTERNATIONAL War Crimes Tribunal, sitting in The Hague, Holland, has heard evidence of torture beyond belief. Beatings, rape, castration and endless sadistic variants—invariably resulting in death. Mehmet Alic, a 75 year old survivor of Nazi concentration camps who was subjected to the ordeal of the Serb-run Omarska concentration camp in 1992 said: "It was a death camp. You cannot imagine."

Those who are rightly outraged at what happened in the Bosnian genocide should also be outraged at the impotence and hypocrisy of the current war crimes process.

It is impotent precisely because there is no just, progressive peace in the Balkans. The architects of the genocide—Milosevic, Karadzic, Mladic, Tudjman and the rest—have

been rewarded by the Dayton peace deal. IFOR will not touch the biggest criminals, just as the imperialist troops did nothing to stop the genocide.

It is hypocritical because the ruling class politicians and judges who are running the tribunals represent the same regimes who have perpetrated their own war crimes with impunity. The British in Kenya and Ireland, the USA in Vietnam and Cambodia, the French in Algeria—all have perpetrated inhuman crimes in their colonial wars.

The real criminals of the Bosnian genocide deserve a bullet in the neck. But only a decisive victory for the working class in the Balkans can deliver that kind of justice. Until then the process in The Hague will remain what it is meant to be—a meaningless sideshow. ■

could and should have mobilised a campaign to boycott these elections, indicating its rejection of the ethnic division of Bosnia. However, it did not and this testifies to continued illusions in elections after four years of war. Workers wishing to preserve a multi-ethnic Bosnia will participate in the elections. They will seek representation for parties which pledge to fight for this.

There are only few viable political forces standing against ruling reactionary parties. On the one hand, there is the open bourgeois, pro-imperialist party of Silajdzic, which stands for a unitary bourgeois-democratic, multi-ethnic Bosnia. No vote must be given to this force.

On the other, there is the left alliance around the Social Democratic Party of Bosnia-Herzegovina (SDP), which emerged out of the former Stalinist "League of Communists". The SDP stood against Serb and Croat nationalists. Its stronghold is Tuzla, where it is linked to the miners' union.

Despite its bourgeois, pro-capitalist programme and its refusal to reject the imperialist bombardments of the Bosnian Serbs, it is organically linked to the working class and has a clear anti-nationalist stand.

Unlike nearly all the other parties it is not confined to the Bosnian Muslim areas, but has links with trade unionists and leftists in the other parts of Bosnia and in Serbia and Croatia.

However, it stands in an electoral block with one other reformist party, the Union of Bosnian-Herzegovinan Social Democrats (UBSD), and three petit-bourgeois parties: the Croatian Peasant Party (HSS), the Republican Party (RS) and the Muslim-Bosnian Organisation (MBO).

Faced with this alliance workers should vote only for the SDP candidates. If the electoral list system makes this impossible then they should cross off the other candidates from the list, thereby expressing both their support for the SDP as a multi-ethnic workers' party and their opposition to its class collaborationist policy.

Such a policy clearly must not be confused with giving any political support to the SDP or a refusing to criticise its positions.

But any revolutionary policy on Bosnia today will have to relate to existing political, trade union and workplace organisations in the country.

Most crucially, a party must be created which can give a lead to these struggles, fighting for an action programme to link them with the fight against capitalist restoration, imperialism, the old bureaucrats and the new bourgeoisie. ■

a world to win

Zimbabwe

The threat of a general strike forced Robert Mugabe's government to back down in its confrontation with 60,000 striking public sector workers. The strike, involving civil servants, doctors, nurses and engineers, was the biggest since 1980 and closed airports, hospitals and mortuaries.

After a rally of 7,000 in the capital, Harare, the Labour Minister, Florence Chitawo, tried to break the strike. During a TV interview she announced the sacking of all civil servants involved in the strike. The determination and confidence of the strikers was summed up by their reply:

"We were not hired on TV so we can't be sacked on TV. There are procedures for dismissing workers and the government must follow them."

Now the government has offered a further 20% pay rise on top of the original 6-9%. The strikers have agreed to return to work and to open negotiations—but only if all dismissals are withdrawn and there are guarantees of no victimisation.

South Korea

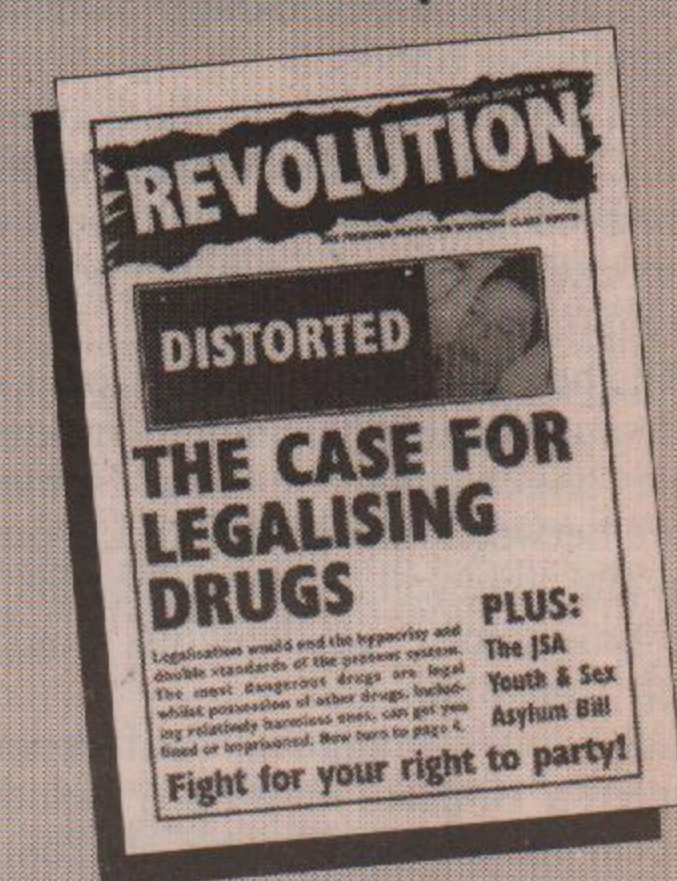
The government has followed up its bloody suppression of the student occupation of Yonsei University by introducing even more draconian legislation against demonstrations and public rallies. The latest chapter in the conflict between students and government began with an attempt to ban the annual demo in favour of re-unification with the North.

Seven thousand students occupied university buildings and fortified them against the expected routine attack by riot police. The authorities, however, anxious to exploit the unpopularity of the re-unification issue to drive a wedge between students and increasingly militant trade unions, turned the situation into a full scale military exercise. As 20,000 paramilitary police prepared to storm the campus, army snipers were dropped from helicopters to pick off any pockets of effective resistance.

The defeat of the students provided the excuse for new laws which require organisers to obtain written permission from the owners of property near the points of assembly of future demos and allow police to use live ammunition against demonstrators. Although presented as a response to the threat of North Korean orchestrated subversives, these laws, if allowed to be introduced, will be used against the organised workers' movement, raising the prospect of a repeat of the massacre of some 200 in Kwangju in 1980.

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USA: New challenge to the bosses' parties

Can Labor break with Democrats?

June witnessed the birth of a Labor Party in the USA. Can it break the mould of US politics? **GR McColl** assesses its chances

THE TWO main bosses' parties in the USA – the Republicans and the Democrats – staged their conventions in August to crown Bob Dole and Bill Clinton as their standardbearers in the November presidential contest. But June witnessed the birth of a new political party that claims to be a voice for the organised working class.

The founding conference took place in the "rustbelt" city of Cleveland, Ohio, where the "liberal" Democratic mayor has sought to tear up negotiated agreements with local government unions.

Representatives at the meeting on 6-9 June came from labour movement organisations with a combined membership of one million. The Cleveland conference attracted 1,400 delegates from 44 of the 50 states. Most of them were officials or activists in important trade unions.

A driving force behind the party's formation has come from the left bureaucrats who run the Oil, Chemical and Atomic Workers' Union (OCAW), particularly its president Robert Wages and its former secretary-treasurer Tony Mazzochi.

Mouthpiece

The other principal impetus has been a coalition of forces around the organisation Labor Party Advocates, first established in 1991 and closely associated with the journal Labor Notes. This publication has provided a mouthpiece for groupings like New Directions in the United Auto Workers (UAW) and Teamsters for a Democratic Union, both of which have achieved success in ousting the most corrupt, right-wing union bureaucrats – albeit with the help of state intervention in the case of the Teamsters.

In addition to OCAW members, there were representatives from the United Mineworkers, the west coast International Longshoremen's Union (which has been at the forefront of international support for the Liverpool dockers), the Stalinist-dominated United Electrical Workers and several public sector unions including the American Federation of Government Employees and the California Nurses' Association.

In addition to this national union support, substantial financial donations for the founding convention also came from local branches of the Teamsters, the Bakers' Union and the UAW.

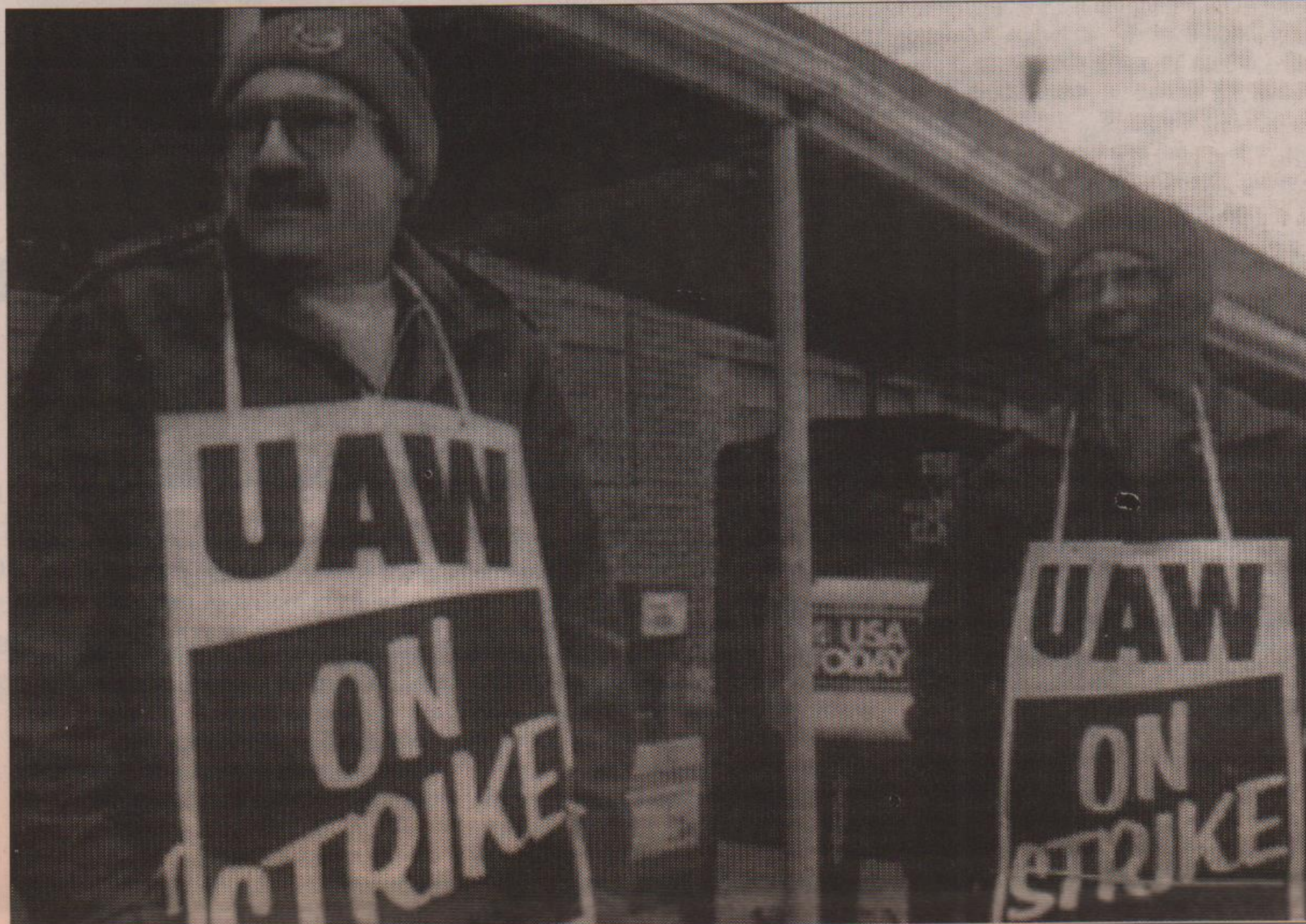
Battling

The event also attracted support from strikers battling the press barons at the Detroit News and from "labor's war zone" in Decatur, Illinois, where thousands of workers have been on protracted strikes or locked out by various multinational bosses.

In a keynote speech to the conference, OCAW's president Wages spoke of the need for a party that will "organise workers against organised bosses and capital".

The new Labor Party, however, is a far from revolutionary organisation. Wages has characterised it as "somewhere between the old British Labour Party and continental social democrats". But some of its demands would shock Tony Blair.

US Labor's inaugural conference adopted a 16-point manifesto including a call for the introduction of a four-day, 32-hour working week with no loss of pay, a minimum wage of \$10 (£6.50)



Car workers on strike: US Labor must break from Clinton's Democrats

an hour to be constitutionally guaranteed and a comprehensive system of public healthcare. African-American workers were under-represented among the conference delegates, but a 50-strong black caucus did introduce a commitment to combating racism.

The party has little to say, however, about US immigration controls which have targeted Latino workers with mounting ruthlessness. America's Labor Party also failed to take a clear position on the most hotly contested social question in US politics: abortion rights.

In fact, there is good reason to question the willingness of the party's key figures from the union bureaucracy to break decisively from the Democrats, who have generally enjoyed the support of the US union bureaucracy since Roosevelt's New Deal in the 1930s.

The fledgling organisation will not be entering the presidential contest between incumbent Democrat Clinton and the Republicans' Bob Dole, though it appears that some Labor supporters may be mounting independent Congressional candidacies. The conference

radical, compared to his all but invisible predecessor, Lane Kirkland, but his strategy remains hitching organised labor's wagon to the Democrats.

The AFL-CIO is throwing some \$35 (£23.4) million behind Clinton's re-election effort and the campaign of Congressional Democrats seeking to take the federal legislature back from Republican Newt Gingrich. This figure far exceeds spending on the bureaucrats' "union summer" initiative, designed to recruit new union members, especially in the southern states with their tradition of

The Clinton years have actually seen the gap between rich and poor in the US grow at a faster rate than during Ronald Reagan's years. Clinton has gone along with much of the Republican Congressional agenda, ratifying drastic cuts in social welfare spending including the Medicare programme.

Despite pledging support to the programme's progressive demands, Wages made it plain that the new party was not about to challenge the private ownership of capital. The platform also had nothing of substance to say about the "foreign policy" of US imperialism, either in critical support of besieged Cuba or against the US military presence in Bosnia.

Confront

Without a willingness to openly confront the power of private capital, and the might of the state that ultimately defends it, the party's calls for radical changes are doomed to remain nothing more than a pious wish-list. US Labor adopted a call for 50% cut in the Pentagon's budget, effectively condoning the other half: an annual military expenditure of \$140 (£90.9) billion.

So whilst the party's launch may symbolise the start of a sea change in the consciousness of the US working class, it would be premature to describe the Cleveland event as an historic turning point.

adopted a position of postponing any independent electoral activity for a minimum of two years, when the party is due to stage its next national gathering.

This does not signify a progressive rejection of electoralism; it does call into question whether the new party will prove different from the American Labor Party of the 1930s, which under the influence of the Communist Party threw its weight behind Roosevelt in the 1936 presidential election at the very time that union militancy was reaching an historic peak.

Elements of the Labor Party leadership clearly see the organisation as little more than a pressure group on the Democrats. The conference rejected a proposal that would have categorically denied Democrats the Labor Party's endorsement.

There is a real danger that, in practice, the organisation will serve as left cover for the new mainstream leadership of the AFL-CIO (the US equivalent of the TUC) around its recently elected president John Sweeney. Sweeney may appear to be a dynamic

implacable hostility to organised labor.

For all his rhetoric about rebuilding the unions in the USA from the grassroots, Sweeney has been fulsome in his praise of Clinton for doing "a great job as president".

The Clinton administration's record, however, has only served to swell the potential audience for a new party, claiming to represent the working class. In office, Clinton has either ignored or barely fulfilled his meagre pledges of the 1992 campaign, finally signing legislation to raise the minimum wage four years into his administration.

Failed

He has failed to introduce a promised measure to ban the hiring of scab labour as permanent replacements for strikers, a feature of several key strikes in the past decade including the Bridgestone/Firestone dispute which continues after more than two years.

The Clinton years have actually seen the gap between rich and poor in the US grow at a faster rate than during Ronald Reagan's years. Clinton has

gone along with much of the Republican Congressional agenda, ratifying drastic cuts in social welfare spending including the Medicare programme.

At the end of July, in his most cynical betrayal yet, Clinton agreed to a Republican bill that ends universal entitlement to the most basic welfare provision. It is legislation that predictably targets single mothers, demanding that any woman under 18 with a child must live with an adult and continue in school in order to be eligible for any benefits.

Other provisions of the bill strip unemployed adults between the ages of 18 and 50 of any right to claim food stamps in a country where virtually all unemployment benefit dries up after 12 months. The legislation's thinly disguised racism becomes obvious in its attack on legal immigrants who are not yet US citizens. They are denied access both to food stamps and any Supplemental Social Insurance payment.

Meanwhile, job insecurity has become even more commonplace in the Clinton years, with some 2.5 million workers losing their jobs in the bosses' restructuring of key corporations since 1991, while real wages have continued to stagnate for the majority of the US working class.

Opposition

But the Clinton years have also seen a number of bitter local or sectional struggles, born out of the anger felt by many workers at an endless series of "giveback" contracts in industries from aerospace (Boeing and McDonnell-Douglas) to cars (General Motors). Other local battles, such as those in Detroit and Decatur, have fuelled a growing opposition to the AFL-CIO's debilitating relationship with the Democrats generally and so bolstered the potential appeal of a new party.

The US Labor Party might give voice to that discontent. Despite its reformist programme, the emergence of a workers' party of some magnitude in the world's largest imperialist power is a significant development that US revolutionaries must relate to through a variety of tactics. The chances of transforming this organisation into an instrument for socialist revolution are probably slim, but it would be sectarian folly to dismiss the US Labor Party out of hand.

At present, the party leadership appears to be far more tolerant of organised leftists than Arthur Scargill's SLP in Britain.

Organise

For example, Militant Labour's US sister organisation and USFI supporters around the paper Socialist Action have been able to organise quite openly in the midst of the founding conference. In the coming months, revolutionary Marxists in the USA face a patient struggle to win the best militants attracted to the Labor Party to a revolutionary programme and the kind of combat organisation required to overthrow capitalism in its still dominant imperialist heartland.

They must also confront the immediate task of forcing the new party's current leadership, composed largely of union bureaucrats, to fight Clinton with more than rhetoric, challenging the Democrats both electorally and with industrial muscle against the vicious austerity drive they have pushed through with nearly as much relish as Gingrich's Republicans. ■

Scottish independence

Dear comrades

In his article in *Workers Power* 202, John McKee says, "Socialists must attack the myth of a "nationally oppressed" Scotland. Scotland has never been an oppressed nation like Ireland".

This is rich stuff indeed. Ironically, it comes on the two hundred and fiftieth anniversary of the massacre at Culloden.

In the immediate aftermath of this event, and for a century or so afterwards, the British State subjected the people of Scotland's Gaelic heartland, until then Scotland's most populous area, to a planned physical extermina-

tion and a largely successful ethnic cleansing. Doesn't this qualify as "national oppression" to John McKee?

His statement is a nonsense, a "historical statement" based on proof-by-assertion, and larded with the same British "national chauvinism" which John McKee later condemns in the Tories.

Instead of insisting on the sacred unity of the British State, Socialists would be better advised to look at the reality of everyday life in Scotland, a country largely ruled by a non-elective colonial regime (the Scottish Office), whose functionaries are selected by

whichever English government happens to be in power, and over whose decisions the people of Scotland have no control.

The issue in Scotland is not the reform of the British State, by devolution or other means. The issue is the desire of the Scottish people to fully exercise their basic democratic rights to national self-determination and freedom. Anyone who opposes this can hardly claim to act in the name of Socialism.

Faternally,
Adam Busby
Portlaoise Prison, Eire.

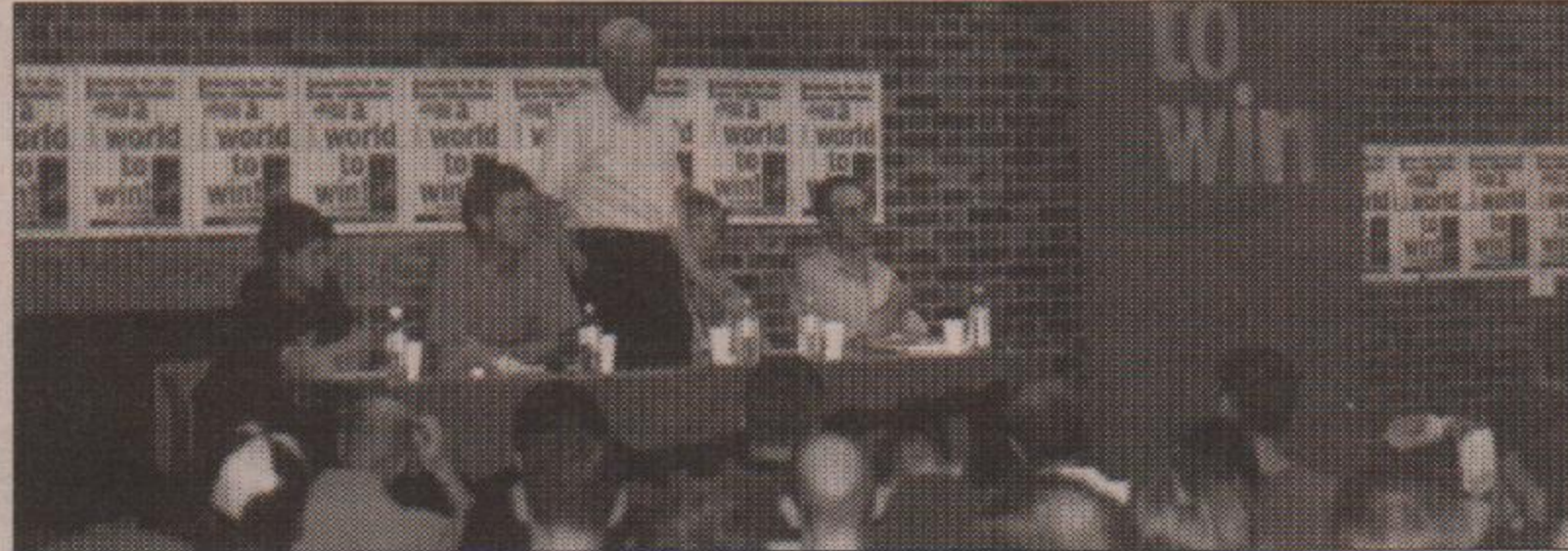
A World to Win: a success

OVER 150 people came to A World to Win, four days of debate and discussion organised by Workers Power in late July. The event was a tremendous success, enlivened by a truly internationalist spirit with militants from 15 countries attending.

Members from other sections of our international organisation, the LRCL, contributed to many of the discussions, including sessions on the Maori struggle in New Zealand, the crisis in Northern Ireland, and South East Asia. There was a course for German speakers convened by members of our sister organisations in Germany and Austria.

Over a hundred people came to a lively debate between Workers Power and a member of the Socialist Labour Party (SLP), during which representatives of various strands of opinion inside and outside the SLP put forward their views. The debate highlighted the centrality of a revolutionary programme. It vindicated Workers Power's argument that only such a programme can lay the basis of a truly revolutionary party, and our struggle to win support for such a programme in every sphere of the class struggle, including amongst comrades currently within the SLP.

A wide range of topics, including the



Militants from the Liverpool docks addressing A World to Win

history of the Fourth International, the nature of socialist planning, the state of the Labour Party, the European Union, legalisation of drugs, and post-modernism were covered at the event. Supporters of the youth paper *Revolution* participated in the sessions, showing their enthusiasm for education and debate as well as for political action.

Several left-wing groups participated in A World to Win, contributing to comradely arguments and sharp debates. In contrast to the often bureaucratically run meetings staged by larger groups such as the SWP, our event was thoroughly democratic. Don't take our word for it. A member of the CPGB reported in the *Weekly Worker* that "the school was generally conducted in a fraternal and comradely spirit, with opponents of Workers Power generally

allowed to intervene in debates". Indeed members and supporters from at least eight other tendencies were present, all of whom intervened, some on several occasions and in numerous sessions.

In the evenings we held three rallies, including speakers from the Liverpool Docks strike and Women on the Waterfront (see photo), London Unison, a member of the Argentinian PTS, participants in the mass struggles in France last December, and from student struggles in Germany, Austria and Australia this year. At the final rally on prospects for revolution in Britain we collected over £1,300 for our new fighting fund.

A World to Win was a great success, and we plan to hold more events like it in the future. Keep reading *Workers Power* for the dates of the next one! ■

Obituary: Mickey Fenn

11 January 1938–28 July 1996

MICKEY FENN, East London dockworker, militant and revolutionary, died from a heart attack on 28 July. At his funeral he was justly described as a credit to his family, his union and his class. Our condolences go to his family, friends and comrades.

In his time he was a member of the Communist Party (CPGB) and the Socialist Workers' Party (SWP) but he left both when he found that their politics came into conflict with some of the most basic trade union and socialist principles that he had learnt in the docks.

With the CPGB it was the strategy of relying on left trade union leaders that brought Mickey into conflict with the leadership. He learnt the value and political potential of rank and file organisation in the campaigns against casual labour in the dock industry and against the Heath government's anti-trade union laws.

The CPGB turned its back on that potential, advising the dockers, who were spearheading a near general strike against the anti-union laws in 1972, to put their faith in negotiations by the TGWU's bureaucracy. Mickey tore up his party card in disgust.

In 1973, the Pinochet coup in Chile underlined the impossibility of any parliamentary road to socialism, and Mickey joined the International Socialists (now SWP). Their support for rank and file organisation against the union bureaucrats and for revolution, as against reform, appeared to sum up the

lessons he had learned.

In the SWP, he was active in the campaign to build a rank and file movement in the docks and was an enthusiastic activist in the anti-fascist movement in East London.

At the time, the National Front was growing and the SWP was still committed to mobilisations to impose "No Platform for Fascists" physically.

However, when the SWP made an abrupt right turn after the election of the Tories in 1979 and not only dropped rank and file movements but even opposed members standing for election as stewards, Mickey Fenn saw this as an abdication of responsibility. He left the SWP and remained a steward in the Tilbury docks after the closure of the Royals in London.

Without political organisation, the principles which guided him in the 1980s were essentially syndicalist. He remained at the centre of trade unionism in the docks as a member of the unofficial National Port Shop Stewards' Committee, but was not able to create an alternative political strategy to that of the majority of the NPSSC. He fought to bring the docks out alongside the miners in 1984, but the majority accepted the officials' line that they could not jeopardise union funds by breaking the anti-union laws.

In 1989, when the Port Employers finally moved to destroy the National Dock Labour Scheme, the NPSSC accepted the T&G's refusal to make a national strike official.

While he was happy to speak at

Workers Power meetings during that strike, Mickey did not agree with us on the need to oppose the leadership line, arguing that keeping the strike unofficial allowed them to keep the officials at arms' length.

In the event the strike was defeated, job security was scrapped and Mickey himself was made redundant.

During the late 1980s and early 1990s Mickey again helped build an anti-fascist movement. With the British National Party trying to build a base in East London, Mickey worked with Anti-Fascist Action. He played a key role in winning trade union support for the campaign and was always willing to speak at its meetings.

Mickey was indeed a credit to his family, his union and his class. His untimely death is a real loss. But as he himself would have insisted, his class will always produce more fighters like him. There can be no doubt that the fate of the British revolution will be decided by comrades like Mickey Fenn. ■

WORKERS POWER

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WHERE WE STAND



Capitalism

is an anarchic and crisis-ridden economic system based on production for profit. We are for the expropriation of the capitalist class and the abolition of capitalism. We are for its replacement by socialist production planned to satisfy human need. Only the socialist revolution and the smashing of the capitalist state can achieve this goal. Only the working class, led by a revolutionary vanguard party and organised into workers' councils and workers' militia can lead such a revolution to victory and establish the dictatorship of the proletariat. There is no peaceful, parliamentary road to socialism.



The Labour Party

is not a socialist party. It is a bourgeois workers' party—bourgeois in its politics and its practice, but based on the working class via the trade unions and supported by the mass of workers at the polls. We are for the building of a revolutionary tendency in the Labour Party, in order to win workers within those organisations away from reformism and to the revolutionary party.



The Trade Unions

must be transformed by a rank and file movement to oust the reformist bureaucrats, to democratise the unions and win them to a revolutionary action programme based on a system of transitional demands which serve as a bridge between today's struggles and the socialist revolution. Central to this is the fight for workers' control of production. We are for the building of fighting organisations of the working class—factory committees, industrial unions, councils of action, and workers' defence organisations.



October 1917

The Russian revolution established a workers' state. But Stalin destroyed workers' democracy and set about the reactionary and utopian project of building "socialism in one country". In the USSR, and the other degenerate workers' states that were established from above, capitalism was destroyed but the bureaucracy excluded the working class from power, blocking the road to democratic planning and socialism. The parasitic bureaucratic caste has led these states to crisis and destruction. We are for the smashing of bureaucratic tyranny through proletarian political revolution and the establishment of workers' democracy. We oppose the restoration of capitalism and the restoration of imperialist property relations. In times of war we unconditionally defend workers' states against imperialism. Stalinism has consistently betrayed the working class. The Stalinist Communist Parties' strategy of alliances with the bourgeoisie (popular fronts) and their stages theory of revolution have inflicted terrible defeats on the working class world-wide. These parties are reformist.



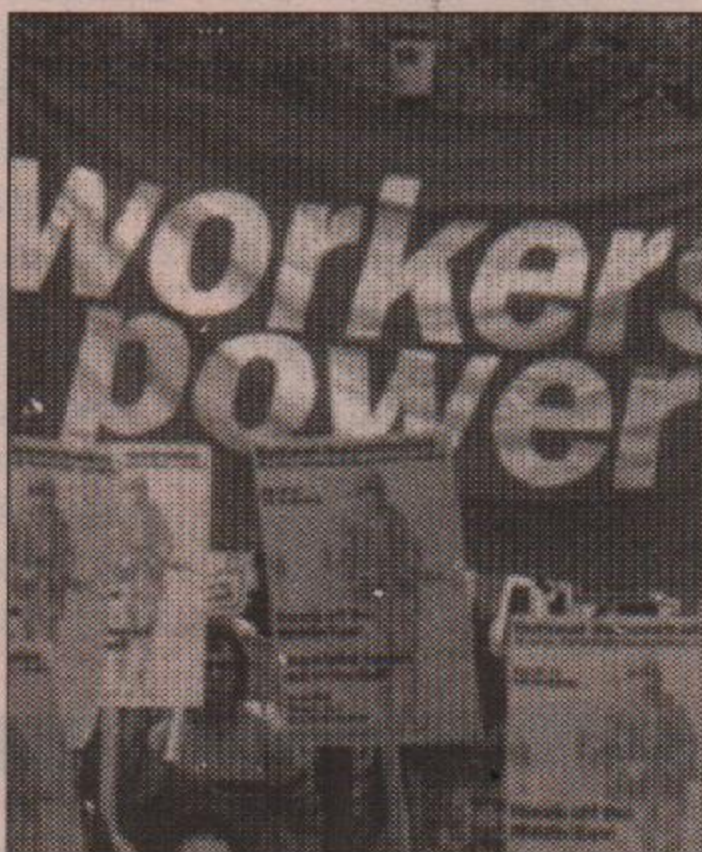
Social Oppression

is an integral feature of capitalism systematically oppressing people on the basis of race, age, sex, or sexual orientation. We are for the liberation of women and for the building of a working class women's movement, not an "all class" autonomous movement. We are for the liberation of all of the oppressed. We fight racism and fascism. We oppose all immigration controls. We fight for labour movement support for black self-defence against racist and state attacks. We are for no platform for fascists and for driving them out of the unions.



Imperialism

is a world system which oppresses nations and prevents economic development in the vast majority of third world countries. We support the struggles of oppressed nationalities or countries against imperialism. We unconditionally support the Irish Republicans fighting to drive British troops out of Ireland. But against the politics of the bourgeois and petit-bourgeois nationalists, we fight for permanent revolution—working class leadership of the anti-imperialist struggle under the banner of socialism and internationalism. In conflicts between imperialist countries and semi-colonial countries, we are for the defeat of the imperialist army and the victory of the country oppressed and exploited by imperialism. We are for the immediate and unconditional withdrawal of British troops from Ireland. We fight imperialist war not with pacifist pleas but with militant class struggle methods including the forcible disarmament of "our own" bosses.



Workers Power

is a revolutionary communist organisation. We base our programme and policies on the works of Marx, Engels, Lenin and Trotsky, on the revolutionary documents of the first four congresses of the Third International and the Transitional Programme of the Fourth International. Workers Power is the British Section of the League for a Revolutionary Communist International. The last revolutionary international (the Fourth) collapsed in the years 1948-51. The LRCL is pledged to fight the centrism of the degenerate fragments of the Fourth International and to refound a Leninist Trotskyist International and build a new world party of socialist revolution. If you are a class-conscious fighter against capitalism; if you are an internationalist—join us! ★

Workers power

INDONESIA:
Mass protests
rock dictatorship
- turn to page 10

Socialism, Internationalism, Revolution

British Section of the League for a Revolutionary Communist International

No 203 September 1996 ★ 50p

As NUS leaders accept the loan scheme

Action against student poverty!

“ I ’VE BEEN at university for a year. My overdraft is about £900. The bank have taken my cheque card off me and I took the full amount of student loan (£1,300). In one year at Manchester University I have built up a debt of about £2,200. I don't know how I'll cope this year. I just have to find work.”

The plight of this second-year student at Manchester University is hardly exceptional. Tens of thousands of his fellow students are forced to seek part time work during term time, and go onto the books of leeching employment agencies during the holidays. The Tories have been carrying out a vicious assault on students.

- Grants slashed by 30% in three years
- 32,000 students dropped out of higher education in 1995/6 for non academic reasons.
- Students have built up a combined debt of £800 million to the notorious Student Loans Company
- Government spending per student has slumped by 30% in seven years, with a further 5% cut due this year.

Things are set to get much worse for the vast majority of students. Dire employment prospects for people without academic qualifications means there has been a big rise in student numbers.

Now more than 30% of over 18s are enrolled in higher education, an increase of 50% since 1989. Because this expansion has not been met by new resources, today's students have few tutorials, crowd into packed lecture theatres and search their libraries in vain for required texts they can't afford to buy.

Little wonder that some academics liken today's universities to “education factories”.

The Tories have promised more of the same, with talk of two year degree courses to save money. But the realities of debt and the prospect of a penniless college life is now starting to drive down university applications.

The desperate scramble for resources and students' struggle to make ends meet has driven down so-called academic standards at many institutions, encouraging several university chancellors to advance the idea of a British equivalent to the US Ivy League. To secure this elite future, colleges like the London School of Economics, Imperial College and Durham are proposing an entry examination and a

£300 top up registration fee. So after the years of rapid expansion, decent higher education could soon once more become the preserve of the sons and daughters of the rich.

The crisis of higher education is one created by the Tories and their system. Economic insecurity drives many people to seek university qualifications; thousands of young people and mature students face staggering debt and poor living standards to complete degrees of uncertain value, with no guarantee of a decent job at the end.

The university chancellors either whimper about the cuts-before carrying them out-or dream about a return to an Oxbridge “golden age” where the lower classes knew their place. ■

NUS leaders betray

The Blairite leadership of the NUS is putting up no resistance to these attacks. Until recently, the National Union of Students (NUS) had a policy of opposition to the loans scheme. Now that has changed.

Over the past year, the leadership of the NUS waged a vicious campaign to force through a change in union policy, ditching the historic commitment to a living grant and embracing a “mixed” funding regime, with money from the state, private enterprise and students' own pockets.

The NUS conference elected Douglas Trainer as its new president. Trainer argues that “we should accept some student contribution”, because society can no longer afford a grant system.

This comes at a time when “fat cat” directors of privatised industries reward themselves with share options and whopping salary increases.

Instead of arguing for redistribution through a steep wealth tax, and the renationalisation of assets the privateers have gobbled up, the NUS leadership accepts the status quo and wants students to pay.

They are also saying that the election of a Labour government will not make a real difference.

So there is no reason to wait for Labour, but there is every reason for students to defy Trainer and his friends in the NUS bureaucracy. ■



NUS March against student debt

Photo Paul Chitty

WHAT TO FIGHT FOR

- Scrap student loans, liquidate the Student Loans Company and cancel all student debt.
- A living grant for all students, equivalent to £6 an hour.
- Scrap the proposed “top-up” fee and “Ivy League” schemes. Free, high quality education for all students.
- For a massive wealth tax to pay for higher education.
- Restore the right to claim benefits, including housing benefits.
- End the bans on student union political activity.
- For a fighting NUS!

Ireland: Where is the peace process going? pages 8&9