

Workers power

Socialism, Internationalism, Revolution

British Section of the League for a Revolutionary Communist International

No 208 February 1997 ★ 50p

EXCLUSIVE!

Southwark council cover-up

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DEFEND THE WELFARE STATE!

TAX THE RICH!

EVERY NIGHT, in hospitals across Britain, elderly patients wait for hours on trolleys in corridors. Meanwhile, on city streets hundreds of young people sleep rough in sub-zero temperatures.

Many schools are literally crumbling. An eight-year-old pupil in Haringey, North London needed 11 stitches for a head wound suffered when hit by flying masonry from a classroom ceiling. In Haringey, the local authority estimates that its schools require a minimum of £15 million for basic repairs.

This year millions of public sector workers, who deliver vital services, face real pay cuts for the fourth year running.

The Tories refuse to fund in full the meagre awards for nurses and teachers recommended by the pay review bodies. That means services will be cut even further to meet the pay awards.

What does Labour offer in place of this sick, run-down system? Only more of the same.

Shadow Chancellor Gordon Brown claims that Labour has "an instinct to

serve the public interest, which is not the same as an instinct to spend". Labour has ditched any commitment to use taxation to redistribute wealth.

The Labour leadership claims to care about education and the NHS, but it will not promise a single extra penny in public spending. Obsessed with placating the financial markets and merchant bankers in the City of London, Brown has pledged not to raise the top rate of tax above the current 40% – already one of the lowest in the industrialised world.

While old age pensioners die of hypothermia each winter and diseases such as tuberculosis and rickets return to Britain, Brown promises not to touch the parasites who have made millions from the privatisation of state assets and public services.

Brown's speech to an audience of bosses spelled

out that New Labour intends to carry on with the Tories' policies. Even before coming into office the Shadow Chancellor has declared war on many of Labour's own supporters and some of the most needy in society.

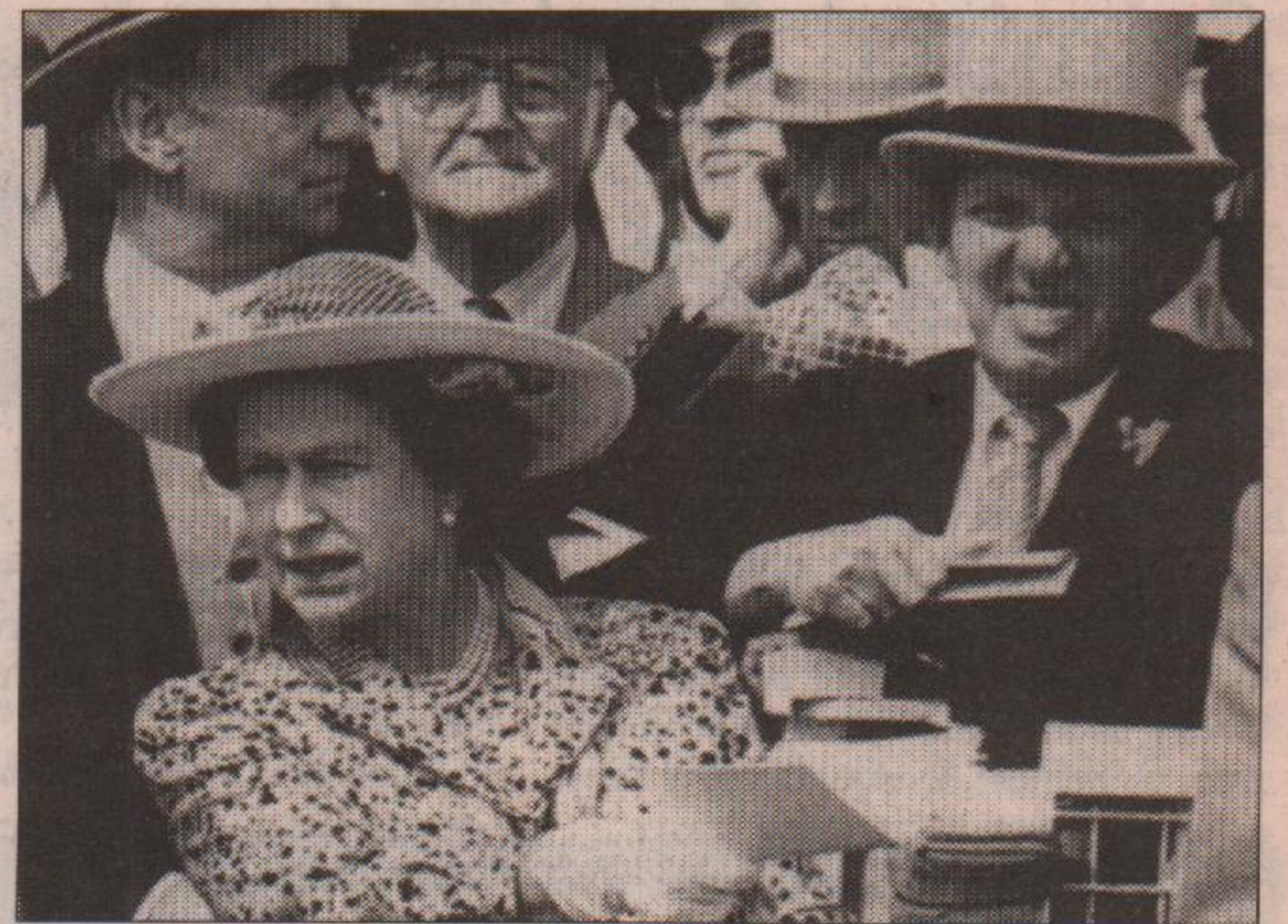
If it is war that the Labour leadership wants, then we must make sure that they get it in full measure. Socialists must ensure that the attacks promised by Brown and Blair meet with the stiffest possible organised resistance.

Between now and the general election, we must fight to mobilise the working class around demands that begin to meet our basic needs.

We need decent public services, education and the NHS.

Where will the money come from? **Tax the rich!**

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Tories shell out £60m of public money on a new Royal Yacht while schools crumble, patients suffer and the transport system collapses

Make the fat-cats pay for the services we need!

HUNGER STRIKES: Asylum seekers detained without charge

Release all asylum seekers!

IN ROCHESTER Prison, Kent, 180 people are being held although they have committed no crime. As we go to press, five of them are close to death.

Rochester is just one of the places where asylum seekers are detained by the Home Office. They have fled torture and death in their own country. In Britain they are slung straight into prison.

Seventeen asylum seekers in Rochester Prison have been on hunger strike since 6 January. They are protesting against being imprisoned without any trial or judicial process. In a statement the detainees said:

"We have clearly noted all previ-

ous unsuccessful attempts to resolve our unlawful imprisonment without trial, hearing or process, which should allow us the right to a fair and prompt hearing. Many of us have already served two years or more. We are detained without charge or time limit."

Last month, as the nation watched with baited breath the fate of Swampy, one of the anti-road protesters holed up in a tunnel, the vast majority of the media ignored the Rochester protest. It might have been ironic, if it were not so tragic.

On Sunday 26 January, some of the detainees felt further action was necessary if they were to get any media attention. Six stopped taking fluids.

Doctors warned that they would suffer irreversible damage to their health, such as kidney failure, and that if they continued they would die within days.

Their exact condition is difficult to ascertain. The Home Office is attempting to cover up the protests. It will not tell campaigners the names of those involved. Even the number of detainees participating in the hunger strike is unclear.

One protester, Ejike Emenike, had to be rushed to Medway Hospital. He is a 30 year-old pastor from Nigeria. He fled his country just a year ago after he had been arrested and beaten by the security forces for delivering sermons protesting against the execution of Ken

Saro-Wiwa. The Home Office claims he has to be kept in prison because of his potential for "violence and disorder".

Ejike agreed to halt his hunger strike after the government dropped plans to move 200 asylum seekers onto a prison ship to be moored off the Dorset coast.

There are 890 asylum seekers imprisoned in Britain. The statement of the Rochester protesters, issued as they began their hunger strike, sums up the desperation they feel:

"Numerous suicide attempts, hunger strikes and official complaints by individuals have gone unheard...The response of the authorities is forceful removal to prison conditions without trial."

Workers and all anti-racists must demand the immediate release of all detainees held under our vicious racist immigration controls. Trade unionists, in particular, must force their leaders to add their voice to the protest and redouble their efforts to boycott all work related to the Asylum and Immigration Act.

- Free the asylum seekers!
- No deportations!
- Abolish all immigration controls!

Demonstrate outside the Home Office, St. Anne's Gate, London (St. James' Park Tube), every Wednesday, 5 - 6.30pm

POLICE BILL: Tories extend the "bug and burgle" activities

Block Howard's way

UNLESS THINGS change dramatically in the next few months, the Police Bill looks likely to become law. Until a motley coalition of liberal peers, judges and civil rights groups drew attention to some of its more draconian proposals, it looked as if it would be completely unopposed.

Despite what Michael Howard says, this Bill does far more than simply codify the present situation. It is a deliberate attempt to free the police from any external control whatsoever in their attempt to secure convictions or trawl for information.

At present the police need the permission of a judge - in advance - before they are allowed to take part in "bug and burgle" activities. If Howard gets his way even this minimal control will be taken away and officers will only need approval from their own Chief Constables.

Howard ignored the concerns voiced by Law Lords, previous Home Secretaries, and even the *Daily Telegraph*. The main reason for this was the spineless attitude of New Labour, exemplified by Jack Straw. Howard calculated that he would be too worried about appearing soft on crime to challenge the Government, who no longer command a majority in the Commons.

Even now, after Labour has been forced into making a show of opposing the Bill, it is only proposing the

same "safeguards" as already apply to MI5 and MI6 telephone tapping. As Liberty's John Wadham said, "despite these having been in place for ten years not one single complaint has ever been upheld".

In the vast majority of cases there can be no complaint since the bugging will be secret and unless a case is finally brought, or the bug is found, no one will be any the wiser!

Apart from that, Labour's only other amendment would insert clauses to stop the powers being used against doctors, lawyers, journalists and "others who hold confidential records".

Even these minimal caveats are apparently too much for the Association of Chief Police Officers (ACPO) who argue that "no one group in the community should be exempt from intrusive surveillance if there is a good cause."

Precisely what constitutes "good cause" is so loosely defined that it could include almost any organisation that isn't supported by the Government.

Although it is meant to be confined to "serious crime", the Bill actually covers any suspected offences involving "a large number of persons in pursuit of a common purpose."

This could obviously be interpreted to include environmental groups, strikers and even political parties. As the civil liberties group Justice says,

"this will allow the police to engage in fishing expeditions which will not necessarily lead to convictions but will allow the police to gather information on people."

Given this situation, the least that Labour should do is vote against the Bill in its entirety and, if that fails, promise to repeal it when it takes office. However, this attempt to strengthen the state's hand against "its" citizens also raises the question of what else Labour should do in power.

Even if the Bill were defeated we would still be left with the status quo. Decisions would still be taken by unrepresentative judges, picket lines bludgeoned by the thugs in blue and secret agencies like MI5 and MI6 left free to concentrate on the "enemy" within.

For all these reasons we demand of an incoming Labour government:

- Election of all judges and free state provision of legal services.
- Scrap the ACPO and all special police squads.
- Abolish the Public Order Act, the Police and Criminal Evidence Act, the Prevention of Terrorism Act, the Official Secrets Act and all repressive measures.
- Disband MI5, MI6, the Special Branch and all secret intelligence agencies.
- Disarm the police: no plastic bullets, CS gas, riot gear or firearms.



Criminal Justice Act

Defend the right to protest

IN 1994, there was a massive protest movement against the Tories' Criminal Justice Bill. Young people recognised it as a fundamental attack on their right to protest, to squat empty properties and even to organise "raves".

Trade unionists pointed out that it would be used against peaceful picketing and indeed against any protest that the police decided was "unlawful".

Nevertheless, with the help of Jack Straw and New Labour, who refused to oppose the Bill in parliament and instead abstained, the Bill was passed. It now exists as the "Criminal Justice and Public Order Act 1994". It is one

of the many pieces of repressive legislation that the Tories have placed on the statute book in their 18 years in office.

One of its first uses was against a demonstration at Stonehenge. A group of peaceful protesters dared to challenge the right of the police to ban all assemblies of 20 or more people anywhere near the monument. They were immediately bundled into a police van and charged with breaking the 1994 Act. They were convicted at the Magistrates Court, but were found not guilty on appeal because the demonstration was peaceful.

The forces of "law and order" were outraged at such a decision and the Director of Public Prosecutions (DPP) appealed to a differently constituted Crown Court - that is, one with judges more to their liking. This time the two defendants, a lecturer and a housing assistant, were convicted under the Act.

Lord Justice McCowan declared that while peaceable vigils or demonstrations might be "tolerated" there was no legal right after the passage of the Act, if the police banned them. This means, for example, that if 20 or more parents decided to lobby a council meeting against a school closure, the police

could seek an order to ban it, making any assembly illegal. Every other type of picket or protest can also be banned under the Act, peaceful or not.

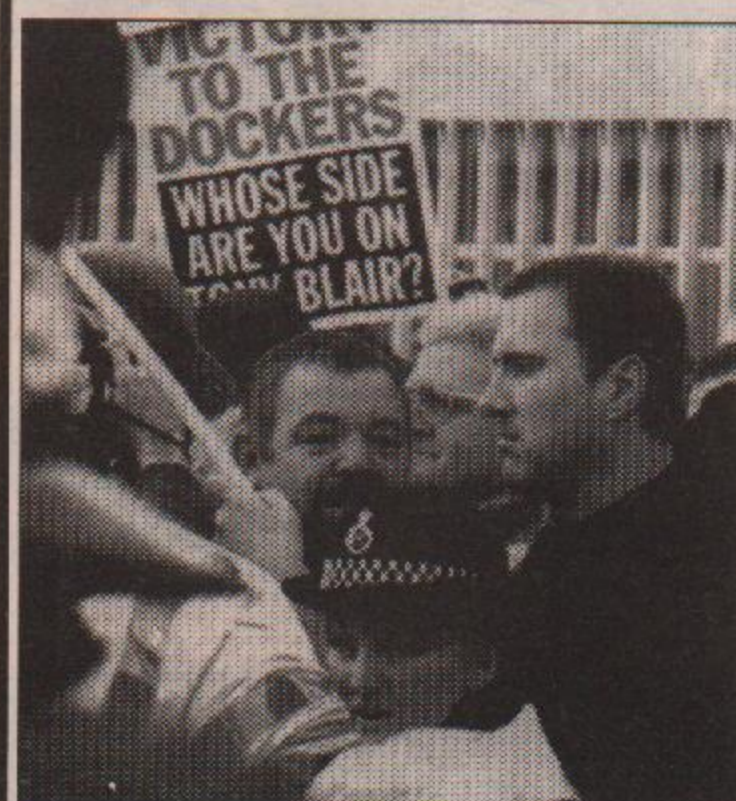
The protesters intend to appeal to the European Court of Human Rights. This is all very well, but in practice repressive laws have always been defeated not by the bourgeois courts, that rule in the interests of the bosses, but by mass defiance which threatens them and their courts with mass disorder.

When the Glacier workers recently defied the 1994 Act by occupying their factory, the police let them be. As one

of the occupiers told *Workers Power*, "The police asked us if we were prepared to physically defend our jobs. We said, this is an engineering plant. What we don't have, we can make." The only arrest made was of a manager for harassing one of the workers!

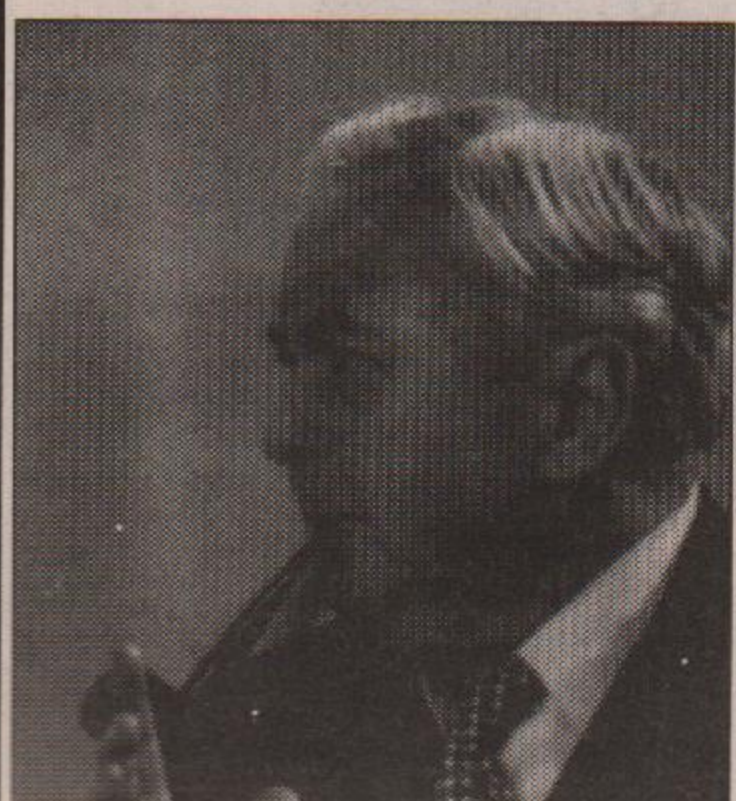
What is needed is a mass campaign of defiance led by the trade unions and the youth, both of whom have much to lose from this piece of reactionary legislation. Such a campaign would organise to force Labour to reverse its policy of abstinence and to commit it to repeal this law immediately on coming to power. ■

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Dockers need a strategy to win

After 17 months of heroic struggle, the Liverpool Dockers are at a crucial juncture – page 5



The devaluation of socialism

A look at the record of the 1964 Labour Government and the lessons learnt – pages 8&9



Tory peace process farce

Jeremy Dewar looks at the IRA's strategy and the breakdown of the peace process - page 11



Crisis in the Balkans

With mass protests taking place in Serbia, Albanian and Bulgaria we look at the background of the crisis and the way forward for the working class of the Balkan countries – pages 12&13

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EDITORIAL

WORKERS POWER 208 FEBRUARY 1997



Brown knows the bosses

GORDON BROWN detonated Labour's latest tax bombshell on 20 January. Under Labour there will be no change in either the basic or the top rate of income tax. He also confirmed earlier reports that public spending would remain fixed for the next two years at the level pegged by Ken Clarke in his November 1996 Budget.

Brown's speech to a meeting of business executives marked yet another step away from traditional Labourite ideology. In theory, at least, even the right wing of the old Labour Party had seen the tax system as a means of wealth redistribution. Progressive taxation of high incomes would improve the lot of the poor and the working class in general by funding state provision of services. In practice, of course, Labour governments have tended to hit the middle class and better-paid sections of workers, while the big bosses got off lightly.

The media-obsessed "Millbank Tendency", led by Peter Mandelson, are determined to avoid a repeat of the 1992 general election. In their view, John Smith's commitment to raise income tax to fund increased public sector spending cost Labour victory. New Labour's spin doctors believe they have scored a real coup, burying once and for all Labour's image as a "tax and spend" party.

But Brown's pre-election posturing as the "Iron Chancellor" also reflects the widespread assumption among economists that the Tories' legacy to an incoming Labour government will be a huge public spending deficit. During Kenneth Clarke's reign as Chancellor, the Treasury has consistently failed to meet its targets for public sector borrowing and his November tax cuts can only worsen the situation.

Brown knows the problem he will face, but raising revenue through taxation will not be his answer. While he did not entirely rule out changes in

tax exemptions and allowances, spending cuts are clearly the preferred option.

Brown's speech served two purposes. First, he was seeking to depress working class expectations of an incoming Labour government still further. At the same time, he wished to reassure the City that virtually nothing would change once he moved into 11 Downing Street. In the words of *Observer* columnist William Keegan, the financial markets "are laughing all the way to the tax havens they no longer need."

The Shadow Chancellor's pronouncements must have been especially comforting to the hard-pressed family of the sacked £1 million a year merchant banker, Nicola Horlick. After her spectacular manipulation of the media, she announced her desire to become a Labour MP. Predictably, Peter Mandelson's reply was that she was precisely the sort of person New Labour needed. Less well paid mothers of five who have recently lost their jobs need not apply.

Recent weeks have given us a clearer picture of New Labour's public spending priorities. As 1997 dawned, Blair and Heseltine struck a deal to secure the future of the Millennium Exhibition in Greenwich, regardless of who forms the next government. Presumably, New Labour thought it was taking a really hard-nosed stance on public spending when it rejected Tories' proposals to shell out £60 million from the public purse to build a new Royal Yacht.

Of course, the Labour Party would not dare to suggest that Her Majesty should go without a proper replacement for Britannia as it sails into the imperial sunset. Instead, a Blair administration will encourage private capital to fund a new vessel.

Apparently, corporate bosses can easily foot the bill for a floating pleasure palace for the world's richest woman and her profligate brats. The rate of direct tax on big capital's profits, however, will not be increased. Neither they, nor those individuals on incomes exceeding £100,000, have any

cause to fear that the state will require them to contribute any more towards the NHS, council housing or state schools.

On page 6 of this issue we report that Britain is now the most unequal society in the western world. Inner city hospitals have frequently come to "resemble gigantic public lavatories" in the words of one recent NHS

patient. Classroom ceilings in state schools are literally caving in. The public transport infrastructure in London is stretched to breaking point.

Even key factions of the capitalist class now recognise that the transport system needs a substantial injection of state investment. The bosses may all send their kids to private schools, but they are anxious about the capacity of the state education system to churn out a future workforce with adequate skills and labour discipline.

New Labour has painted itself into such a corner over tax and public spend-

ing that it will be hard-pressed to satisfy even those sections of the bosses who are sympathetic to Blair's project. More importantly, what Blair and Brown are now offering can only fuel widespread working class anger.

The current leadership may be doing its best to shatter any illusions in a future Labour government, but millions of workers will still be voting for the party in anticipation of something better.

There is a very real possibility that Blair in office will take the lid off the simmering outrage at what the Tories have done to the welfare state. A Labour government that maintains a tax regime which has shifted wealth from the poor to the rich through cuts in income tax and higher indirect taxes like VAT, could face a day of reckoning sooner rather than later.

Socialists have a clear answer to the question of where to find the money to fund a massive increase in urgently needed welfare and infrastructure spending. Total wealth in Britain is more than adequate to allow for better provision of education, health care and public housing. The problem is the grotesquely unequal distribution of that wealth.

The first step towards fundamentally transforming Britain is a steeply progressive income tax that begins to bite into incomes exceeding £50,000 a year. This must be combined with a dramatically higher tax on corporate profits and wealth in the form of dividends, capital gains, real estate and inherited property.

Organised pressure from below might be enough to force Blair and Brown to make some policy shifts, but they will resist anything that would really cut into the wealth and profits of big business. For that reason, we must continue to build a revolutionary socialist party that can provide the answers both in theory and in practice. ■

New Labour has painted itself into such a corner over tax and public spending that it will be hard-pressed to satisfy even those sections of the bosses who are sympathetic to Blair's project.

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Trade union lefts

Broad left conference offers no way forward

"POLICIES FIRST, leaders second, workers next!" This is how, Bernard Roome, leading member of the CWU Broad Left and supporter of Militant, summed up the priorities of the organisers of a Conference of Trade Union Lefts.

But the 200 delegates found the leaders would not let them discuss, amend or vote on policy when they went to the 1 February conference.

A "loose federation" of mainly white-collar Broad Left type organisations - the NUT's Socialist Teachers Alliance (STA), the CWU Broad Left, the Print and Media Broad Left (GPMU), CFDU (Unison) and CPSA (Broad Left) - called the conference. Their aim? To create a "left block" within the TUC.

Debate centred around a motion submitted by Leicestershire County Council Unison branch. It had been won in the branch by Workers Power supporters. The motion called for the conference to break with the failed strategy of Broad Leftism:

"This conference recognises that the trade union machines cannot be simply captured by the left. Rather, the bureaucracy as a whole has to be politically defeated and organisationally overthrown so that the Trade Unions can be transformed into fighting, democratic organs of class struggle."

It called for the building of an anti-bureaucratic rank and file movement with regular policy making conferences, open

to shop stewards' committees, rank and file caucuses, TU branches and district organisations. It demanded annual election of all officials, the right of recall by members and their salaries to be based on the average income of the members. It called for all strike action to be made automatically official and for the rank and file organisation to support and build itself on such actions, official or not.

Every trick in the book was used to prevent delegates from voting on the motion. We were told it would be "undemocratic" to have a vote on an unseen motion. The organiser had received it two weeks previously from the branch but refused to circulate it. A point of order asking the chair to allow conference to decide was denied on the grounds that "there are no standing orders for this conference".

The manner in which the motion was dealt with underlined the hostility of the organisers to the idea of involving rank and file workers even in their own conference. Their orientation is to national trade union leaderships and getting control of them. Their aim was a friendly meeting of Broad Left leaders. The STA leadership made no attempt to build for the conference in local NUT associations, even those they controlled.

The "Aims" presented by the organisers are to form a "co-ordinating committee of Broad Lefts" to win the unions to a vague commitment to industrial action against attacks, to support work-

ers in struggle and to defend the Labour-union link. In particular, the federation wants to build a left wing in the TUC which will campaign for a series of demands on a Labour government contained in a "Statement". The "Aims" and the "Statement", of course, were not open to amendment or voting!

The STA leadership is the driving force behind this initiative. After 20 years, the STA is finally in sight of its goal: to win control of the NUT executive. Increasingly building themselves as a broad left type caucus, they have little interest in establishing an activist base in the union which could demand support for action from the new leadership and bring it into conflict with the anti-union laws and government.

Instead, they are looking for support amongst other would-be "left" bureaucrats inside the TUC. Such forces, built on the rotten basis of broad leftism rather than militant rank and file activity, will turn out to be useless when a Blair government attacks teachers and other public sector workers.

The organisers promised "to take on board" some of the arguments made at the conference. They promised to hold another conference in November which would allow resolutions. Rank and file activists involved in these union caucuses need to fight to transform them into real rank and file organisations and to make sure the November conference is a democratic, policy making one. ■



MAGNET STRIKERS and the Women's Support Committee lobbied the company's Annual General Meeting in London last month. Outside a plush West End hotel where the bosses were meeting, they maintained a barrage of songs and chants.

Those inside were forcefully reminded that the strike was solid and that the strikers would continue their fight for the reinstatement of 350 workers sacked last September. Their resolve has not been weakened by police harassment of the Magnet pickets. If anything the strikers are more determined than ever to win.

The lobby was graced by the presence of TUC leader John Monks and Bill Morris,

leader of the TGWU, along with other general secretaries whose unions are in dispute with Magnet. These worthies left the lobby to go to a meeting to discuss how to help the strike.

A Magnet striker told Workers Power that what was needed "was a national strike", closing other Magnet plants which are keeping the bosses' operation afloat. Bill Morris, however, only promised to look at ways of stepping up the consumer boycott of Magnet products.

Send money and messages of support to: Ian Crammond, 109 Jedburgh Drive, Darlington, DL5 9UP; Tel: 01325 282589

NATHFE

Fighting the cuts

THE GOVERNMENT has announced an £84 million cut in spending on Further Education. This comes after four years of cuts which the government appointed head of the Funding Council says have brought one in five colleges close to collapse.

Sheffield College has announced 106 redundancies. Hackney Community College is balloting for strike action against a wage freeze, new contracts and 145 job losses! Nelson and Colne College has been on all out strike against proposals to sack a quarter of the staff.

Management wants to break effective union organisation. They want a free hand to drive through a casualisation programme: new contracts for the full time staff, making them work longer for less

money, mass redundancies of full time staff and replacement of directly employed part timers by agency staff on rotten pay and conditions.

Roger Ward, the employers' chief hatchet man declared that he wanted "peace with the trade unions"; he means victory over them.

In Accrington and Rossendale College, governors turned down an appeal by Pat Walsh, NATFHE Branch Secretary and NEC member, against his sacking. He was told on the last day of term before Christmas that he was "redundant" and given ten minutes to clear his desk before being escorted from the premises. His full timetable of classes is now being taught by agency staff!

Branch members are balloting for indef-

inite strike action from mid-February. Their campaign was given a major boost by a 600 strong demonstration through Accrington at the end of January.

This is a vital struggle. If employers get away with sacking a branch secretary and national leader of NATFHE it will give a green light to further attacks. NATFHE members must demand the local region of the union immediately ballots for strike action in support of Accrington and Rossendale. Regular collections and a levy will be vital if the strike becomes a long one.

Collection sheets available from Pat Walsh/NATFHE c/o TGWU, 2a Abbey St, Accrington, Lancs. Donations to the same address. Cheques to Accrington and Rossendale NATFHE Account no 2

Project Aerospace

Workers locked out

Project Aerospace Ltd in Coventry have locked out 41 sheet metal workers since 10 December.

When they turned up to work at the firm, which makes prototype body panels for the car industry, they were presented with an ultimatum by the management to sign new contracts of employment or consider themselves sacked. Although one man signed an acceptance form the rest remained defiant. This occurred just hours before management were due to meet officials of the workers' union, MSF, over a dispute that began last August.

As well as pay and conditions, this concerned health and safety, particularly the presence of asbestos in the factory. One former worker died of cancer last month and workers fear that this could have been caused by their working conditions. The premises, the former Alfred Herbert machine tool plant, has an ancient asbestos roof which showers down asbestos dust when it rains and has totally inadequate ventilation.

In addition to concerns for their health, the workers were also demanding the introduction of pension and sick pay schemes. When these were refused, the workers went on to stage a series of stoppages and overtime bans which only came to an end when management presented their ultimatum.

Since the lockout, management have had little success in recruiting scab labour and are hoping to sit it out and wait for the workers to capitulate and return to work on management's terms. They'll either have a long wait, or they'll soon give in.

The Aerospace workers have maintained a picket line outside the plant since the lockout and it has remained solid. The MSF has taken up the workers' case, with the union's general secretary, Roger Lyons, visiting the pickets and calling for talks. The pickets, however, view this intervention with some scepticism in view of the fact that the MSF bureaucracy are currently undergoing re-election.

Messages of support and donations can be made to: Project Aerospace Dispute Fund, c/o Coventry Trades Council, Unit 15, The Arches Industrial Estate, Spon End, Coventry CV1 3JQ

Hillingdon

No to the sell out!

THE NATIONAL leadership of Unison has abandoned the 16-month struggle by 53 hospital workers against the multinational contractor Pall Mall. The workers, mainly Asian women, have fought to regain their jobs on their previous terms and conditions at West London's Hillingdon Hospital, after Pall Mall sacked them for staging a legal strike.

Unison's conference last year voted unanimously to support the women's fight on the basis of the demand for their jobs back and General Secretary Rodney Bickerstaffe raised the arm of Hillingdon shop steward Malkiat Bilku

in a solidarity salute. Six months later, Bickerstaffe issued a letter to all Unison branches, informing them that the dispute was over. The leadership had accepted a lump sum payment of £250,000 by Pall Mall, roughly £5,000 in compensation for each woman.

In exchange, Unison agreed to end any further support for the strikers, other than representation at an industrial tribunal on 7 February. The agreement holds out the prospect of a "normalised" relationship between the union and Pall Mall, in short, it is a national recognition deal on the back of selling

out the Hillingdon strikers.

An emergency meeting of the strikers voted 35 to nil to reject the Pall Mall pay-off and continue their battle. As Malkiat Bilku put it:

"We never came out for a sum of money. We have been fighting for our jobs and our dignity as workers, for the future of the NHS and for the whole working class."

The Campaign for a Fighting and Democratic Unison opposes the deal and has called on the union's executive to reverse their decision.

Support for the strikers continues despite the sell out. Unison's East Mid-

lands regional council has voted against the national leadership's attempt to pull the plug and agreed to donate £10,000. The Greater London region will debate a similar motion in mid-February.

The Hillingdon women have established a new fund. Cheques, etc. should be made payable to: Hillingdon Strikers' Support Campaign (HSSC), c/o Cllr. Wally Kennedy, Civic Centre, Uxbridge, Middlesex UB8 1UW.

Strike supporters' conference on Sunday 9 February at 11 am in the Uxbridge Civic Hall. To invite a striker to your branch meeting, ring 0956 153511 or 01895 250781.

LIVERPOOL DOCKERS

Strikers need a strategy to win

THE LIVERPOOL dockers and their families have waged a remarkable 17-month battle against daunting odds. Their fight with the Mersey Docks and Harbour Company (MDHC) to win back their jobs and defend union organisation has been a source of inspiration to tens of thousands of other workers both in Britain and internationally. This key struggle has once more reached a crucial juncture, demanding a hard look at the way ahead.

The strategy developed by the port shop stewards' committee has relied on solidarity action by dockers overseas to obstruct the transport of freight to and from Merseyside. They have won tremendous support internationally. For example, the recent international week of action, led to 24-hour stoppages at west coast ports in the United States and solidarity meetings at all 50 ports organised by Japan's National Council of Dockworkers.

Financial support and industrial action by dockers outside Britain have sustained the strike, and strikers' morale remains remarkably buoyant even in the face of the threat of repossession of homes. But the international action has so far failed to put decisive pressure on the port bosses and the MDHC's biggest clients such as ACL.

While the price of MDHC shares has fluctuated wildly during the course of the dispute, the company is adamant in its refusal to discuss the dockers' consistent demand for the past 17 months: unconditional reinstatement.

The dockers and the Women of the Waterfront are now engaged in a war of attrition, with no immediate end in sight.

Although a powerful *Guardian* article by radical journalist John Pilger and Ken Loach's *Flickering Flame* television documentary helped to raise awareness of a battle the bosses' media has systematically ignored, solidarity in Britain on the day consisted only of a picket at Liverpool's Seaforth Grain Terminal while dockers occupied its gantries.

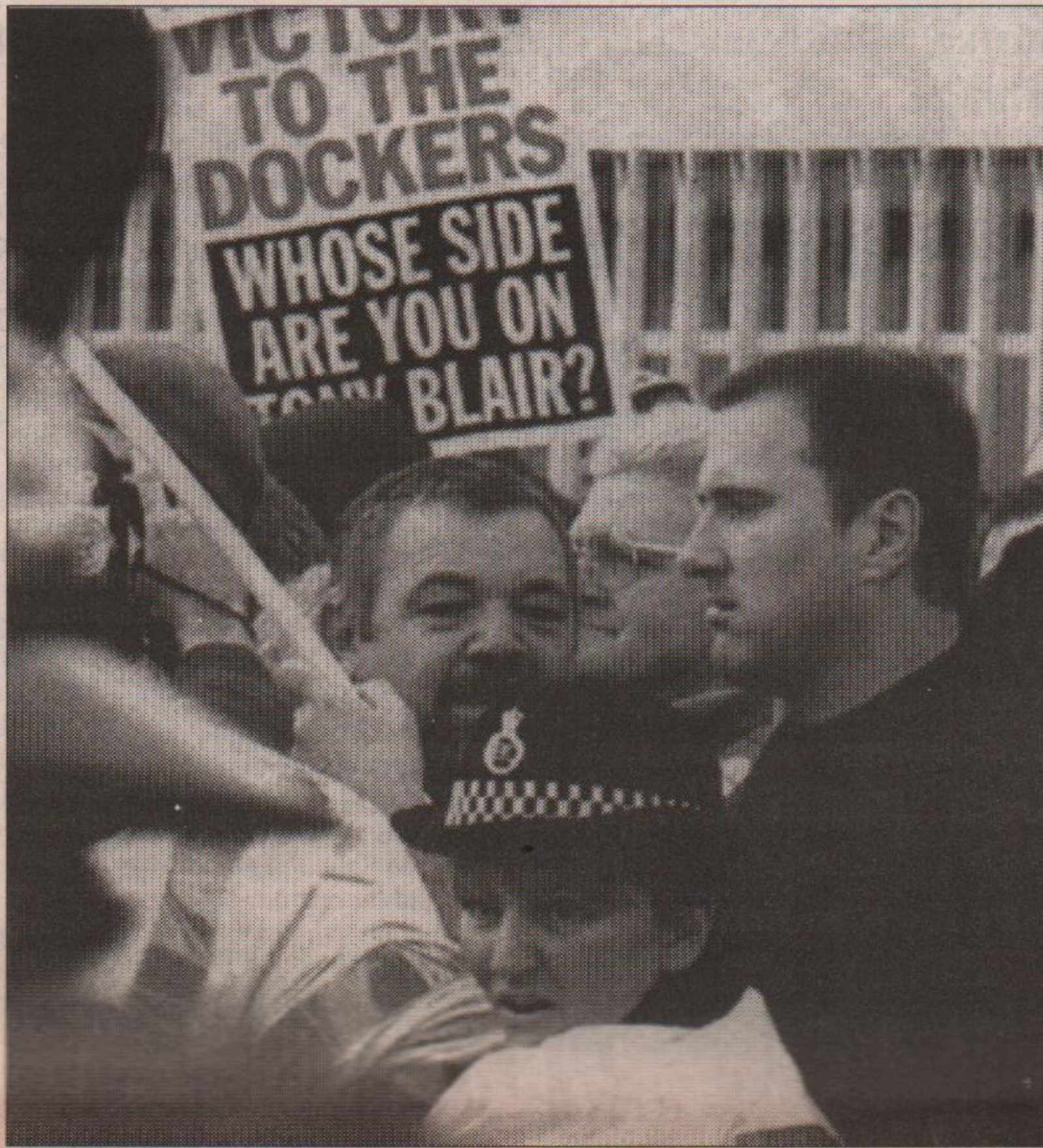
An enormous vein of passive sympathy and support persists on Merseyside for the dockers, but active participation in demonstrations and pickets has waned in recent months. This is partly due to sheer "battle fatigue" but also the abandonment of the dockers by their erstwhile allies in the local churches.

Peter Kilfoyle, a local Blairite MP, has joined the clerical chorus in urging the strikers to accept the MDHC's redundancy pay-out "for the sake of the local economy". New Labour clearly has no intention of using the government's 13% share in the MDHC to come to the dockers' rescue.

Crucially, however, the dockers' fight has suffered because the national leadership of their own union, the TGWU, has denied their official recognition. Since September 1995, General Secretary Bill Morris has hidden behind the Tories' anti-union laws as a convenient excuse for withholding access to the union's still mighty resources.

At best, the TGWU bureaucracy has given irregular, token contributions to the hardship fund. At worst, it has sought to negotiate deals behind closed doors with the MDHC bosses, which have completely ignored the dockers' basic demands.

Unfortunately, the strategy adopted by the port shop stewards' committee has served to let Morris and the bureaucracy as a whole off the hook. The committee's chair, Jimmy Nolan, has repeat-



Changes in the course of the dockers' battle are both urgent and long overdue. The convening by the dockers of a meeting of shop stewards from a number of key Merseyside workplaces, such as Vauxhall at Ellesmere Port and Spiller foods, with the aim of co-ordinating unofficial action to block parts and raw materials coming through the port, is a significant step forward.

edly argued that the dockers themselves did not want the dispute made official. Stewards fear that if the strike were to become official then control would pass to the TGWU national bureaucracy.

Yet the kind of fight that would be required to win official backing for the strike, could also lay the basis for a much greater degree of rank and file control over the TGWU. As it is, the strikers have enjoyed none of the blessings of official support, they can only exercise negative control over the outcome of negotiations and TGWU members have continued to drive through picket lines, aiding the MDHC's scab operation.

There are tentative signs that the stewards' committee has begun to take a much tougher line with the TGWU leadership. Leading steward Bobby Moreton issued a public call on TGWU branches to bombard Transport House with faxes about the handling of the dispute. The committee as a whole is supporting motions critical of the leadership's role to the union's biennial delegate conference.

Even so, the stewards are continuing to steer clear of an open and ultimately unavoidable confrontation with the bureaucracy. As recently as the 18 January supporters' conference, Jimmy Nolan argued against calls on the leadership to make the strike official and to pursue other measures in defiance of the anti-union laws.

The Liverpool dockers' leadership deserves enormous credit. They have made themselves regularly accountable to the membership as a whole through mass meetings. Their decision to "go international" was both shrewd and principled. Its important results have pointed in the direction of the kind of co-ordinated international workers' action and union structures which will be increasingly necessary to combat multinational capital.

Nonetheless, changes in the course

of the dockers' battle are both urgent and long overdue. The convening by the dockers of a meeting of shop stewards from a number of key Merseyside workplaces, such as Vauxhall at Ellesmere Port and Spiller foods, with the aim of co-ordinating unofficial action to block parts and raw materials coming through the port, is a significant step forward.

This should be developed into concrete action through a direct appeal to rank and file members at these factories. The anger on Merseyside, stoked by the threat of 1,300 redundancies and eventual closure at Ford Halewood, renews the possibility of extending the battle to other fronts across a region which has suffered so much at the hands of the Tories and the bosses.

All the more reason, then, to turn up the heat on the TGWU leadership to throw the full weight of the union behind a crucial struggle that must not be lost and could have been won many months ago.

Despite their own hardship, the dockers have agreed to levy themselves in support of the Hillingdon strikers, who have been stripped of Unison's official recognition and financial support. ■

Send cheques and money orders to: Merseyside Dockers' Shop Stewards Appeal Fund, c/o Mr Jimmy Davies, 19 Scorton Street, Liverpool L6 4AS. To invite a docker or Women of the Waterfront representative to your meeting, ring 0151 207 3388.



Southwark Trade Union Support Centre

Victim of Blairite sleaze

ON FRIDAY morning 17 January, Southwark Council's head of Property Services, a property inspector and a locksmith turned up at the Southwark Trade Union Support Unit (STUSU). They planned to seize the building and lock out the Unit's workers.

Their plan failed. The Council snatch squad found members of the Unit's Management Committee there to thwart their attempt at repossession.

Desperate to get their way, the Labour-controlled Council took the Management Committee to the High Court. They felt able to do this because Trustees of the Unit, including Harriet Harman MP and Richard Balfe MEP, had resigned and voiced their support for Council's move to close down STUSU's building.

At the High Court the Council suffered another rebuff when their repossession order was rejected, due to technicalities.

These events are part of a tale of political manoeuvring and alleged corruption involving a Labour Council, one of its allies working at the Unit and the Trustees. These events are of more than local interest because they reveal the lengths to which the Blairite Labour leaders will go to attack independent union organisation.

Some time ago the political balance of STUSU's management committee shifted to the left. The Management Committee is elected by the local Trades Council to oversee the running of the Unit. The new leadership also inspected the Trades Council's accounts which were kept at STUSU.

Like other trade union centres, STUSU has helped to develop and promote trade union campaigns and activities.

Strikers from all over Britain have found a welcome at STUSU, with meetings organised throughout Southwark on their behalf. The Unit also has a proud record of international solidarity, having organised tours for Bosnian and Russian miners.

The Unit has always been hated by the Tories on Southwark Council. After the election of the new Management Committee, Southwark's Labour leader, Jeremy Fraser, joined the opposition to STUSU.

On Tuesday 10 December, the day after the new Committee was elected, the Council's Regeneration Committee discussed cutting the Unit's grant. It decided to reduce the grant from £90,000 to £50,000. This proposal became the subject of a political row within the Council.

Socialist Labour Party councillor Ian Driver, took a principled stand against the cut while Council leader, Jeremy Fraser, proposed the complete abolition of the Unit's grant.

It later emerged that Fraser had already persuaded Harriet Harman to resign. The decision to close the Unit was taken by the Labour Group on 17 December. Harman stepped down on 16 December. Richard Balfe did the same on 13 January, admitting in his letter that his decision had been taken "after consultation with Southwark Council and others".

To cover themselves, the Labour group cited two examples STUSU's activities: the Unit's support for the Liverpool dockers and an article in the Unit's bulletin, STUN, from the National Abortion Campaign defending reproductive rights for women. Fraser agreed with Tories on the Council and ordered an investigation into the Unit by the Urgency Regeneration Committee.

Fraser accused the "hard left" of taking over the Management Committee. Yet this Management Committee was elected by the Trades Council and was found by the Urgency Regeneration Committee investigation not to have transgressed any of the Trades Council's policies. Despite this, Fraser launched his failed attempt to seize the building.

Fraser is driven by more than just political hostility to the Unit. A Southwark trade unionist told *Workers Power*:

"There are good grounds for believing that the Council is trying to cover up corruption. In particular, questions are being asked about how the Trades Council's funds were spent by one of the Unit's workers - an ally of Fraser's - and about the old right-wing leadership's authorisation of this spending."

Workers Power has seen documents which give grounds for believing that - under the old Labour right-wing leadership - funds belonging to the Trades Council have, at the very least, been mismanaged. Cheques whose stubs record payments to the Cuba Solidarity Campaign and the Liverpool Dockers were actually paid into the account of a Fraser ally working at the Unit, or the accounts of his wife, or the accounts of his wife's company. These cheques were signed by the former treasurer of the Trades Council.

Maybe there is an innocent explanation for this. Maybe the Council is not trying to cover up financial mismanagement by its supporters at the Unit. Maybe it is coincidental that it made its move after the election of a new Management Committee which gained access to the accounts. On the other hand, maybe Tony Blair is a socialist.

The STUSU Management Committee is campaigning hard to win support for a defence campaign. And support is pouring in. Protests from trade unions from all over the borough have reached Jeremy Fraser's office.

Delegates to Southwark Trades Council will call for a workers' enquiry into the whole affair - a call that Workers Power fully supports. In addition, we must fight tooth and nail to force the Council to reverse its decision on cutting the Unit's grant.

But we must also learn a general lesson from the whole affair. The Blairites will stop at nothing to silence the rank and file of the labour movement.

This local incident hints at the attacks the Blairites will launch on the unions once they get power. The response of the rank and file workers in Southwark is a pointer to what we will have to do on a national scale if Blair gets into power: organise to fight him. ■

POVERTY: Blair and Major unite against beggars

Blaming the victims

OVER THE last 18 years the Tories' policies have consistently aimed at redistributing wealth from the poor to the rich. Tax cuts since 1979 have meant a "gain" of £7 a week for people earning less than half the national average – compared to £908 a week for the top 1% (those earning over £80,000 a year).

The poorest 10% of the population (unemployed, pensioners and those on poverty wages) have £13 a week less than 20 years ago. In last November's pre-election budget, the richest tenth of the population gained another £5.64 a week, while the poorest 10% lost 48 pence.

The consequences of these policies to promote inequality are clear to anyone willing to face the facts, even if the Tories have done everything they can to obscure the reality of poverty in Britain. They have tried to shift the blame for mass unemployment and widespread homelessness onto the very people who are suffering from them. The vicious attacks are only matched by the blatant falsehoods that accompany them.

Benefits

One populist moral crusade has peddled the lie that young women become single parents only in order to jump the queue for council accommodation or to get extra benefits. This has become the justification for removing single parent benefits and abolishing housing policies which recognise the particular vulnerability of young single parents and their children. From April 1998 new claimants will lose their entitlement to the single parent premium and single parent benefit, and will receive only the standard rate paid to married couples.

The latest propaganda offensive is against fraud. We have been told that the unemployed simply don't want to work – or that they are already working and are therefore stealing from the taxpayer by trying to claim benefits as well. The government has announced plans to spend £470 million over the next three years in the continuing battle against benefit fraud, on top of the current outlay of £900 million. The latest proposals include a bill which would penalise local authorities for not clearing up enough housing benefit fraud. It will also introduce on-the-spot fines for claimants accused of giving inaccurate or misleading information about their circumstances.

From October 1997 the penalties for incorrect completion of forms will rise. The government claims that 60% of current Income Support claim forms are completed incorrectly and claimants will be encouraged to take more responsibility for providing information. So instead of making the forms simpler, it is now proposed that the start date of a claim should be linked to the date when all information required is provided – and that any backdating of claims should be severely restricted.

Payments

It is also becoming ever harder to find out what benefits can still be claimed. The Benefits Agency's own newsletter has revealed that leaflets telling people how to apply for hardship payments will no longer be on display in Jobcentres, Social Security offices or Post Offices.

At every point the government turns the screw. Changes to housing benefit regulations and the introduction of the Job Seekers Allowance (JSA) have all made it more difficult for those most in need to receive any income at all. In his budget speech on 26 November, the Chancellor said that the government's aim was to ensure that those on benefits do not have a more comfortable lifestyle than those who are supporting

Britain is now the most unequal country in the western world. According to the United Nations, the gap between rich and poor in this country is wider today than in such African countries as Ghana and Ethiopia. Meanwhile, both Tory and New Labour politicians are engaged in blaming the poor. **Clare Travis** assesses the impact of the assault on the welfare state and what is needed to repair the damage.



A teenage beggar: Tories say he does it "for pleasure"

themselves on modest incomes. As the Unemployment Unit points out, just as those modest incomes have plunged, so benefits get levelled down to maintain a pathetic differential.

The insecure, low-paid sections of the labour force continue to grow. So, moving off benefit and into work is a high risk choice for little reward. Of course, Tory politicians will never publicly admit the effects of their social policies. Instead, they make a point of blaming the victims as with minister David Maclean who asserted that "there are no genuine beggars. Those who are in need have got all the social benefits they require. Beggars are doing so out of choice because they find it more pleasant."

The most horrific consequence of the relentless assault on benefits – especially for young people – has been the spiralling growth in homelessness. Despite the rising number of people living on the street or in cockroach-infested bed and breakfast hotels, the government continues to cut the money to build social housing.

The Housing Corporation, which subsidises housing associations, has had its budget slashed by £247 million. This could mean that as few as 30,000 homes at affordable rents will be built each year (only half the government's own stated target for new lettings). Meanwhile, local authority money for repairs and renovations has been cut

by £250 million.

The recently published *Inquiry Into Preventing Youth Homelessness* estimated that between 200,000 and 300,000 young people experienced homelessness at some point in 1995. The study emphasised that homeless young people are mainly forced to leave home rather than choosing to do so: stress and escalating tensions, caused by poverty at home, or a change in the family structure, can make life intolerable.

The report showed how the poverty trap can destroy young lives and how the most vulnerable young people are

also most likely to fall through the gaping holes in the "safety net". Two in five young women who become homeless have suffered sexual abuse in childhood or adolescence. Those young people most in need of support are precisely those who are being abandoned as they reach adulthood. Nine in ten young people leaving local authority care are unemployed, while 23% of those leaving care have no support from any source.

The findings from homelessness projects around the country show that the homeless population is getting younger and younger – an impression confirmed by local authority statistics in London. Around a quarter of all homeless applications to councils are from single 16 to 25 year olds – thousands more don't even bother to apply because they are generally not eligible for social housing.

Life on the streets has a devastating effect on health. Homeless people are 35 times more likely to commit suicide than the rest of the population and the average life expectancy for a homeless person is only 42 years of age.

Myths

Many of the government's policies have been justified on the basis that they are designed to combat benefit dependency. But as the Unemployment Unit's *Working Brief* reported last month the government's own research suggests that some of the main assumptions on which current social security policy is based are myths with no factual basis. The benefit dependency myth maintains that long periods on the dole sap an individual's motivation to find paid work. This belief then easily leads to a justification of compulsory retraining and jobsearch courses for the long-term unemployed.

Working Brief cites some of the government's own research and concludes that the real issues are not "demotivation" or dependency, but a lack of skills and resources among the unemployed and a labour market which discriminates against ethnic minorities and older workers. In short, there is a real danger that long-term unemployment will be replaced by long-term poverty at the fringes of the labour market.

In order to combat alleged fraud and to motivate the jobless, the Tories have cooked up endless schemes to force people off the register. In addition to the notorious JSA, there is now Project Work, another compulsory measure which the government has extended to a further 29 pilot areas before the three original trials were even completed. As

one backbench Tory MP put it, this scheme, which forces long-term unemployed people into demeaning work for a meagre top-up, "sorts out the wheat from the chaff".

The Labour Party, far from challenging the Tories on the issues of unemployment, poverty and homelessness are now competing to prove they are tougher than the Tories. The policy of zero tolerance, introduced in New York and recently tried in London's King's Cross received Tony Blair's seal of approval in his interview with *The Big Issue*.

Crackdown

The basic theory of zero tolerance is that a crack down on little crimes helps cut big crimes. *The Big Issue* interviewer confronted Blair with the fact that zero tolerance means clearing beggars off the streets. New Labour's leader replied that it's not satisfactory to leave them where they are: "I often drop my kids off at Kings Cross in the morning and it's actually quite a frightening place for people."

Blair is prepared to embrace the same brutal social control measures as the Tories. The government included five law and order measures in the last Queen's Speech before the election. Even as they keep the lid on welfare spending, the Tories have earmarked an extra £450 million for the Home Office budget to put an extra 2,000 cops on the streets and create another 8,600 prison places.

The Labour Party's emphasis is little different. Its policy document, *Tackling the Causes of Crime*, continues to put the blame on poor individuals and households for their own plight. In a country where one-third of children grow up in households below the official poverty line, the bright young things who formulate New Labour policy can only think of parenting classes, more emphasis on the legal responsibility of parents, new ways for police and local authorities to cut truancy levels.

Solutions

The labour movement must reject this recycled Victorian morality that seeks to create a new category of underserving poor.

Socialists must take the arguments around the real causes and real solutions to poverty into the unions. They need to mobilise around demands on an incoming Labour government to abolish low pay through the immediate introduction of a national minimum wage of at least £6 an hour, with benefits fixed at the same rate, and to finance action against poverty through a wealth tax that hits the rich. The money could then be used to:

- finance a massive programme of council house building at full union rates and under workers' control;
- restore full benefits to 16 and 17 year olds;
- provide real training for proper jobs at union-negotiated rates of pay. ■

EUROMARCH '97

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Some Mother's Son

Ten men dead

Lesley Day reviews
Some Mother's Son,
directed by
Terry George,
on general release

SOME MOTHER'S SON tells the story of the Republican prisoners' hunger strike of 1981 through the eyes of the mother of one of the prisoners. On its release last month, Helen Mirren found herself beset by British media hounds demanding to know why she was taking the lead role in "pro-IRA propaganda".

This accusation tells us more about the abject state of the British press than anything else. *Some Mother's Son* is certainly not a "pro-IRA film". Its perspective, that of a woman who is drawn reluctantly but inexorably into campaigning for the hunger strikers, is one that is critical of all the major players – the British government, the Sinn Féin leadership and even the Church. Its dominant message is that violence, from whatever quarter, is futile.

But what riles the apologists for British imperialism is the film's honest attempt to show how the actions of the British state in Northern Ireland created support for Republican resistance and drove young men to such extraordinary acts of heroism and self sacrifice.

Harassment

This is not to say that the film gives us a history of the long years of oppression and discrimination. But its sketch of a rural community besieged by British soldiers, disrupted by road blocks and constantly having to endure the harassment of its nationalist sympathisers, gives the viewer an insight into Irish life under British occupation.

Like *In the Name of the Father*, written by the same team of Terry George and Jim Sheridan, *Some Mother's Son* starts with ordinary people who find themselves criminalised and politicised by the circumstances around them. They are then compelled to act and in so doing draw on unknown reserves of ability and courage.

Helen Mirren plays a schoolteacher, Cathleen Quigley, who reacts with total horror to the news that her son has been



Real mothers marching to demand political status for republican prisoners

involved in the IRA, gradually learns more about the reality of British state repression and finally has to take political action.

British critics protested about the stereotypical British government characters – a hypocritical complaint when set against all the stereotypical "terrorists" that have been fed to us on TV and film over the years. Even the

more sympathetic reviews in the British press felt the Thatcherite hatchet man, who intervenes to stoke up confrontation, was too much of a caricature, while the *Financial Times* protested that:

"The Brits are the usual gallery of Westminster-despatched wimps and villains with satanic under-lighting and death pale complexions."

Actually for anyone who's had any dealings with the hard-nosed, me-first people elevated into public life during the 1980s, this was no caricature. We've all met them in the flesh, orchestrating attacks on the miners or leading Human Resource Management in hospital trusts. They are despicable, vulgar and vicious.

Contrast

The film does use some overly two dimensional characters, but these are present on all sides—neither the Sinn Féin leadership nor the church escape this treatment. In contrast the mothers emerge as more rounded and growing characters.

Helen Mirren's performance has been justly praised but most striking is the portrayal of the committed republican played by Fionnula Flanagan. She emerges from behind her hard-faced exterior to lead Mirren's character, and the audience, to a better understanding of the political conviction and commitment of Republican families.

Above all, though, *Some Mother's Son* is a powerful and moving portrayal of the hunger strikers themselves. They were not the dupes of a cynical Republican leadership as the British reports of the time tried to suggest. They were driven to extreme protest by the extreme brutality of the British state.

The film provides the backdrop of the no-jury Diplock Courts which convicted these men and the government provocation – the removal of the rights associated with political status – which led to the growing crisis in the H blocks.

The prisoners emerge as what they were – heroic young men absolutely committed to a cause, with faith in the future.

Their relatives are forced into the most terrible of vigils and the most agonising of decisions. They are forced to watch their sons die because British imperialism is determined to brand them as criminals instead of prisoners of war.

The concentration on the individual

and human dimension of the tragedy is both the film's strength and its weakness. As a way into the story, it helps to grip the viewer and take them into what may be unfamiliar territory. But this individualised view also contributes to the idea, widely propagated in Britain, that the mass of people in the Northern Ireland Catholic community are separate from the struggle, hostile to it and indifferent to their status as a subject, colonial people. It is a view that obscures the depth and scale of the movement against the British troops and against the Orange state in Northern Ireland.

Although the masses appear briefly during the election campaign for Bobby Sands, who was elected as an MP and who became the first of the ten hunger strikers to die, we are far removed from the urban base of Republicanism, and in particular from the Derry and Belfast anti-unionist working class who had challenged the long years of British oppression and who mobilised in their thousands during the H Block campaign.

Relevance

The breakdown of Major's fake "peace process" has meant the film has not been as widely shown as it deserves to be. One critic admitted that his sympathy for the characters "may be a little less wholehearted now than in the ceasefire months when the film was made"! Yet the story has a particular relevance at a time when the British state has forced another incarcerated group—this time of asylum seekers—into a position where they have to use the hunger strike as the only weapon left to defend themselves against injustice.

If there is still a chance to see it, do. Use it as a starting point for a discussion on Northern Ireland and a reminder that it is the British presence there, propping up a sectarian state through force of arms, that is the real cause of the violence, the tragedy and the sacrifice of young lives. ■

Carla's Song

Busman's Nicaraguan holiday

G.R. McColl reviews
Carla's Song,
directed by Ken Loach,
on general release.

FOR MANY on the western left the Nicaraguan revolution was a beacon of hope in the 1980s, the decade of Reagan, Thatcher and a world wide reactionary offensive. Support for Nicaragua under the Sandinistas (the FSLN) even became the height of radical chic as artists, ranging from Graham Greene to The Clash, rallied to the cause.

The Sandinista revolution in 1979 was a popular uprising against the Somoza dictatorship – one of the most brutal and parasitic regimes in the world. The FSLN dominated government delivered dramatic improvements in health care and launched an ambitious literacy programme. For a time, there was also a substantial rise in the living standards of the urban working class and the mass of poor peasants.

This tale of social progress in a Third World nation proved short-lived. The overthrow of Somoza by a movement led by left nationalists inevitably provoked the wrath of Nicaragua's imperialist neighbour, the United States. First Carter, and then Reagan, financed the "Contras" – an army made up of Somocistas and other elements of the Nicaraguan bourgeoisie opposed to the Sandinistas' modest nationalisations and land reform measures. With extensive training and logistical support from

the CIA, the Contras waged a murderous decade-long war that literally bled the country and its revolution dry. This reactionary war is the backdrop to the latest film from Britain's foremost socialist director, Ken Loach.

His last film, *Land and Freedom*, was a powerful exploration of the Spanish Civil War, which exposed Stalinism's role as the butcher of a revolution. Unfortunately, *Carla's Song* falls below Loach's usual standard. It offers neither the cutting political edge of *Land and Freedom* nor the dramatic punch of other recent Loach films, such as *Riff Raff* and *Raining Stones* – both stunning indictments of what Thatcherism did to sections of the working class.

Obsessive

The plot unfolds in the summer of 1987 with a chance encounter between George, a good-natured, wisecracking but hopelessly naive Glaswegian bus driver (Robert Carlyle) and a mysterious female fare dodger (Oyanka

Cabezas). Having defended her against a bus inspector, George sets off on an obsessive quest for the woman who turns out to be Carla. She is an "illegal" refugee from Nicaragua, traumatised by an horrific experience she can only begin to talk about.

Up to this point the film appears to be an awkward romance, spiced with comic moments. But in his pursuit of Carla, George gets the sack for "gross misconduct". Here the film takes an incredible twist as George buys two British Airways tickets for Managua. Loach's films usually pay meticulous attention to detail, but here is a jobless young bus driver, without any redundancy pay, living in a high-rise council block—and paying for flights on one of the world's most expensive airlines.

Soon after their arrival in Nicaragua, Carla and George find themselves plunged into a society under siege. The movie seeks to document the gains of the revolution with images of a women's centre, a clinic and a literacy class for rural peasants. In one powerful, spontaneously improvised scene a group of peasants explain to George what the revolution meant to them.

In general, however, this is familiar cinematic territory, including the hard-nosed CIA operative turned human

rights activist who knows the awful details of Carla's wartime experience. Ironically, the Hollywood director, Oliver Stone, told a similar story more effectively in his film, *Salvador*.

Loach has described the film as a work about "human, interpersonal connections", but only rarely do these make any dramatic sparks fly or throw light on the historical situation.

Authorship

The film never explores the question of how the Sandinistas' own politics contributed to the eventual defeat of the Nicaraguan revolution. This may be due to authorship of the screenplay by Scottish human rights lawyer, Paul Laverty, who spent three years in Nicaragua and saw the FSLN government through rose-tinted glasses.

Especially in the context of the second cold war, unleashed by Washington even before Reagan's arrival in the White House, the survival of the revolution depended on spreading it beyond the boundaries of a tiny, economically backward country. The FSLN leadership, politically dominated by a mixture of Stalinism and nationalism and citing the distinctly Nicaraguan character of the revolution, shied away from directly intervening in the revolutionary crises wracking neighbouring

El Salvador and Guatemala.

The Sandinistas also rejected more radical measures against the country's bourgeoisie. But their decision not to expropriate key sections of the local capitalist class could not win these bosses to the defence of the revolution or placate the Reagan administration. Instead, the FSLN government found itself attacking its own mass base through repeated austerity programmes in order to finance the long war against the Contras.

Nearly 20 years after the overthrow of the Somoza regime, a Somocista now occupies the presidential palace. Roberto Aleman's victory over FSLN leader Daniel Ortega in the autumn 1996 election reflected the impact of the Sandinistas' own policies as well as the devastating pressure exercised by US imperialism.

Clearly, a two-hour film could not address all these issues, but ultimately *Carla's Song* is a demoralising picture. As a piece of anti-imperialist propaganda, it never achieves the compelling power of *Battle of Algiers*. Worse, its uncritical view of the Sandinista revolution could lead to the conclusion that nothing else could have been done; the bad guys from the CIA were bound to win. That isn't true, as Ken Loach well knows. ■

HAROLD WILSON AND THE 1964 LABOUR GOVERNMENT

The devaluation of s

HAROLD WILSON won the Labour leadership in 1962 after the unexpected death of the right-winger Hugh Gaitskell.

Although the candidate of the left, backed by Tribune, Wilson had not played a prominent role in the battles over nuclear disarmament and nationalisation. His reputation was made as the quick-witted scourge of old-fashioned Toryism and the champion of state-directed modernisation.

The reality of Britain at that time was not the carefree swinging sixties that most people "remember". Certainly there was near full employment, real wages had risen and youth culture was beginning to emerge. But Britain's long boom was a lot weaker than that in the Common Market. Italian, German and French annual growth rates were over twice those of Britain, which was locked into the "Stop-go cycle".

Periods of expansion quickly produced a balance of payments crisis as superior foreign exports flooded in. The pound then came under pressure and the government was forced to take deflationary measures. "Economic stops" in 1957 and 1961 choked off an already low rate of investment. Industries like motor cycles and textiles collapsed or shrank rapidly under competition from the Far East.

A harsh winter in 1962-3 saw unemployment soar. The premier, Harold Macmillan, who had been hailed as "Supermac", was suddenly seen as a doddering old fool. The Profumo affair

fatally wounded him, but the Tories pulled off their old trick of changing leader a year before an election. Unfortunately for them, they chose the "eleventh Earl of Home", a wealthy landowner in Scotland. He was the perfect target for Wilson's rhetoric about the "grouse moor mentality" of the Tories.

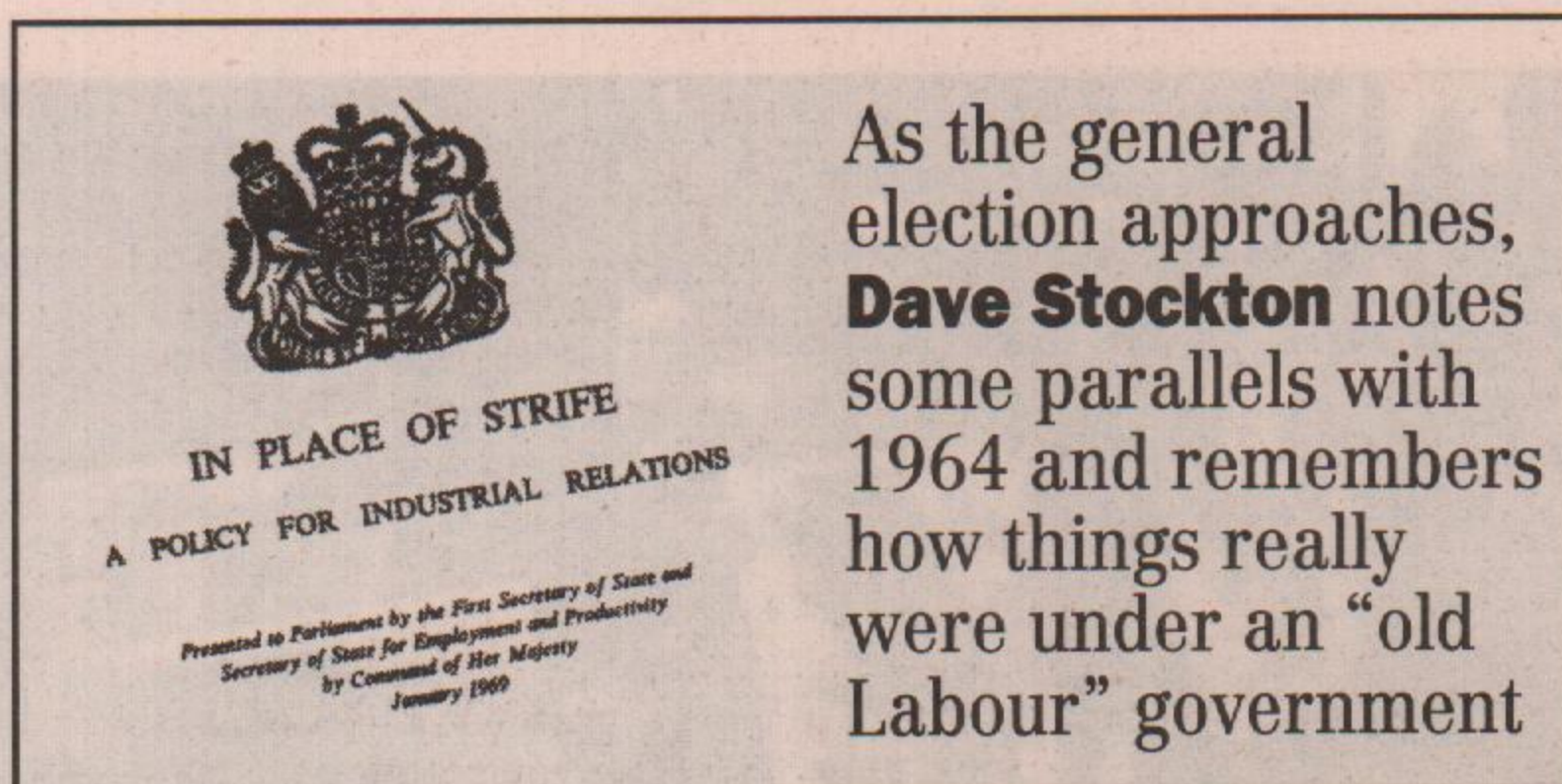
What Wilson stigmatised, however, was not capitalism as such but hide-bound, old-fashioned capitalism. What he advocated was the corporatism common on the continent, where management, unions and government were locked into a "partnership", which subordinated workers' interests to those of a booming capitalism.

Such corporatism was fashionable in the early 1960s, most obviously in France. Surely the answer for Britain was for the state to promote modernisation by boosting investment and research.

Wilson's first speech as leader to the Labour Party Conference in 1963 seized on this state capitalist theme but covered it in socialist language. The word "revolution" was used repeatedly. He meant a technological revolution but many didn't listen or wanted to believe that radical change was on the horizon.

Wilson promised a progressive response to the "automation" that millions feared would bring back mass unemployment:

"If there had not been a case for socialism before, automation would have created it. It is the choice between



As the general election approaches, **Dave Stockton** notes some parallels with 1964 and remembers how things really were under an "old Labour" government

the blind imposition of technological advance, with all that means in terms of unemployment, and the conscious, planned, purposive use of scientific progress to provide undreamed of living standards and the possibility of leisure, ultimately, on an unbelievable scale."

However, the practical measures to achieve this utopia were feeble in the extreme. Wilson filled his speeches with images of the "new breakthroughs in marine propulsion, in aircraft guidance, in electronics, in agricultural and textile machinery". Such techno-scientific jargon and an emphasis on the role of the state in directing, planning and even competing with private industry was made to sound like the socialist utopia.

Labour's manifesto, *A New Britain*, concentrated on this programme of economic reform. It promised a Prices and Incomes policy to curb prices and boost

incomes. It included social reforms such as increased pensions, comprehensive schools with a leaving age of 16, and half a million housing units a year. Yet, despite Wilson's trouncing of the Tories in debate, Labour's popular vote was actually less than in 1959. It was a swing to the Liberals of two million Tory voters which gave Labour a tiny majority of four in the 1964 election.

The key positions in Wilson's cabinet went to his right-wing rivals. George Brown was Secretary of State for Economic Affairs, in charge of the National Plan and James Callaghan was Chancellor of the Exchequer. Their first obstacle was the balance of payments deficit left by Reginald Maudling, the outgoing Tory chancellor. His words to Jim Callaghan on leaving Number Eleven Downing Street, "sorry about the mess old cock!", soon took on a deeper meaning.

The pre-election boom had created a massive trade deficit. Lord Cromer, the Governor of the Bank of England, demanded drastic measures to prevent a run on the pound. Wilson asked him incredulously whether he expected him to implement the very Tory policies he had stigmatised. "Yes, indeed!" replied the ruling class trustee. There were only two courses available to a reformist government: a major deflationary budget or the devaluation of the pound.

Naturally, the Treasury, the Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) were heartily in favour of the former. Sterling was still the second world reserve currency. The USA insisted that such a policy was a precondition for IMF support for the pound.

Washington also demanded support for the Vietnam War. Wilson happily complied, stopping short only at the president's tentative requests for British troops. In July 1965, the government imposed a series of tax rises in return for an IMF loan of \$1.4 billion. At a stroke, Wilson not only sabotaged his own economic policy but set in train the two movements which would finally undermine his government and nearly wreck his party – a revolt by rank and file trade unionists and the great student upheaval.

In September 1965, George Brown launched Labour's National Plan. Like all state capitalist plans it was only indicative, not authoritative. But even compared to such plans in France or Japan it was completely toothless. It did

"Old Labour" attacks the unions

IN 1965, MEMBERSHIP of TUC-affiliated unions stood at 8,868,000. The unions were led by a conservative bureaucracy of 2,800 full time officials but full employment had enabled workers to push up real wages by 2-3 percent a year. By the 1960s, however, it was rarely national wage bargaining which led the way. Leadership in key industries – cars, engineering, the print, the docks – had slipped out of the hands of officials and into those of shop stewards.

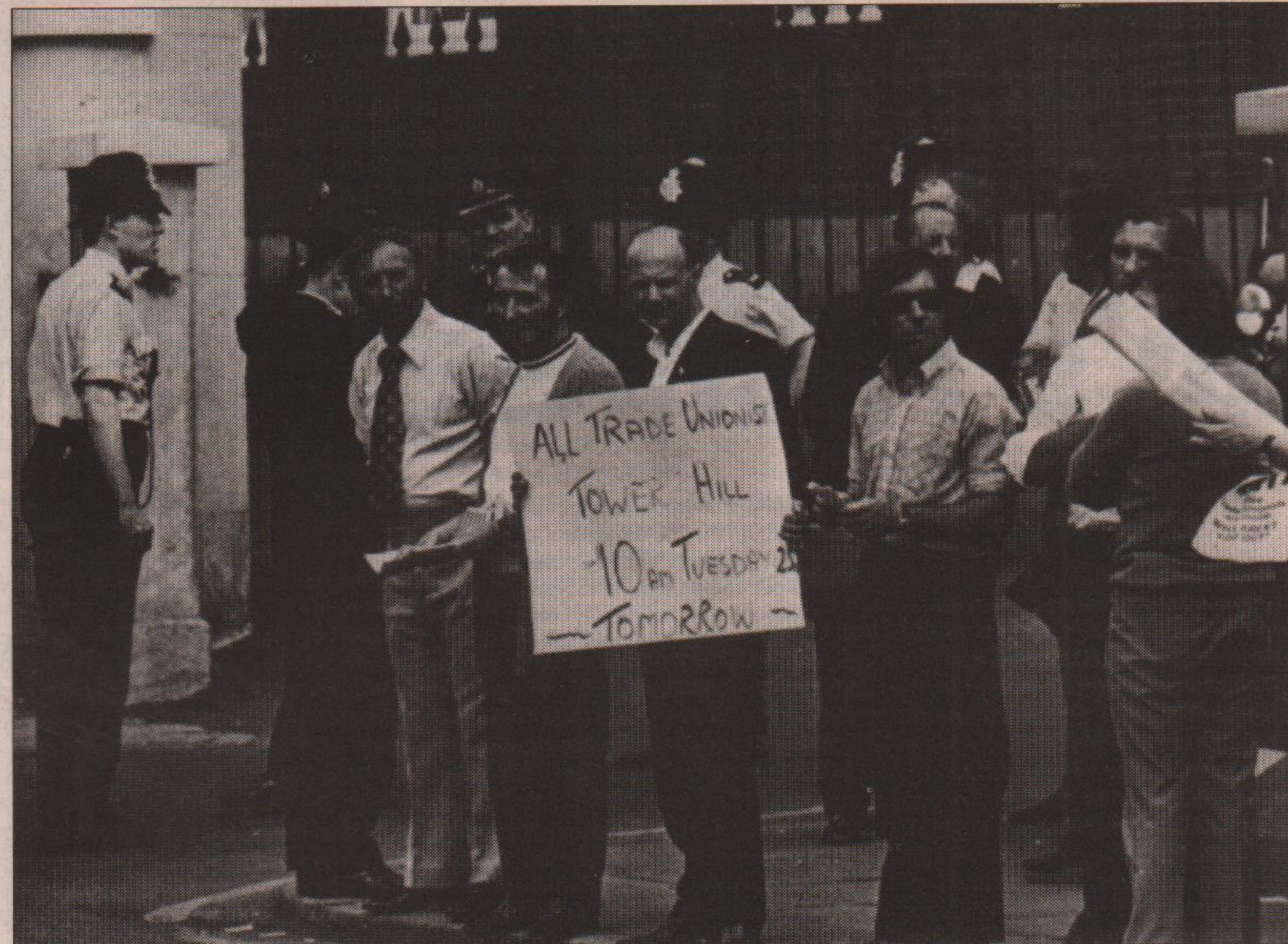
Stewards had developed a tactic of short, often sectional, strikes for increases above the nationally agreed wage levels. As a result, deals negotiated by national officials were seen simply as a minimum and actual pay scales were those won by the stewards.

In the early 1960s the number of stewards was estimated at 90,000. This rose to 175,000 in 1968 and by the 1970s had reached 250,000, as the system spread to white collar and public sector workers.

Shop stewards were hated by management, Labour leaders and union leaders alike. Bill (later Sir William and ultimately Lord) Carron of the AEU described them as; "werewolves who are rushing madly towards industrial ruin and howling delighted at the foam on their muzzles which they accept as their only guiding light".

The union and Labour leaders hated them because they were a truly spontaneous development of the rank and file, answerable to their members by direct election and re-election. They were, moreover, organisationally independent of the officials and often unincorporated in the union constitution. As a result they had their own, separate, power base which stood in contradiction to the leaders' attempts at corporatism. This was especially true over incomes policy or, as the stewards correctly called it, the wage freeze.

At first, most shop stewards, even the most militant, were very far from



Militants mobilise for action against *In Place of Strife*

being politically motivated. They prided themselves on keeping politics out of the wages struggle. Indeed, they thought it was the Labour government and the "knights and barons of the TUC" who were politicising things by demanding wage restraint "in the national interest". As the 1960s progressed, however, the Communist Party did develop a strong influence amongst shop stewards.

The CP's broad left strategy channelled shop floor militancy into a series of campaigns to elect "left" officials. Wilson's policy of using the right-

wing union leaders to back up his pay freeze actually gave a huge boost to this campaign. Between 1964 and 1967, the average number of days lost through strikes ranged from 2-3 million. In 1968, this doubled to 4.7 million. It reached 6.7 million in 1969.

By the late 1960s a number of left-wingers had won important positions in the large unions. Hugh Scanlon was elected president of the AEU in 1967, Jack Jones succeeded Frank Cousins in the TGWU in 1968. Things began to move in the NUM with the election of Lawrence Daly, a commu-

nist, though he was offset by Joe Gormley, a right winger.

The left officials had a greater degree of tolerance of shop stewards' actions and occasionally gave official support to strikes and political protests. Through the block vote they caused a swing to the left at Labour Party conferences and emboldened the Tribunites to conduct "revolts" in parliament on issues where the government had a safe majority.

The number of large national strikes increased as the Incomes Policy bottled up wage pressure and diverted it

towards official national claims. In 1968, both the TUC and the Labour Party conference rejected the Incomes Policy by large majorities.

At the same time, Labour was slumping in the polls. Wilson decided to bring in laws to curb the power of shop stewards and prevent unofficial strikes. The actual measures, drawn up by Barbara Castle in the White Paper, *In Place of Strife*, included some, such as union recognition, which strengthened the position of the union leaders, but its main provisions were aimed at the shop floor militants. Against unofficial strikes, the government could order a "cooling off period" of 28 days, enforce pre-strike ballots and intervene in inter-union disputes.

The response of the shop stewards' movement was a campaign of industrial action. It was largely under CP leadership in the Liaison Committee for the Defence of Trade Unions (LCDTU) which held large conferences to mobilise for "days of action". These were the first political strikes since the war and they were against "the party of the working class".

On 27 February 1969, 150,000 workers struck and demonstrated in Scotland and on Merseyside under the slogan "Kill the Bill". On 1 May 1969, 250,000 struck and demonstrated. The trade union leaders were forced to renounce all support for the Bill and on 3 March, 55 Labour backbenchers voted against it. By the summer, Callaghan, for totally opportunist reasons, led a cabinet revolt and the Bill was indeed killed.

Through this campaign, a shop stewards' movement came into being which, if not yet separate from Labourism, was already highly suspicious of it. More, it was willing to look with unprejudiced eyes towards the CP and, later, to the far left groups, for what they thought were militant, intransigent politics which seemed to mirror the stewards' own experience and objectives. ■

socialism



Castle and Wilson confer on how to defeat the shop stewards' movement

not command anyone to do anything but only set a series of projections: a growth rate of 3.8%; a 25% increase in output by 1970; targets for fiscal policy and employment levels. The government's role would be to encourage private industry to co-operate with both it and the trade unions to achieve these targets.

The Plan's fatal flaw was its subordination to the Treasury and the Bank of England, the very institutions which Wilson had analysed as the main cause of Britain's backwardness. However, he was able to present this to Labour supporters as the unavoidable consequence of the "Thirteen Years of Tory Misrule" and his tiny Commons majority.

The alibi of the small majority and

the Tory legacy was soon to be taken from Wilson and Brown. The general election in 1966 swept Labour back in with 48 per cent of the vote, the same as Attlee achieved in 1945, and a majority of 96.

Once again, a Labour victory was followed by a balance of payments crisis and a run on the pound. Wilson and Callaghan forced through £500 million worth of cuts and increases in indirect taxation. It was a complete return to the Tory stop-go policies. As Reginald Maudling remarked acidly, "they have inherited our problems and, it seems, our solutions too."

This budget was effectively the end for the National Plan. All that remained was the Prices and Incomes

Policy. Instead of being part of a plan for coherent growth, it became a plan to slash wages. Wilson decided that to impose it he would have to take on and defeat a section of workers. He chose the seafarers, a hitherto moderate work-force who were fighting to shorten hours and increase pay.

Wilson launched a McCarthy-style red scare against the seafarers' shop stewards, accusing them of being "a tightly knit group of politically motivated men", and naming those who were members of the Communist Party.

This witch-hunt brought an end to the strike but shocked many rank and file Labour supporters. Combined with Foreign Secretary Michael Stewart's fulsome defence of United States bombing in Vietnam, it started a mass exodus, of up to 200,000 members, from the Labour Party. Ken Livingstone, who actually joined the Labour Party in 1968, felt like "a rat who was boarding a sinking ship".

Moreover, all this did not save Labour from another run on the pound. This time they were forced into a humiliating devaluation. Thanks to the majority of the trade union bureaucracy, Wilson had some success in freezing wage levels from 1966-68. But this led to a revolt of the rank and file, spearheaded by the shop stewards, which brought this to a grinding halt. Wilson concluded that the power of the shop stewards had to be broken. Once again, Labour was poised to attack and alienate its own base. ■

Vietnam and the student revolt

ONE OF Labour's great successes was the expansion of higher education. Although it was done on the cheap, the student population was nearly doubled after 1964. For the first time, the majority was now drawn from lower middle class and working class backgrounds. Nonetheless, by 1968, support for Labour amongst students and youth generally had evaporated. Obviously, the main cause of this was Vietnam.

In 1966, the Vietnam Solidarity Campaign was founded. Breaking away from the "Peace In Vietnam" position of the Communist Party, it called for "Victory to the NLF!" On 22 October 1967, tens of thousands marched to the US embassy in Grosvenor Square and large scale rioting ensued. On 17 March 1968, 200,000 were involved in the fiercest fighting in the capital since the 1930s. On 27 October 1968, the movement peaked with 500,000 claimed by the organisers.

Across the country, sit-ins demanded radical democratisation of the universities and organised Marxist/libertarian "alternative universities". This soon led to the rapid growth of the "Trotskyist" groups; the International Marxist Group and the International Socialists as well as Maoists and anarchists. Those who considered themselves revolutionaries numbered tens of thousands and the "grouplets" grew tenfold in a matter of two or three years.

Further alienation was fuelled by the Labour government's rotten attitude to immigration. In 1961, Hugh Gaitskell, in one of the few progressive stands of his life, opposed the Tories' Commonwealth Immigration Bill. He characterised it as racist and declared Labour's opposition in principle to it.

He went on: "We on this side are clear in our attitude towards restricted immigration. We are categorically against it."

Yet, by 1963, Wilson was on record

as saying in the House; "We do not contest the need for control of commonwealth immigration to this country". Indeed, in the manifesto he pledged to "retain immigration control".

In 1968, citing the need to prevent a "flood" of 150,000 Kenyan Asians into Britain, Callaghan rushed through, in one week, an Act to strip them of their right to come to Britain. On top of this was the largely symbolic opposition to the racist Smith regime in Rhodesia, collusion in arms sales to South Africa, support for Israel and the waging of a war in Aden and the Gulf against national liberation forces.

Wilson staggered on into 1970 then, taking advantage of an upturn in the opinion polls, he went to the country a year before he needed to and lost. What were the achievements of his government?

Certainly they had carried out a substantial house building programme, although much of it became "slums in the sky" because of the cheap building methods used. They also increased dramatically the size of further education, including Wilson's pet scheme, the Open University. Much more cautiously, they had begun "comprehensivisation", though they had not dared to impose it on the Tory shires.

Probably the greatest achievements of the period were in the sphere of social legislation; the death penalty abolished, homosexual acts in private decriminalised for males over the age of 21, divorce by consent after two years, abortion decriminalised, an act against racial discrimination and one legislating equal pay for equal work.

However, many of these measures were timidly left to private members' bills, and the barbarous features of British life they addressed were already long gone on the continent, and even in the USA. There was, in any case, nothing socialist about them, nor could they offset the overwhelming feeling of betrayal of those who, in 1964, had been solid and loyal Labour supporters. ■

The lessons for today

THE ROTTEN record of the 1964-1970 Labour government confirms the absolute correctness of the Trotskyist tactic of calling for a vote for Labour but denouncing in advance their reformist policies which will degenerate into attacks on the working class.

It is better to put the reformists to the cruel test of power than to leave them in opposition. In opposition, as was to be seen between 1970 and 1974, they can rejuvenate themselves, both because the attacks of the Tories make Labour's seem mild by comparison, and because Labour moved to the left, promising a new strategy of radical reforms.

The student revolt of 1967-8 and the rank and file workers' struggles of 1969-71 created conditions in

which a revolutionary party, rooted in the working class, could have been built. The possibilities that would have opened up in the years that followed can only be imagined.

That such a party was not built was a product of the programmatic weakness and tactical ineptitude of the existing organisations: the fact that they were centrists and not revolutionaries.

These are the lessons for 1997 and a Blair government. New Labour will inevitably disappoint its supporters, even if it promises virtually nothing compared to Wilson's old Labour Party. The level of class struggle and youth revolt will rise and an opportunity to destroy reformism will be presented. This time we must not fail. ■

The A to Z of Marxism

is for

Trotsky

BY COLIN LLOYD

IN 1937-38 Stalin put on trial the last remaining leaders of the Russian Revolution and most of the Red Army General Staff. They were convicted, amongst other things, of being "Trotskyists", and shot.

In 1944-45, there were strikes in Britain's mines and shipyards. The government – a coalition of Tory, Liberal and Labour – banned the strikes and accused the workers of being "Trotskyists".

More recently, in 1989, when the workers of Eastern Europe rose up against the Stalinist regimes, they were accused by the dying hard-line Communist Parties of – you guessed it – "a Trotskyist uprising".

But the vast majority of Red Army colonels, Barrow shipyard workers and East European protesters were not Trotskyists. Many had not even heard of Trotsky. They were attacked because they stood up against vicious rulers, but they were accused of Trotskyism because Trotsky has come to symbolise consistent revolutionary socialism. In this respect, Trotskyism's opponents have got it right.

Leon Trotsky was born in the Ukraine in 1879. At 18, while a student, he decided to devote himself to revolutionary politics. From then on, his life reads like a catalogue of the greatest events in the history of working class revolt. Exiled to Siberia, he joined Lenin's *Iskra* network. He escaped across the Russian Arctic, reached Western Europe and participated in the London Congress where the Mensheviks and Bolsheviks first formed.

In 1904, he wrote a pamphlet predicting that the Russian workers would lead the revolution against the Tsar and, against every other Russian revolutionary, argued that they would turn it into a revolution against capitalism and spread it to the advanced countries.

When the revolution broke out in 1905, Trotsky, aged 25, was elected chair of the St Petersburg Workers' Council (or Soviet) which led the revolution. Arrested again, he was exiled again and escaped again. Until 1917 he remained abroad, active in the labour movements of Austria, the Balkans, France and the USA.

In 1917, after the fall of the Tsar, Trotsky returned once more to Russia. Although he had sympathised with the Mensheviks previously, he now saw the supreme importance of Lenin's conception of the revolutionary party, joined the Bolsheviks and was immediately elected to their leadership.

Once again a leader of the Soviet, Trotsky masterminded the October Revolution and, when civil war broke out, created the Red Army from the workers' factory militias and led it to victory against the Whites and 16 foreign armies.

In the 1920s, he became the most intransigent opponent of Stalin's increasingly dictatorial methods. It was in this period, in his struggle to defend the principles of the revolution at the same time as trying to develop a strategy for the international communist movement, that a distinctive political method, Trotskyism, began to be codified, although he himself never used the term.

At its heart, was the idea, later embodied in the Transitional Programme of 1938, that in the modern, imperialist epoch, all workers' struggles can be linked to the need to struggle for power. Whether in China in the mid-1920s, in the Soviet Union itself, in Germany as the Nazis rose to power or in the Spanish Civil War of the 1930s, Trotsky developed political strategies which began with the immediate attacks being made on the workers and devised tactics, demands and methods of organisation that could transform those struggles into revolutionary struggles.

This political method brought Trotsky into the sharpest conflict with all the forces within the workers' movement who, consciously or not, opposed revolution in favour of some other, more immediate, supposedly more practical alternative.

In the 1930s, these forces were almost always more numerous and more powerful than Trotsky and his supporters. Only the most determined, the most clear-sighted, the most militant stayed alongside Trotsky as he fought to build a new, revolutionary International to lead the workers' movement in the world war he saw approaching.

Trotsky summed up this method of fighting in the Transitional Programme – the action programme of the Fourth International. The method embodied in this programme remains a valid guide to action for working class militants today. In every struggle we fight to advance the element of workers' self-organisation and control.

We fight for workplace committees, able to exercise control and a veto over management. We fight for cross-factory delegate committees, drawing in also delegates from housing estates, youth groups and the unemployed. Not only can these co-ordinate the struggle better than any trade union bureaucrat – they can also serve as a centre of potential working class power.

On the picket line, revolutionaries do not rest content with the "link arms and push" approach of the left trade union bureaucrats, but fight for organised picket line defence squads. In the fight against racism and fascism we likewise try to organise an alternative force, the better to prepare and equip the working class for the day it has to go up against the capitalist state machine.

There are many "heroic" aspects to Trotsky's life: the exiles, the battles and insurrections, the defiant speeches to his prosecutors, the assassination – all these are the stuff films are made of. But Trotsky's major achievement was to understand and keep alive the idea that socialism is built by the workers themselves – not by heroic individuals. He understood that workers have to learn in practice what socialism will look like – not just from books and newspapers but from the practical struggle in their own workplaces, estates and trade unions.

And that is why, wherever workers struggle for their own needs – ignoring the bureaucrats' pleas for moderation, and beginning to find new goals and forms of struggle – they are denounced as Trotskyists. ■

personal view

KEITH HARVEY

Heavy traffic ...

LAST AUTUMN getting through South London to work was a nightmare. Brixton Hill was being resurfaced for six weeks and traffic was reduced to one lane. Trying to get through Brixton by bus was hell; a five-mile journey took up to an hour.

One day I drove the car in the hope of outsmarting the traffic through a series of back street detours. My progress was spectacular: after 35 minutes I was stuck in Brixton, all of two miles from home. At this point, I gave up.

One routine piece of essential road maintenance caused chaos and misery for thousands. But a car breakdown, poor weather, a broken traffic light can all do the same. Even these are no longer required. As many radio listeners know, the usual cause of congestion and delays is summed up in the famous phrase, "sheer volume of traffic".

It takes longer now to travel by road from Marble Arch to the top of Edgware Road than it did 100 years ago by horse and carriage.

Failure

Other major cities increasingly suffer similar rush hour problems but surely us Londoners can escape the traffic by using the Tube? But as the *Financial Times* (FT) reported in its 9 January editorial, "the network is heading for an all-out collapse. Escalators are collapsing, embankments and tunnels are crumbling." Two small power failures in 1996 brought the whole network to a standstill.

The most basic cause of this traffic misery is capitalism itself and the car industry, which has formed its most powerful commercial main-spring. More cars every year, more two-car households. Cars are pushed as symbols of wealth and status, as icons of individualism—the very stamp of personality.

Another factor is that the Tories are in hock to the big construction firms that build roads and maintain them. More roads mean big profits and big contributions to Tory coffers. More roads encourage more traffic. In London, low investment in underground and bus systems, together with the perennial fare increases at double the rate of inflation, just push more and more travellers onto the road.

Millions are fed up with the pollution, the resulting asthma, the noise, the accidents; a new generation of youth have cut their activist teeth on anti-roads protests. The problem is devising a progressive solution that does not hit the working class.

Attention was focused in January on the new private members bill from Liberal Democrat MP, Don Foster. Nearly one-third of all MPs have backed his call to force the government to oversee a 10% reduction in traffic miles by 2010.

Bosses worried

The size of this task can be gauged from the fact that present official forecasts suggest that traffic miles will increase by at least 24-44% by 2010. The degree of cross-party support at Westminster is an indication that recently Britain's bosses themselves have become fed up with the transport system in Britain, especially in London.

Workers being delayed or even failing to get to work, or managers missing crucial appointments as a

result of the crumbling transport system, costs the bosses big bucks. They have reluctantly been forced to admit that something must be done about road traffic and public transport.

True to form, their first answer is to make the workers pay for the crisis. The *Economist* and the FT moaned that road-pricing would probably not get support in the short term, so a huge hike in petrol pump prices would deter some motorists. Raising government duties by 9% a year is one proposal.

Of course, this would hit the working class most, as do all indirect taxes. Expense account drivers would be able to pass on the cost to their firms.

But the transport chaos and widespread public disaffection with the Tories is driving bosses to think the unthinkable. Even arch Tory right-winger John Redwood has argued that the Tory election manifesto should commit itself to a freeze on Tube fares.

In a direct slap in the face for the free market, the *Economist* and FT called for some of the revenue from road pricing to be ploughed back into funding a decent public transport system. The FT admitted that under private ownership, London Underground cannot possibly finance the £720 million plus a year investment programme it needs.

Even more incredible, the Corporation of London has come up with the idea that London's businesses should be taxed on top of business rates in order to improve London's transport infrastructure. The FT approved, arguing that "the principle of charging employers directly for the costs of maintaining the system their workers use is a sound one".

A radical tax on the bosses, which is not then passed on to workers in higher shop prices, is something we should demand of Labour. But a lasting socialist solution to the crisis of transport can only be achieved in the context of a democratically planned economy in which all the relevant industries—road, rail, tube, air, construction—are owned and run by the working class.

Workers solution

A rational, cost-effective and environmentally friendly system would more than likely discourage the use of private road vehicles; it is not rational for thousands of virtually empty private cars to clog up and pollute our neighbourhoods. But above and beyond any monetary disincentive to car use would come the building of a cheap, safe, clean, fast, convenient public transport system which makes a continued desire for routine car ownership seem idiosyncratic.

The bosses count the cost of the Tories' free-market, fragmented and under-invested transport system in terms of absenteeism, lateness and lost profits. Ironically, their solutions have to recognise that planning and public ownership are not the social vices they would otherwise like us to believe.

Yet they better take care; you never know where such subversive thoughts may lead. Transport today; education, welfare and health services tomorrow? Given that my experience last year with Brixton Hill forced me to start cycling to work in 1997, I may well have need of a properly funded NHS. ■



MRTA guerrillas

Peru's hostage crisis

Poverty and repression exposed

In a stunning propaganda coup the Tupac Amaru Revolutionary Movement (MRTA) in Peru seized more than 500 hostages in Lima's Japanese embassy before Christmas. **Justo Cordova** reports from Lima on the background to this continuing drama and outlines a revolutionary alternative to the guerrillas' heroics.

THE CREAM of Lima's political elite were present to celebrate the birthday of Japan's emperor when several of the waiters – instead of serving the caviar – reached for their AK47s, revealing themselves as members of the guerrilla group.

They soon announced their demands: the release of their comrades from President Fujimori's jails and a programme of aid to relieve the impoverished Peruvian masses. They also highlighted, in front of the world's media, the horrendous conditions endured by political prisoners inside Peru's prisons.

For logistical reasons and as part of a "hearts and minds" campaign, the MRTA released over 400 of their reluctant guests during the first weeks. They whittled down their collection of worthies to 74 – all key Peruvian government ministers, members of parliament and the judiciary, as well as army and police officials.

The MRTA is the lesser known of Peru's two main guerrilla groups. Sendero Luminoso (SL) or "Shining Path" dominated the headlines in the 1980s until the capture of its leaders – "Chairman Gonzalo" (Abimael Guzman) and seven other central committee members – in 1992. That event, which was closely followed by a major split in the organisation, led to a dramatic disruption of SL's military capabilities.

The MRTA was formed in 1984. While Sendero looked to Mao's China, the MRTA found its inspiration in the Cuba of Che Guevara and his guerrilla strategy of creating "one, two, many Vietnams" in the Latin America of the 1960s. The MRTA were less sectarian to the mass popular organisations of resistance (trade unions, left parties, community groups) that were not under their leadership.

Sendero, in contrast, considered all popular groups outside their control as "revisionists" and no better than accomplices of the Peruvian state. Hence, their leaders were fair game for assassination and many peasant leaders, trade union activists and left personalities, along with MRTA members, were killed by SL.

The MRTA's first armed actions were

in 1987 and its influence spread during the next four years in the interior. Typical actions have included raiding food and clothing supplies and redistributing them to the poor, bank hold-ups and spectacular prison escapes. Like SL, the MRTA sought to establish a stable popular base for its actions in the coca producing Andean highlands where desperate peasants produced the raw material for the drug barons to process.

Whereas Sendero dominated the Upper Huallaga Valley region, the MRTA rooted themselves in the Central Huallaga area as well as setting up important bases in the north-east jungle department of Junin and along the north coast.

On 5 November 1987 they captured the 20,000 strong provincial city of Juanjui, locked up local police and ensured their deeds were prominently broadcast on national television.

In 1989 and 1991 the MRTA temporarily took over several towns. In Huallaga it extended protection to coca producers under attack from both "narco-barons" and the Peruvian authorities. They supported a major peasant strike in 1989.

The 1990 election of Alberto Fujimori as president soon shifted the balance of forces towards the government. Elected as a "populist" against a right wing neo-liberal opponent, Fujimori promised to end the hyper-inflation (then running at over 7,000%) and crack down on the guerrilla insurgency.

Repression against the peasants was stepped up and special counter-insurgency units were established. Politically motivated murders rose to 150 a month in Fujimori's first year. Then in April 1992, in a coup against the elected Congress, Fujimori effectively governed with the military, who were given free rein to wage terror against the urban poor and peasants in the name of "countering terrorism" and Fujimori became a born again neo-liberal.

Like the rest of the left in Peru, the MRTA's effectiveness, numbers and support all declined. By the time they invited themselves to the Japanese embassy celebrations it was thought the

MRTA had no more than 500 armed members left in Peru.

Socialists and anti-imperialists all over the world should refuse to join in the chorus of condemnation against the MRTA. Their action has focused world attention on the appalling consequences of IMF-backed economic policies in Peru and the brutal repression necessary to impose it. Fujimori's policies of privatisation, deregulation and mass sackings in the state sector have devastated the domestic economy and living standards.

Peru's return to price stability, with inflation down to 10%, has been paid for by the masses. The IMF's "strong currency" policies have led to soaring import prices and plummeting savings, mass unemployment and low wages. At the same time, the multinationals and Fujimori's backers in the bourgeoisie have made a killing, buying up state assets at knock-down prices and wringing huge profits from a super-exploited and increasingly unprotected labour force.

Socialists should support the demand for the release of all political prisoners from Peru's jails, not just those of the MRTA as the guerrillas first called for. But the MRTA's call for aid to the people is vague and insufficient. Where is the money to come from? Who is to dispense it?

Alleviating poverty must go hand-in-hand with taking power and wealth away from the multinationals and Peruvian bourgeoisie and placing it in the hands of the masses. The expropriation of the main companies, banks and all privatised state assets is essential, as is the refusal to pay the debts held by the IMF and foreign banks.

With such resources available, a massive programme of public works under the control of trade union and neighbourhood committees could really alleviate poverty and unemployment. Alongside this, a minimum wage/benefit of US\$1,000 is essential in today's Peru if the majority are to sustain anything like adequate levels of food and shelter at today's prices.

While the hostage crisis has served to highlight the repression and injustices of Fujimori's regime, ultimately the secret and isolated guerrilla actions of the MRTA will not overthrow it. Only a revival of the united action of the mass organisations of the working class and poor peasants – the trade unions, self-defence groups and neighbourhood committees – which flourished between 1977 and 1988 – can do that.

But this time they must be welded into a force that can disarm the military, disperse the corrupt Congress and establish a government of the workers and peasants. For this we need a new revolutionary socialist party in Peru. ■

NORTHERN IRELAND: Loyalists get what they want

Tory peace process farce

John Major's Irish "peace process" is a joke. To keep their grimy hands on Unionist votes in Parliament the Tories are giving them everything they want. The "parades commission" on Orange marches will have no powers. Loyalist paramilitaries have broken their ceasefire but are still welcomed into all party talks by the Tories. And there will be no new inquiry into the massacre of unarmed civilians in Derry on Bloody Sunday

25 years ago, despite new evidence pointing the finger of guilt at the British army.

Meanwhile, the farcical stop-start peace talks at the Forum have been stalled in the run up to the British General Election. The IRA's response to this has been to step up its own actions, including in the six counties. **Jeremy Dewar** examines the current state of affairs in Northern Ireland.

ONE YEAR ago, in February 1996, the IRA signalled the end of their ceasefire in dramatic fashion with the bombing of Canary Wharf. It came after almost 18 months of "peace", and 18 months of the British government refusing to make a single real concession to the nationalist community. Other high-profile bombings followed, including the ripping apart of the Arndale Shopping Centre in Manchester.

These acts had a symbolic significance, rather than representing a return to full-scale guerrilla warfare by the IRA. In effect, the IRA were saying, "We can still strike at the heart of the British state. Peace negotiations without the inclusion of Sinn Fein are, therefore, doomed." The 15.5% vote that Sinn Fein won last June, after the end of the ceasefire, proved that, despite the evident war-weariness of the nationalist population, Sinn Fein and the IRA continued to have mass support for that position.

Over the last six months, however, the IRA appear to have taken a new turn – or at least to have modified their tactics. For example, very large bombs were placed under Hammersmith Bridge and more recently inside the grounds of Belfast Castle on the day before the Forum talks were to resume. Neither went off.

Other smaller "close misses", cache finds and undetonated bombs have significantly outnumbered actual explosions. With regard to one incident the IRA's Belfast Brigade stated that:

"When the joint British army/RUC patrol passed the target area a Mark 16 mortar was launched but the warhead travelled between two jeeps in the patrol and exploded on the roadway." (*An Phoblacht* 16.1.97)

Are the IRA a bit rusty after the long ceasefire as some ignorant British journalists speculated? Certainly not. Having proved their capacity to hit, they are now reminding the British state of their continued resolve and capacity to intensify their offensive if they need to. Behind the current "offensive" lie specific pressures, aims and a strategy.

Despite what the British Government may say, the pressure for the IRA to continue to "do something" comes directly from the nationalist community itself. For large swathes of the Catholic population – and Protestants living near nationalist areas – 1996 was a year of hate, a throwback to the old days of triumphalist Orange parades and pogroms.

Poignant

The stand-off at Drumcree, in particular, where two Catholic residents were killed and over 200 families were forced out by loyalist mobs, was a poignant reminder that after almost 18 months of the ceasefire the Orange state and its permanently armed militia remained "commissioned" to the teeth.

Since then, the British media has concentrated, almost exclusively, on the IRA's actions. In reality, there has been a prolonged campaign of Loyalist intimidation and terror. Dozens of Catholic churches and schools have been picketed and even burnt to the ground. Catholics have been stoned while leaving mass, children terrorised on their way to and from school.

As in the summer, the RUC and the RIR have stood back, in practice giving tacit support to the Orange bigots. In complete contrast to the state's response to IRA warnings, it has been left to teachers to clear the schools of nationalist children when they have come under attack. Sinn Fein rightly accused the RUC of "showing a callous disregard for the lives of nationalist children".

What, then, are the aims of the current IRA campaign? The most immediate goal is to draw out the Combined Loyalist Military Command (CLMC). The Ulster Democratic Party (UDP) and the Progressive Unionist Party (PUP) both have seats at the Belfast Castle Forum talks on account of their (minuscule) votes in the June elections and their direct links with the CLMC.

Distinguish

The Loyalist paramilitary organisations have been at the heart of the campaign of terror against the nationalist communities for the past nine months. As the United Kingdom Unionist Party said, "it was either the tooth fairy or the CLMC" behind the attacks. Yet, Northern Ireland Secretary, Patrick Mayhew, continues to distinguish between the arson attacks and the car-bombs of the CLMC, who do not claim responsibility, and the actions of the IRA.

Sinn Fein have repeatedly called, not for the exclusion of the UDP and the PUP, but for equal treatment and thus the inclusion of Sinn Fein in the talks. Mayhew has not only declined them but has gone on a new verbal offensive against the IRA.

But the overall, low-intensity, character of the IRA's campaign signals a strategic aim which goes far beyond an attempt to force the Tory government to allow Sinn Fein to enter the peace talks. This aim was most clearly expressed by Martin McGuinness, one of Sinn Fein's leaders, in a recent TV interview, when he said that:

"Hope lies in the fact there will be a General Election, that there will be a new British government."

All parties in the six counties view the coming polls, both the general election and the local elections in May, as crucial. The peace process is at an impasse and the view is that only a new British government can reinvigorate it; hence the need to get a renewed mandate from the electorate.

For the Unionists, this has involved

both Trimble's Ulster Unionist Party (UUP) and Paisley's Democratic Unionist Party (DUP) disentangling themselves to a certain extent from the Tories. Trimble warned Major that his party cannot be counted on in crucial votes, like the Finance Bill. The Unionists have also been having discussions with New Labour concerning areas of possible collaboration under a new administration.

Whilst the UUP and the DUP will undoubtedly hammer out a division of the electoral spoils between them, it is unlikely that there will be any amicable pact between them and the smaller Unionist parties over the working class Loyalist vote. As each party vies for the mantle of defender of the Protestant workers' privileges, we can expect strains to appear. Already, Paisley has accused the CLMC of having broken its ceasefire and, by implication, called for the exclusion of the PUP and the UDP from the Forum.

Similarly, a pact between the constitutional nationalists of the SDLP and Sinn Fein seems very unlikely. The SDLP knows it has lost ground to Sinn Fein, especially during the events of the summer. In effect, this has forced the SDLP to project a more intransigent face, refusing to condemn the IRA outright and virtually boycotting the talks themselves.

The SDLP know that, without a ceasefire, they will be forced into further accommodations to Sinn Fein's agenda; they want a renewed truce so that they can continue to pull Sinn Fein towards their own constitutional nationalism in the fragile pan-nationalist bloc sponsored by Dublin.

There are many dangers for the nationalist community in Sinn Fein and the IRA's strategy. For a start, the general election may not result in a Labour government with a working majority. Pro-Unionist Tory backbenchers have already rebuffed Blair's plea for continued bipartisanship after the election and indicated their intention to force the Conservative Party further into the Unionist camp. Such vocal opposition to any move towards a settlement involving power-sharing and/or the Dublin government could unsettle a Labour government anxious to prove its establishment credentials.

More importantly, there is no evidence that the Labour Party – old or new – is any more sympathetic to the nationalist cause than the Tories. Labour is the party that sent the troops in, that stripped IRA prisoners of political status and that implemented the PTA.

Schema

Sinn Fein believe that Labour's stance on Scottish and Welsh assemblies opens the door for them to advance a policy of devolution and eventual reunification of Ireland. This schema forgets that devolution in



A loyalist arson attack on a bus carrying Catholics to church

Northern Ireland, on a Scottish or Welsh model, is impossible precisely because it would involve dismantling the systematic sectarianism that is an integral part of the statelet.

Finally and crucially, Sinn Fein's policy is flawed because, even if they were included in the talks on the basis of a renewed ceasefire, the Forum cannot deliver a just peace for the nationalist minority within the six-counties. The Framework document that the talks are based on has at its core a pledge to maintain the Orange veto: no change except by the consent of the (inbuilt Loyalist) majority in the six counties.

Travesty

This "majority" is a small minority in Ireland as a whole. The country was partitioned against the will of the overwhelming majority of its people by Britain in order to manufacture the Loyalist "majority". The continued partition is a denial of Ireland's basic right to national self-determination. All of this is a travesty of democracy and is studiously ignored by the Framework document.

Yet Sinn Fein have persistently indicated that all such questions will be up for negotiation as part of its own "peace process". It has trimmed its demands for national unity in order to get in on the all party talks. This is a dead end strategy for the oppressed and imprisoned nationalist community of the six counties. It is doubly wrong to believe that a Blair government will fundamentally alter the situation in favour of Sinn Fein and its entry into talks.

This is not to say that a Blair government could continue Major's cur-

rent policy of inertia. Whenever the general election is, the local elections will take place in May and the marching season begins at Easter.

The spectre of Drumcree Revisited (the Loyalists have said they will amass 100,000 to demand their right to march through Catholic areas) will haunt a Labour government from day one. This alone may push the IRA into a real offensive. Blair will be forced to act swiftly, not least by the USA and the EU, both of whom will want the question resolved this time.

Last year's resistance to the Orange Order's triumphalist parades was, to a large extent, policed and contained by Sinn Fein. But the resistance did take the form of mass action, especially by the nationalist youth.

Socialists need to participate in any future similar mobilisations and fight for organised self-defence of the beleaguered communities, for British troops out of Ireland now, the ending of partition and for the abolition of the RUC and RIR.

As well as this, socialists need to use the election period to challenge the Loyalists' grip on the Protestant working class. It is criminal that the Orange supremacists are left to squabble over their vote in the elections.

Demands for renationalisation of the privatised companies, for a minimum wage of £6 per hour and for a 35 hour week and a massive programme of public works to eradicate unemployment can help break Protestant workers from their bloc with their bosses – but only if they are linked to the fight against all discrimination and for a 32-county workers' republic. ■

CRISIS IN THE



IN THE LONG and troubled history of the Balkans 1997 looks set to be a momentous year. Mass demonstrations are now a daily event in Serbia, Bulgaria and Albania. The streets of Belgrade, Sofia and Tirana are filled with the noise of those who refuse to go on in the old ways.

While their origins lie in different immediate political and economic problems, the protests reflect a more general anger among the people in these countries. After the collapse of the Soviet Union and the Stalinist regimes across Eastern Europe, at last removing the dead weight of the bureaucracy, the masses looked to the restoration of capitalism for the promise of a bright and prosperous future. They have been sorely disappointed.

Prior to 1989 these three countries were degenerate workers' states. Capitalism had been abolished, but from above in a bureaucratic and reactionary way.

Bureaucracy

The Stalinist bureaucracies who carried out these overthrows ensured, in advance, that the working class had been demobilised and rendered powerless. They excluded the working class from political and economic life. Police state "socialism" was the norm.

The economies created were based on post-capitalist property relations; the capitalists had been expropriated, the law of value was suppressed and some kind of central planning, highly bureaucratised, dominated the economy.

But the transition to real socialism was blocked by the rule of the bureaucracy, and the atomisation of the working class increasingly alienated it from the very ideas of planning, socialism and even workers' sol-

idarity.

After the collapse of Stalinism, in countries across Eastern Europe pro-capitalist restorationist governments were elected. Such was the utter bankruptcy of Stalinism that even the old Stalinists, like Milosevic in Serbia, who managed to cling on to power, threw in their lot with capitalism and declared themselves sudden converts to the delights of the market.

The objectives of these restorationist governments were clear. They

had to destroy the old planning systems and transform the economies into fully functioning capitalist economies. The extent to which this has been achieved across Eastern Europe has depended on a number of factors: the amount of foreign investment, the opening up of potential markets and the political stability of the governments.

But despite the barriers they face on this they are committed to restoring capitalism.

WHAT WE FIGHT FOR

Throughout the Balkans workers must meet the crisis by fighting for a revolutionary solution:

- ★ **Kick out the corrupt ex-Stalinists and the bosses. Seize their property, stolen from the workers. Forward to workers' states based on democratic workers' councils!**
- ★ **Stop all privatisations! Renationalise the enterprises!**
- ★ **For workers' control of the enterprises!**
- ★ **For a democratically agreed, workers' plan!**
- ★ **Smash the repressive apparatus of the restorationist governments, build democratic workers' militia!**
- ★ **Build a new revolutionary workers' party in every Balkan country, linked to a new revolutionary communist international**
- ★ **For a Socialist Federation of the Balkans and a United Socialist States of Europe!**

ALBANIA: Mass uprisings against ruling class rip-off

Deadly lure of the pyramids

AFTER TWO weeks of protests and rioting in Albania, President Sali Berisha assumed emergency powers and called in the army at the end of January.

One rioter in Vlore, a southern port town, summed up the mood:

"We're making another Serbia here. The government has lied to us. It has bought our votes and stolen our money."

The government in question is the ruling Democratic Party (DP), headed by Prime Minister Aleksander Meksi. The Democratic Party swept to power in the general election of March 1992 to the delight of international capitalism and the IMF. They ousted the former communists, now renamed the Socialist Party (SP).

Meksi's government came to power committed to speeding up and completing the free market reforms, tentatively started by the previous government. One of its first measures was to abolish the earnings-related unemployment benefit.

This had been introduced by the Socialist Party to cushion the results of their closures of large "loss making" state factories built by the Russians and Chinese. Workers were paid 80% of their former salaries under this scheme.

Within two years unemployment rocketed to over 30% in urban areas. State farms were broken up and their assets looted. Desperate workers and

peasants looked for ways to make ends meet. In stepped bright, new and thrusting private enterprise in the shape of "foundations". These played the role of banks, business enterprises and political power brokers. VEFA, Populli and Xhaferri were three of the biggest.

They offered investors extremely good rates of interest, starting at 8% or 9%, but in the last year rising to 60% or even 80%. Masses of Albanians, with no other source of income, rushed to sell their property or mortgage their homes and dug out their life savings in order to invest and live off the income.

There was one small problem: the foundations were pyramid schemes. They could only pay such high rates of interest out of new deposits. The pyramid grew only as long as new "investors" came forward to part with their cash. By the end of 1996 they were running out of cash.

Not only were the foundations' managers raking off millions for themselves and living lavish lifestyles, but they were also awash with illegal money being "laundered" by criminals and by the government itself.

Much of this money came from supplying oil to Serbia in defiance of UN

sanctions. When sanctions were lifted this source of cash dried up.

When the Populli and Xhaferri foundations were clearly in difficulty, delaying by months the payments of interest due, the government finally acted and froze their accounts. The result was an explosion of anger across Albania, directed not at the foundations but at the government.

In town after town, council buildings were stormed and sometimes burnt to the ground, police stations were mobbed and Democratic Party offices wrecked.

In Tirana, the capital, 20,000 broke through police cordons into the main square and tried to storm parliament shouting: "Give us back our money" — only to be beaten back by military police and troops.

The anger at the government was not surprising. The cabinet knew the basis of the pyramid schemes but refused to act. These schemes had bankrolled the DP's election campaign. In Vlore the DP candidate, who went on to be elected as Mayor, appeared on an election poster flanked by adverts for four of the suspect pyramid schemes. His town hall was one of the first to be burnt down.

In many towns council buildings were stormed and sometimes burnt to the ground

The VEFA foundation's President was shown on TV after the election victory, congratulating the new state president Berisha. The Xhaferri pyramid scheme, not to be outdone, paid for the publication of Berisha's biography, written by the editor-in-chief of the state-run newspaper!

The DP government has been trying to deflect blame onto the SP, saying that it orchestrated the riots. Already arrests of SP members are being reported.

The government claims to have frozen £185 million in the failing foundations' accounts which will be paid out to investors "in due time". But this is a fraction of the amount invested and further schemes, such as VEFA, are about to collapse.

It risks a further explosion when it announces the pathetic pay outs. Hundreds of thousands will lose their homes and livelihoods. The whole economy could collapse if the businesses controlled by the foundations go under.

Yet the IMF insists that the DP government must not compensate the investors from government funds as this could only be done by printing money and setting off hyperinflation. To enforce its decision it has put new lines of credit to Albania on hold, making the situation worse.

The Albanian masses suffered decades of misery and repression under the vile Stalinist dictatorship of Enver Hoxha. Now they are getting their first real taste of free enterprise capital-

ism. Their determination not to pay for the corrupt and miserable failure of the "entrepreneurs" and their willingness to fight austerity and poverty represent an excellent beginning.

Now they must go forward to take power into their own hands and settle accounts with the new capitalist robbers. ■



THE BALKANS

Workers Power characterised these post-Stalinist countries as moribund workers' states. The term moribund signals the fact that they are on the point of destruction - literally, bound for death.

The governments want to create capitalism but they face very real problems. It is not possible simply to sell off an entire economy. Many factories, entire industries are non-profit making. Even the restorationists recognise that you cannot close down

a country. So in this period they attempt to encourage private enterprise, while allowing some state owned factories to continue to exist through government subsidies or allowing them to get away with never paying their debts.

The hope is that, ultimately, private enterprise will become sufficiently strong and the state sector can gradually be cut back or turned into fully fledged state capitalist enterprises. In their attempts to encourage

the growth of private enterprise the restorationists are not above encouraging criminal activity and the emergence of a very grey economy to oil the wheels of capitalism.

Serbia, Bulgaria and Albania have lagged behind many of the other Eastern European states. Unlike the Czech Republic and Hungary, clear pro-restorationist governments were slow to emerge. The problems facing the Balkan nations are greater, with less diverse economies, fewer links with

Western capitalist economies and fewer potential markets.

They are considerably poorer and less tempting to the army of financiers and speculators roaming Eastern Europe in search of big profits.

Also, unlike Poland, Hungary and the Czech Republic the whole region has been blighted by nationalist conflicts.

Serbia, in particular, has been effected by the war and the break up of Yugoslavia. Its economy was

ripped to shreds by the war and the sanctions imposed by the West. Bulgaria and Albania, while not directly involved, could not escape the effects of the instability within the region.

On these pages, we examine the recent events in Albania, Bulgaria and Serbia. We assess the forces involved in the protest movements and the prospects for the working class in their struggle against economic disaster. ■

SERBIA: Government plans Kosovo provocation to save its skin

Milosevic fights for control

IN SERBIA the battleground between President Slobadan Milosevic and the opposition shifted to the media last month.

In Belgrade every night protestors come out onto the streets blowing whistles, others hang out of windows banging pots and pans. The time is 7.30pm. The objective is to drown out the sound of the main TV news, which is slavishly pro-Milosevic.

In Kragujevac, a town 90 miles to the south of Belgrade, thousands surrounded a local TV and radio station. Inside were around 100 riot police determined to defend the station and not allow opposition forces to take it over. Having won the local election, the opposition should have been able to gain control of the local media, but Milosevic supporters have learnt the importance of hanging on to such power. The police baton-charged the protest, badly beating up two of the protestors and arresting eight.

The opposition is made up of anti-Milosevic forces organised in Zejdano - "Together". The alliance has been encouraged by its success in forcing Milosevic to accept the opposition vic-

tories in some of the disputed election results in Belgrade and other key towns. The full scale of their victories over Milosevic's Socialist Party of Serbia have yet to be accepted.

At the end of January a Belgrade court reversed a previous decision to recognise the opposition's victories in the election. Milosevic and his supporters continue to hope that if they spin out their resistance long enough they can gradually wear down the opposition.

Despite the fact that opinion polls continue to show a majority of the population in Serbia disagree with the protest, Milosevic must be worried. There are signs that the opposition is growing outside of Belgrade and the major towns. The rural areas have previously been Milosevic's stronghold. If his support begins to erode there, he will be in deep trouble.

Reflecting their growing desperation, the voice of Milosevic's supporters grows ever more shrill and bizarre. Radio Belgrade recently announced that the CIA had hypnotised the demonstrators and was using black magic to influence events.

More seriously Milosevic himself is accusing the demonstrators of "destabilising" the country. The opportunity to play the Serb chauvinist card in Kosovo, a province where ethnic Albanians are in a majority, remains open. On 16 January in Kosovo a bomb exploded under the car of the Serb who is chancellor the University of Pristina. A fax claimed responsibility for the bomb attack from an organisation calling itself the "Kosovo Liberation Army".

This organisation is unknown to Albanian activists. The fax appears to have been written by someone who was not even a native Albanian speaker and the car used to conceal the bomb had been recently impounded by the Serbian police. Not surprisingly many see the attack as a piece of Serbian provocation.

Ominously, the Serb Mayor of Pristina commenting on the bombing declared that:

"The Albanian terrorists (responsible for the attack) receive support in Belgrade from those who have been trying to destabilise Serbia for two months."

There is undoubtedly a growing

mood of discontent in Kosovo. Many feel that the current leadership's policy of peaceful protest to force Milosevic to negotiate, which has led to the setting up of a parallel state, including schools, health service etc., for the ethnic Albanians of Kosovo, has run its course. Calls for a militant fight for independence are increasing.

Kosovo has suffered even more than Serbia from the economic crisis which has wrought havoc within the former Yugoslavia. Unemployment has been running at around 30 to 40%, as opposed to 15% in central Serbia. Income per head in Kosovo is a quarter of the figure for central Serbia.

While the advantages of using Kosovo as a means of diverting attention away from the political challenge of the opposition are significant, the dangers involved in playing this particular nationalist card are immense for Milosevic.

The Serb population is at present war-weary. Few Serbians want to provoke another protracted war. And Milosevic's plans for rescuing the economy rely upon support from his friends in

the West.

The EU and the USA have refused to encourage any moves towards Kosovan independence. They recognise that a new guerrilla war could spill beyond the borders of Kosovo, running all the dangers of drawing in not just Albania but possibly Greece and Turkey on opposite sides as well.

The imperialists will do everything in their power to prevent Milosevic reigniting the Balkan powder keg and Milosevic runs a big risk if he flouts their wishes.

The way out of this crisis is for the working class of Yugoslavia to break from Milosevic and strike out on their own course - a course that places the fight against capitalist restoration and the misery it is causing, at its centre.

Such a fight, organised by independent workers' councils and defended by a workers' militia, can win the best elements of the opposition to its ranks, counter the threat of renewed war through internationalism and the recognition of the right of all nations to self-determination and lay the basis for a new era in Balkan history. ■

BULGARIA: Bourgeois opposition holds no answers for workers

Strikers demand new elections

ON 10 JANUARY hundreds of demonstrators stormed the Bulgarian parliament. Inside they clashed with several hundred riot police leaving 200 demonstrators injured. Outside, on the streets of Sofia, 50,000 demonstrators called for new elections and a change of government. The demonstration had been called by the opposition Union of Democratic Forces (UDF) - a loose coalition of anti-government groups.

The Bulgarian government is in deep crisis. In the November Presidential elections the UDF candidate, Peter Stoyanov, defeated his Socialist Party opponent. The Bulgarian Socialist Party (BSP), the ex-communists, had become deeply unpopular because of the galloping economic crisis afflicting the country.

The election of a new president was followed by the resignation of the head of the Socialist Party government, Zhan Videnov. He was accused of economic mismanagement and corruption not just by the opposition but by some of his own party.

The ensuing deadlock between the BSP majority in parliament and the UDF President spurred on the mass demon-

strations to demand immediate new elections. As marchers surrounded the parliament and were being attacked by police, the UDF walked out in solidarity. Addressing the demonstrators Ivan Kostov, leader of the UDF, declared:

"We are leaving this Parliament and we are walking outside, because physically the risk for you outside the Parliament is greater than for those inside".

He went on to say: "we will start preparations for a nationwide political strike."

Over the weekend of the 11-12 January thousands of people came to Sofia to protest against the government with demonstrations being staged in another twenty cities.

By the Monday the oil workers and dockers were on strike. The two major union federations, CITUB (the Confederation of Independent Trade Unions of Bulgaria), the former Communist Party federation of one and half million members, and Prodkepa, an independent union of around 700,000 members, came out on general strike.

The government quickly went into negotiations with the opposition to get an agreement on early elections and on

a government of national unity.

The IMF and World Bank have made much of their intended support, promising to re-schedule the national debt and send in advisers. Because of the big stick of the national debt both the BSP and the UDF have succumbed to IMF pressure and share the same economic programme for Bulgaria.

Bulgaria is on the brink of an economic disaster. Inflation last year ran at 300% and nine newly independent banks had to be taken over by the government because they were about to collapse. The economy shrank by 8% last year. Foreign reserves are running at an all time low of around \$520 million which the government needs to pay an annual debt of \$1.3 billion (excluding interest payments). On top of that, the monthly wage of \$20, a fifth of that in Serbia, is increasingly devalued with such high inflation.

The IMF and World Bank's proposals, supported by both the BSP and the UDF, include the widespread selling off of the nationalised industries, the introduction of a currency board which would take the management of exchange rates out of the hands of the government

and put it into the hands of the IMF and the revamping of the banking system.

Like the other reforms of the IMF and World Bank, which have been carried out by governments of the ex-Stalinist states, these measures would be a further disaster for the Bulgarian masses.

The IMF and World Bank have refused all appeals for substantial further loans until their demands are carried out.

Inspired by events in Serbia the masses of Bulgaria have gone onto the streets in huge numbers for the first time since 1989-90. But unlike the situation in Serbia, workers have been in the forefront of protests.

Strikes and days of action have been going on for nearly a month with main roads to Greece and Turkey episodically blockaded.

The workers of Bulgaria are right to take to the streets to attempt to bring down the BSP government of austerity. But to put any faith in the bourgeois opposition UDF is jumping out of the frying pan into the fire.

The workers and small farmers of Bulgaria must demand a government

that rules in the interests of the masses, not one which enthusiastically rules on behalf of the IMF and the European imperialists of the EU, which is exactly what a UDF government will do. The workers must demand that the BSP breaks with the IMF and its plans for further privatisations.

But the strikers must place no reliance on the leaders of the BSP, a bunch of treacherous former Stalinist bureaucrats who now bow before the imperialists.

The workers must use the general strikes to form their own independent organisations, democratic strike committees, workers' councils in the towns and cities. They must build their own defence organisations against the thugs of the military police, embryos of a genuine workers' militia.

Above all they must build a new party unswayed by Stalinism with its history of treachery and bloody repression.

A new revolutionary Trotskyist party is needed to lead the struggle against capitalist restoration and imperialism throughout the Balkans and Eastern Europe and fight for a Socialist United States of Europe. ■

Eightieth anniversary of the February Revolution

The downfall of Russia's Tsar

There had been weeks of food riots and sporadic protests in the Russian capital of Petrograd. But the workers' leaders did not believe the time was right to challenge the Tsar. The police had a detailed plan to quell any sign of revolutionary action – they felt well-prepared. The city was full of soldiers waiting to go to the western front.

Within five days the workers were to prove their leaders wrong, tear the police plan to shreds and deal swiftly with their autocratic rulers. Thus began a revolution in Russia in February 1917 – 80 years ago. **Kate Foster** looks back at this momentous event.

INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S Day was on 23 February in the old Russian calendar. Demonstrations and eaflets were planned. No strikes were called. Even the Bolshevik leaders in Petrograd opposed strikes, believing they would only lead to confrontation with the police and, worse, the soldiers. They wanted to wait until things were better prepared.

A group of women textile workers disagreed. The women had a very basic demand – bread. They came out on strike on International Women's Day and then began to spread the strike. They went from factory to factory calling on the other workers – men and women – to join them. By the end of the day 90,000 workers were on strike. The next day, 24 February, half of the city's industrial workers were out.

The women were the spark of the revolution. Leon Trotsky, a key protagonist in the unfolding drama, wrote:

"The fact is that the February Revolution was begun from below, overcoming the resistance of its own revolutionary organisations, the initiative being taken of their own accord by the most oppressed and downtrodden part of the proletariat – the women textile workers, among them no doubt many soldiers' wives. The overgrown bread-lines had provided the last stimulus."

It was not until two days later that the Bolshevik Central Committee called for an all-Russian general strike. By that time, even government figures admitted that a quarter of a million were on strike.

The key unresolved question, which weighed heavily with the Bolshevik leadership, was what view would the soldiers take. The Tsarist police were relying on them as part of their plan. Power had been immediately transferred from the civilian authorities to the chief of the Military District of Petrograd, General Khabalov.

The workers knew they had to win the soldiers over. After all, the revolution of 1905 had been crushed by the army.

Promising

At first Khabalov's plan was to use the Cossacks to disperse the crowds. They appeared to follow orders, but the workers were quick to spot a promising sign. Rather than charging the demonstrators, the Cossacks guided their horses through the crowd, allowing time for the strikers to move out of the way and then return to their original positions.

By the end of the third day of strikes the Tsarist authorities were determined to go onto the offensive. Khabalov announced that anyone still on strike by the 28th would be immediately conscripted to the front line. By then, however, the military garrison of Petrograd no longer existed.

During the night the secret police, the Okhrana, raided a number of houses and arrested around 100 revolu-

tionaries. The Russian nobility were so sure of their power, even at the very point of losing it, that the Tsarina telegraphed to her husband that the city was calm that night.

On Sunday 26 February, the police and soldiers received orders to shoot. A warning to Khabalov had been sounded the day before. The police had opened fire on the demonstrators and, after appeals from the crowd, a Cossack had shot one of the policemen. This one incident reverberated throughout the city the following day.

Response

Forty workers were killed by the police on that day. But the response from the army was swift and clear. The Volynsky regiment refused to fire on the demonstrators. By the evening the Pavlovsky regiment had mutinied and several of its officers had been killed.

On the following day the Volynsky regiment voted to join the revolution. They were followed by the Litovsky, Prebrazhensky and Pavlovsky regiments. Trotsky quips that the only regiments who didn't mutiny that day were the ones who didn't get around to it!

Now, sure of the support of the army, the workers turned on the hated police, burning police stations across the city and destroying the Okhrana's headquarters.

The bourgeois politicians in the Duma, the Tsar's tame parliament, were as ill-prepared for the revolution as the Tsarist police. Up until the 26th, cloistered in the luxury of the old Tauride Palace, they had been blind to events on the streets outside.

When they finally realised what was occurring, the conservative elements within the Duma attempted to dissolve it on 27 February. The liberals and the left were provoked into action. They set up a Provisional Committee to maintain the government.

But on its very first day the Provisional Committee had unwelcome visitors. Workers' deputies began to arrive at the Tauride Palace, where the Duma met. They demanded a room in the palace for a meeting – the first meeting of the Petrograd Soviet of workers' and soldiers' deputies.

Imagine how horrified these bourgeois politicians must have been when the soldiers of the Prebrazhensky regiment turned up to defend the revolution and its leaders in the Soviet. They had no choice but to hand over a room.

In the words of a Nationalist deputy, Vasilii Shulgin:

"I remember the moment when the blackish-grey sediment pressing the doors like a never-ceasing flood, drowned the Duma . . . From the first moment of that inundation, repulsion filled my soul . . . I felt helpless. Something dangerous, terrifying and abominable had been unleashed which threatened all of us alike."

They were right to feel threatened. The Soviet, made up of directly elect-

ed representatives from factories, soldiers' committees and workers' districts across the city, became a centre of power which challenged the bourgeois politicians in the Provisional Committee. The dual power, which was to characterise the revolutionary period from February until the workers' eventual victory in October, began that day in the Tauride Palace.

In one room the workers' representatives began their work and in another the bourgeoisie discussed how to contain this force which had been unleashed by the February revolution.

The Provisional Committee laid the basis for the Provisional Government and within days of the crisis beginning, the Tsar abdicated.

But why, having defeated the Tsarist autocracy, did the workers and soldiers not move forward immediately to seize power from the bourgeoisie? In fact they handed it over to them. At this point in the February 1917 events the weakness of the revolutionary leadership began to show.

The leaders of the Russian working class did not believe that the workers and peasants could seize power. They thought the time was right for a bourgeois, not a workers' revolution – the overthrow of the autocracy and the creation of a capitalist democracy to manage capitalism in a modern and efficient manner. They believed that this stage of the revolution was both necessary and justified before socialism could become possible.

The leadership of the Soviet – dominated by the right wing socialists in the Menshevik party and the misnamed Socialist Revolutionaries (SRs) – therefore supported the Provisional Committee. Many of the delegates reluctantly agreed with this, but the Soviet also decided to set up an "observation committee" to check on the activities of the bourgeois politicians. A mass meeting of the Petrograd Cable workers declared on 3 March:

"We consider the most essential issue of the current moment to be the establishment of strict control over the ministers who are appointed by the State Duma and who do not enjoy popular confidence. This control must be constituted by representatives of the Soviet of Workers' and Soldiers' Deputies."

Heart

The Soviet saw its task as keeping an eye on the Duma's politicians, to ensure that they did not betray the revolution and attack the workers. In reality, as the revolution spread throughout Russia, the Soviet became the heart of the revolution. Workers looked to it for orders. The Tsar attempted to get back to Petrograd from his country estate, only to find that no trains ran in Russia without the agreement of the Petrograd Soviet.

But the Russian working class was relatively small and inexperienced in the class struggle. The leaders, includ-



Building workers break up a statue of the Tsar

ing the Petrograd Bolshevik leaders at the time (Stalin and Kamenev), did not believe that the workers were yet capable of making a socialist revolution. Once the bourgeoisie had established a modern capitalist state within Russia, once the working class had grown in numbers and experience, then the time would come.

Russia was a backward country. The political dead weight of the Tsar and the Russian aristocracy had retarded and distorted the development of Russian capitalism. Industrial development lagged way behind other European nations.

Correct, in terms of analysing the problems faced by the Russian working class, the Mensheviks and the Stalin/Kamenev leadership of the Bolsheviks (Lenin was not yet back in Russia and Trotsky had not yet joined the Bolshevik party), were wrong on what this meant for the struggle.

First, the weakness of the Russian working class had to be overcome through an alliance with the peasantry. February pointed the way forward. Many of the soldiers who came over to the revolution were themselves peasants. Undecided at the start, the workers won them over by their decisive action against the autocracy.

The experience of 1917 was to demonstrate to the Russian workers that the bourgeoisie were incapable of taking Russia forward. They were a weak class. Their opposition to autocracy melted away in the heat of the revolution itself. They were more scared of the workers than of the Tsar.

The months which followed the February insurrection saw the Russian economy slide towards complete collapse. It saw the bourgeoisie paralysed. Unable to take society forward and more concerned with attacking the workers, the bourgeois Provisional Government staggered from crisis to crisis.

Dual power at the level of government was reflected in dual power in the factories. Workers returned to work to throw out the old bosses. The director

of the Putilov works, one of the largest factories in Petrograd, had locked out 40,000 workers prior to the revolution because they had taken part in a demonstration.

When the workers returned from the streets, they put the director and his assistant in a wheelbarrow and dumped them in the local canal. At one of the textile mills, women workers returned to find 30 factory police on the premises. But not for long. The women chased them off.

Confidence

In the factories workers elected committees. They decided who would be in charge. They also saw their job as observing, or keeping an eye on the bosses. Real workers' control was beginning to emerge and increasingly the workers realised that they were capable of running the factories, in fact a lot more capable than the capitalists. With each step forward the workers' confidence in their ability to make their own revolution increased.

When Lenin returned to Russia he quickly saw the need to rearm the Bolshevik Party in the wake of the February insurrection and in the context of dual power. He argued that the time was right for the workers to go forward, not to wait for the bourgeoisie. To wait risked repression and counter-revolution.

Lenin was to be proved right. With the support of rank and file workers in the party, who had themselves argued against the Stalin/Kamenev line of limiting the revolution to a bourgeois stage, he won over the Bolshevik Party to his position, a position summed up in the slogan "All Power to the Soviets".

February had demonstrated the power of the working class and the potential for workers' revolution. Within eight months, the Bolsheviks, a tiny minority in the Soviet when it first met, won the support of the overwhelming majority of Russia's workers. The October revolution turned February's potential into reality with the establishment of the world's first workers' state. ■

Proportional Representation

A reform too far for Blair

Tony Blair doesn't want a democratic outcome to the next election – or the one after. He "isn't persuaded" of the case for Proportional Representation (PR). But PR is the only way in a bourgeois democracy of electing a parliament which accurately reflects the voters' political choices. **Peter Main** puts the revolutionary case for electoral reform.

WRITING IN *The Economist* last September, Tony Blair argued that Britain needs an electoral system which can "aggregate opinion without giving disproportionate influence to splinter groups". This was especially important because the job of parliament is "to create and sustain a single, mainstream government".

In plain English, his objective is not a parliament that reflects the electorate's views and can hold a government to account but an executive regime that can dominate the House of Commons. He wants to carry on ruling in much the same way as the Tories have done for the last 18 years.

Characteristically, Blair does not say he is against PR, only that he is "not persuaded". This still leaves the door open to post-election negotiations with the Liberal Democrats. But what does he fear in proportional representation? Surely, a "mainstream government" would have the support of the majority – otherwise how could it be "mainstream"? So what if a few splinter groups get elected? By definition, they could not win any votes in parliament against the supposed representatives of the majority.

Behind Blair's opposition to a more democratic electoral system is his recognition that New Labour would be very unlikely ever to win a stable and disciplined parliamentary majority for his policies. Academics agree that a PR election would not produce a majority for any single party.

Majority

Having gained control of the Labour Party, Blair hopes that the existing electoral system will bring him an overall majority. After all in 1987, only 42% of the popular vote gave Thatcher a 100 seat margin in the Commons. Once there, he calculates that most Labour MPs will support his right wing policies, if only to stay "in power".

If he fails he will retreat to his second option, a Commons majority based on a deal with the Liberal Democrats, secured by the promise of electoral reform to introduce not PR but "Alternative Votes". This system, in which voters indicate their second preference if their first choice fails to win over 50%, would keep Labour's regional advantages while giving approximately 30 more seats to Ashdown. Apart from that, there would be no increased representation for minorities and no serious chance of winning seats for the smaller parties outside Scotland and Wales.

Blair fears genuine PR because it gives smaller parties representation. This could trigger the fragmentation of current par-

ties and make political differences clearer – offering more alternatives views.

Should we support PR? Revolutionaries support democratisation both as a matter of principle and of practicality. When Lenin used the term "consistent democrats" to describe the Bolsheviks he was not just trying to get his ideas past the Tsar's censors. Full and equal involvement of all citizens in political life remains an important step towards a more conscious and confident working class movement.

Reform

Our arguments against the parliamentary reformers are not about the desirability of reforms, but instead recognise the impossibility of even the most democratic of parliaments ever wresting control of society's resources away from the capitalist class that owns and controls them.

No matter how big a parliamentary majority a workers' party might capture, so long as the banks, the big corporations and the international agencies like the IMF and World Bank can decide over where there is to be investment, where there is to be production, where plants are to be opened or closed, there can be no question of the majority ruling society. Toyota's recent reminder to Major that it could go elsewhere if Britain does not join a European currency, is just the most recent evidence of where such decision-making power really lies.

There are also the key institutions of the British state, the military and the security services, whose leaders would be prepared to quash any attempt by a left reformist government to introduce radical measures that shifted the balance of economic power or otherwise challenged the British establishment. Sections of MI5 even sought to destabilise Harold Wilson's 1974-76 Labour government, which ditched any radical plans almost as soon as it entered office.

Most workers, however, do believe that it is possible for a Labour government to change society. They believe it is possible to reform capitalism and win socialism through parliament. Revolutionaries call these ideas reformist ideas and recognise the importance of challenging them. The debate over PR can make this task more difficult.

Illusions

Supporters of PR argue that the disaster we have all suffered under Thatcher and Major resulted from the fact they were not elected by a democratic system. They acted in the interest of a minority because they represented a minority vote. The conclusion then seems

obvious: if we reformed the voting system, we would get a government that did represent the majority and would act in its interests.

Opponents of PR in the Labour Party counter this by arguing that the most important thing to do is to get a Labour government elected, even if it is one based on a minority of the popular vote. This position ignores the political content of such a government.

Blair is pursuing the same anti-working class policies as Major. What happens when workers begin to turn against him? The reformers' argument will still be there. It will not be the very nature of reformism which will be challenged, but whether or not Blair represents a majority. Blair is not governing in the interests of the majority, we will be told, because he was not elected by a majority.

In practical terms, proportional representation, based on the List System, would be an advantage to the working class and to revolutionaries. With each party winning the same percentage of its list of candidates as its share of the national vote, there would be a strong tendency for opponents of existing leaderships to break away and form their own lists.

Democratic

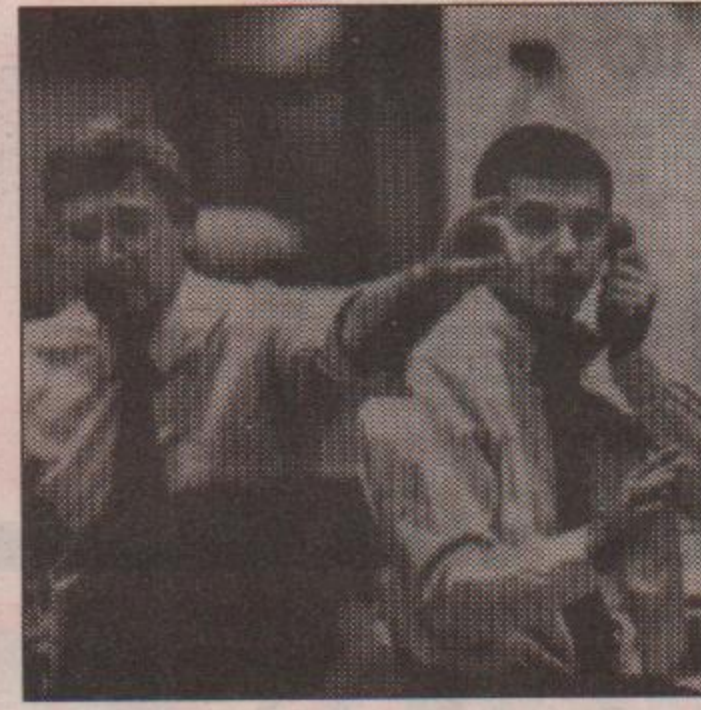
This would create a wider choice and make the political differences between the parties more sharply defined. At present, we can only guess if voters are supporting Labour candidates because of Blair or despite him. Likewise, we would have a better indication of how much sympathy Scargill's Socialist Labour Party really has.

Experience suggests that a PR system would also make it easier for groups who suffer from discrimination within society to gain representation. In Sweden 50% of MPs are women. We do not believe that, for example, sexual or racial oppression will be removed by the election of more women or black people, but it would undoubtedly raise their profile and strengthen their voices.

Under PR the working class movement would become more political, particularly if Labour split. This would pose the question of affiliation in the unions. Equally, minority parties, including centrists and revolutionary socialist organisations, would stand a serious chance of gaining representation and gaining a key platform for their ideas. And finally, the more democratic the system, the less likely that its flaws can be used as an excuse for the betrayals of the Labour leaders.

In the approaching election there will be no such advantages. The majority of workers still expect a Labour victory to mean a real improvement in their lives. We think this is mistaken but, as with the arguments over parliamentary reform, experience is the best test. Workers Power will call for a Labour vote so that after 18 years, Labour can finally be put to that test. Getting rid of the Tories, while preparing to mobilise against the reality of the Labour government are the highest priorities – but that does not mean that we should ignore the demand for democratic reform. ■

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.



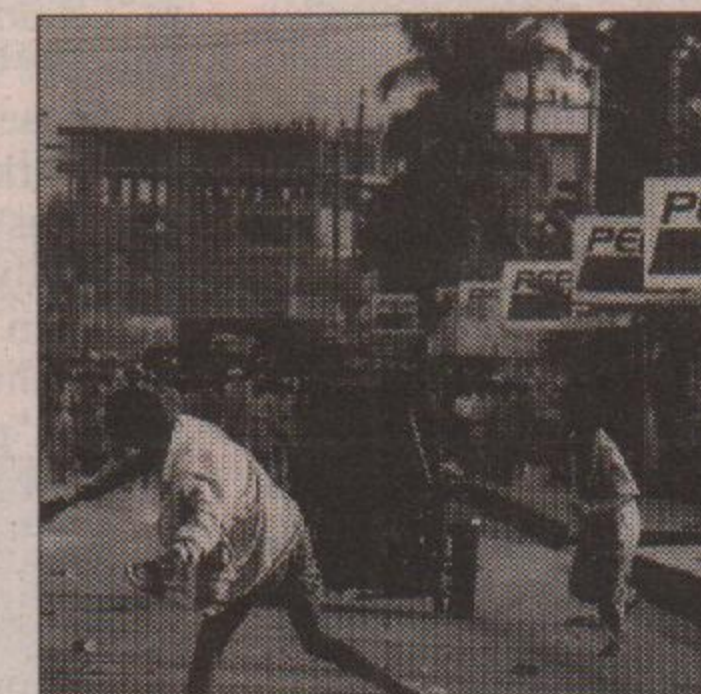
October 1917

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 recognise that only workers' revolution can defend the post-capitalist 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.



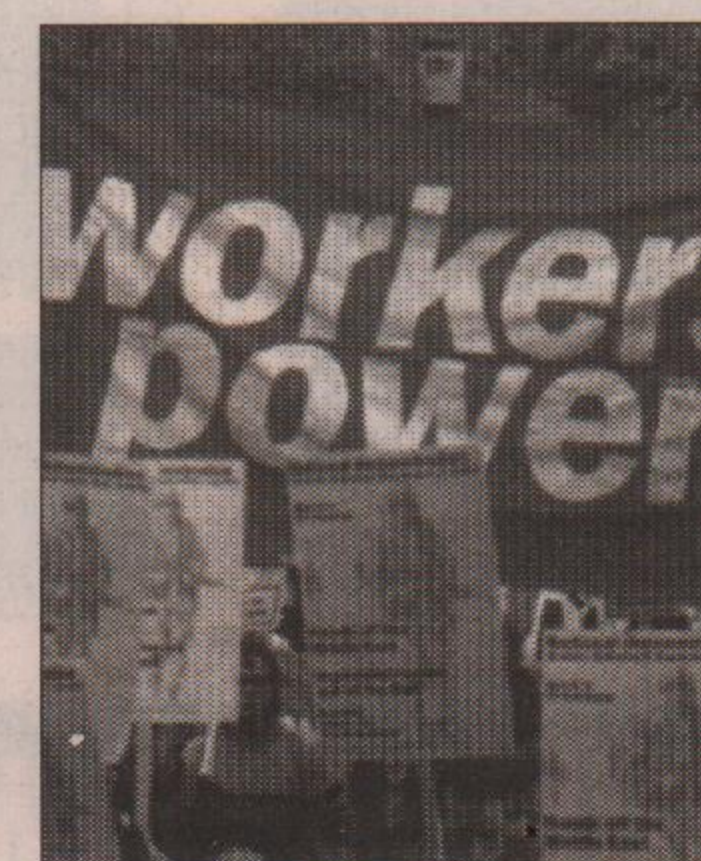
Social Oppression

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 LRCI 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! ★

Money: It's what we want

PROGRESS TOWARDS our £20,000 building fund target is slow. We issue an urgent appeal to all our readers and supporters to speed things up. Fund raising must become a priority if we are able to purchase the premises we need to secure a firm base of operations for Workers Power and the LRCI.

This month we have raised £596, taking our grand total to £5,234.50.

So, we have four months left to raise nearly £15,000. This is more than possible. Four readers raised £91 on a sponsored bike ride. Other readers should be thinking of similar ways of raising money.

Please rush donations and funds raised to our address. Make all cheques, POs etc., payable to Workers Power and mark them Building Fund, on the back. ■

WORKERS POWER

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Workers power

BALKAN CRISIS

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Socialism, Internationalism, Revolution

British Section of the League for a Revolutionary Communist International

No 208 February 1997 ★ 50p

Fury at Ford Halewood sackings

ALL OUT NOW!

A THOUSAND Ford workers descended on a West London news on 23 January. They came to voice their anger at the threat by Ford's bosses to axe 1,300 jobs at the company's Halewood complex—a prelude to the closure of the Liverpool plant.

From Merseyside, 500 Halewood workers came to lobby the London talks between union officials and the multinational's top brass. Thousands more from Halewood staged an unofficial one-day strike. Management has eroded terms and conditions at Halewood, all in the name of greater "competitiveness". Whilst they reluctantly tolerated many of the changes, no Halewood worker is prepared to accept the sackings or closure against the background of local unemployment which is still over twice the national average.

Thousands of workers at Ford's other British plants have responded in a spirit of solidarity, voting overwhelmingly at mass meetings for a national strike ballot. They know that their own jobs could soon be on the line. As one worker from the Bridgend engine plant put it: "This is not just Halewood at stake. It could be any of us."

To underline this point, lorry manufacturers Iveco, run jointly by Ford and Fiat, are poised to shut their Langley plant near Slough with another 500 jobs under immediate threat.

The union leaders have called national strike ballots over the Halewood redundancies. Militants must build for the biggest possible "yes" vote, but also ensure that rank and file members establish control over the action.

The key national official, Tony Woodley of the TGWU, has been talking left, saying openly that it might well be necessary to shut down Ford to win this vital battle. For full-time union bureaucrats, such rhetoric can come cheap. To translate fighting talk into action will mean:

- visits from militants at the best-organised plants to the weaker ones to press for a "yes" vote;
- the election by mass meetings of factory-wide, inter-union strike committees, wholly accountable to regular and frequent mass meetings, and with



Workers voice their anger

- responsibility for organising picket rotas;
- the creation of a national strike committee from the bodies elected at plant level;
- full access to all talks between the unions' national officials and Ford's bosses;
- a veto over any proposed deal by the national strike committee pending votes by mass meetings.

Rank and file militants also need to fight for a strategy that can secure a swift and decisive victory in the dispute. This must centre on an all-out, indefinite strike across the whole of Ford UK—at least until the bosses drop all the redundancy threats, with no strings attached.

As the 1988 pay strike showed, the move to "just-in-time" production across the whole of the European operation has enabled workers at British plants to severely disrupt production at the Genk, Saarlouis and Valencia factories in a matter of days. This is a very strong card and workers should play it straight away. An all-out national strike would also open up a fight for a maximum 35-hour week with no loss of pay and equalisation of terms and conditions across the European operation. Militants

must also combat the idea that the fight at Ford's is "to save Britain's manufacturing industry", to quote AEEU bureaucrat Roger Butler. Many of the placards on the 23 January lobby carried slogans such as "Let British Workers Build Ford Cars For The British Market".

These arguments paint fellow workers at the continental plants as the enemy, not a powerful ally. This is not a battle between workers of different nationalities about which plant is more "productive". It is a fight with Ford's bosses who are bent on slashing their production costs across the whole of Europe.

As Bill Jones, a shop steward at Halewood, put it:

"This is not about Halewood against any plant in Spain or Germany. This is a European fight. What's happening to us today could happen to any worker in Ford's Europe tomorrow." Bill Jones is absolutely right. Workers must reject any arguments from union officials that come wrapped in the Union Jack.

Instead, they should seize the opportunity created by the crisis at Halewood to forge links at rank and file level across the whole European combine.■

Fight racism at Ford

ON MONDAY 27 January the TGWU and Ford announced a last minute deal to resolve race discrimination cases filed with an industrial tribunal by eight black workers. They had been denied relatively well paid jobs as drivers in the company's truck fleet. The new agreement will supposedly ensure "a selection and training procedure that fully complies with the company's equal opportunity policy".

The Ford's truck fleet is attached to the giant Dagenham complex. More than 45% of the shopfloor workforce is Asian or Afro-Caribbean. Only seven (less than 2%) of the more than 300 drivers in the truck fleet come from "ethnic minorities".

It is plain that Ford's management has operated a colour bar in recruiting for the fleet, with the collusion of a substantial section of the white workforce.

The TGWU bureaucrats

were right to back the tribunal cases, even though they could have won much more for the men concerned. Bob Purkiss, the TGWU's equality officer, remarked that "Ford's own equal opportunity policy will enable progress to be made, albeit at a slow pace."

But anti-racists at Dagenham and elsewhere in the TGWU should remember that these are the same bosses who only last spring authorised a promotional campaign where an airbrush deleted all the black workers from a magazine advert.

Most of the current drivers have voted to leave the TGWU and join the TUC-affiliated United Road Transport Union (URTU) in response to the TGWU's decision to support the black workers' race discrimination claims. Douglas Curtis, URTU's campaigns director, has made plain that they will be welcomed with open arms.

This move should be condemned throughout the labour

movement, not because it is a case of poaching members off the TGWU, but because it bolsters racist attitudes among a section of white workers. The "fathers and sons" policy that appears to have operated in the truck fleet was not an example of workers' control over hiring, but a case of collaborating with the bosses to maintain relative privileges based on skin colour.

If URTU stands by its present line of recruiting the drivers, there should be a labour movement enquiry into the substantial charges of racism.

Crucially, union militants must take up the fight against both racist practices and ideas in the workplace and fight for real workers' control of hiring, firing and promotion.

This is far too important a task to be left to the TGWU bureaucracy. The bosses at Ford's and elsewhere must not be allowed to divide and rule us on the basis of race or nationality.■

Labour in power 1964-70 pages 8 and 9