

# Workers power

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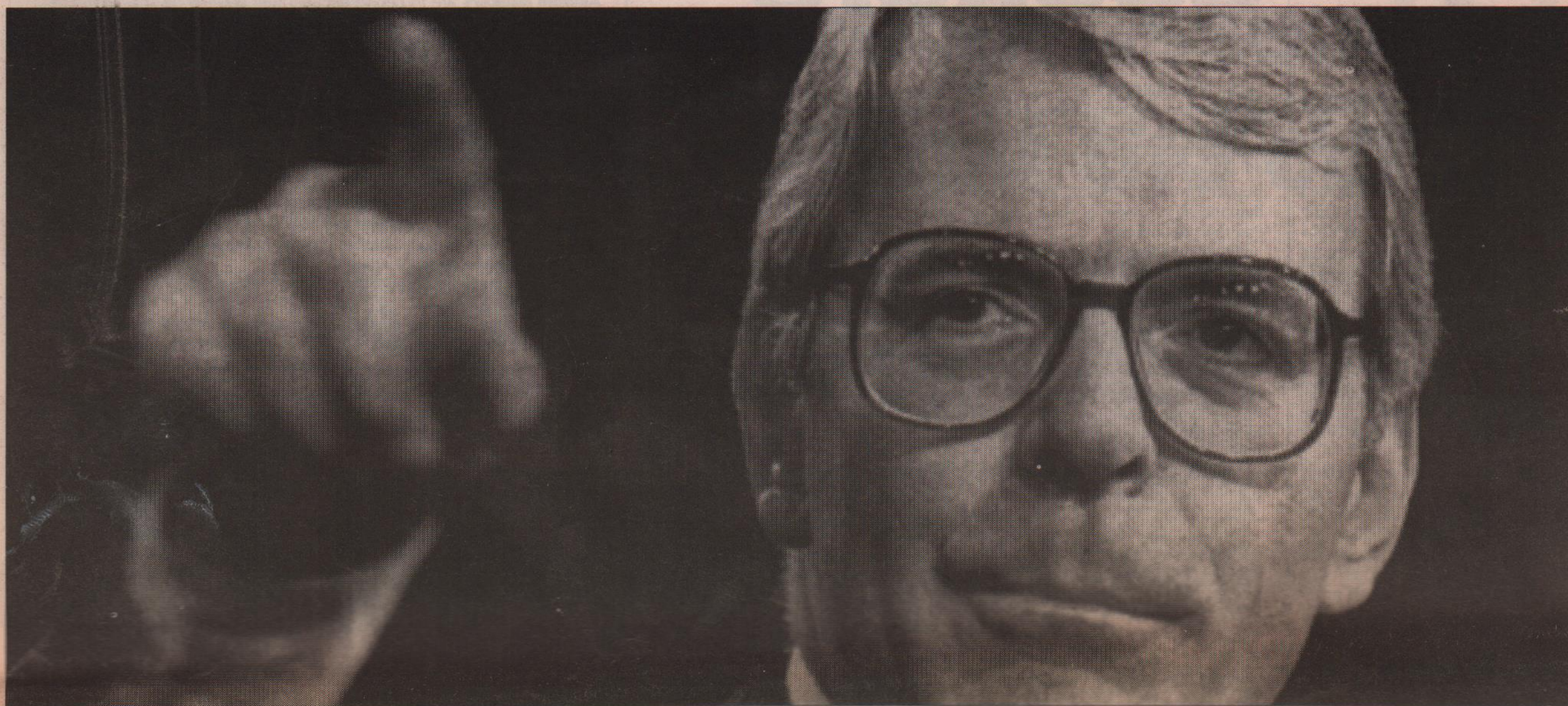
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Socialism, Internationalism, Revolution

British Section of the League for a Revolutionary Communist International

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# TIME TO GO!

**L**ABOUR'S WIRRAL by-election victory signalled the beginning of the end for John Major.

The media is buzzing with talk of Labour's conquest of "Middle England".

But outside of "Middle England" things are different. Youth with no future know only that Labour intends to "punish young offenders" faster than the Tories.

The unemployed know that Labour is preparing to force them into dead-end training schemes.

Trade union members know that Labour has promised to keep the Tory anti-union laws completely intact.

People hate the Tories but there is little enthusiasm for Labour.

The overwhelming mood among working class people is anger at the devastation wrought by 18 years of the Tories, determination to kick out Major and his sleaze merchants, but foreboding at the thought of the most right-wing Labour government ever.

Blair's government will be dominated by unprincipled turncoats like David Blunkett and larded with public school-

educated products of "Middle England" who travel in chauffeur-driven cars.

There was a time when many workers, including trade union activists, saw Blair's public conversion to Tory values as a clever ploy to fool the Murdoch-dominated media.

Others believed the union leaders when they claimed that Blair was just a middle class figurehead who could easily be manipulated.

Few now cling to these seeds of hope. Labour - as its Wirral by-election slogan revealed - "means business". It means to carry on attacking the working class where Major leaves off.

And the union leaders terrified of a Tory backlash. They will accept whatever scraps New Labour is prepared offer.

But this is not a reason for despondency. A massive Labour victory will open up a whole new situation for the

working class.

It will open a struggle over the level of the minimum wage: who will get it and who will set it. It will open up the possibility of challenging the Tory anti-union laws in practice.

It will unlock new areas of struggle as the despised Tories are replaced by Labour's own rogues' gallery.

And it will show millions of people - many of whom can-

not remember a Labour government - that we need a socialist alternative to Labour.

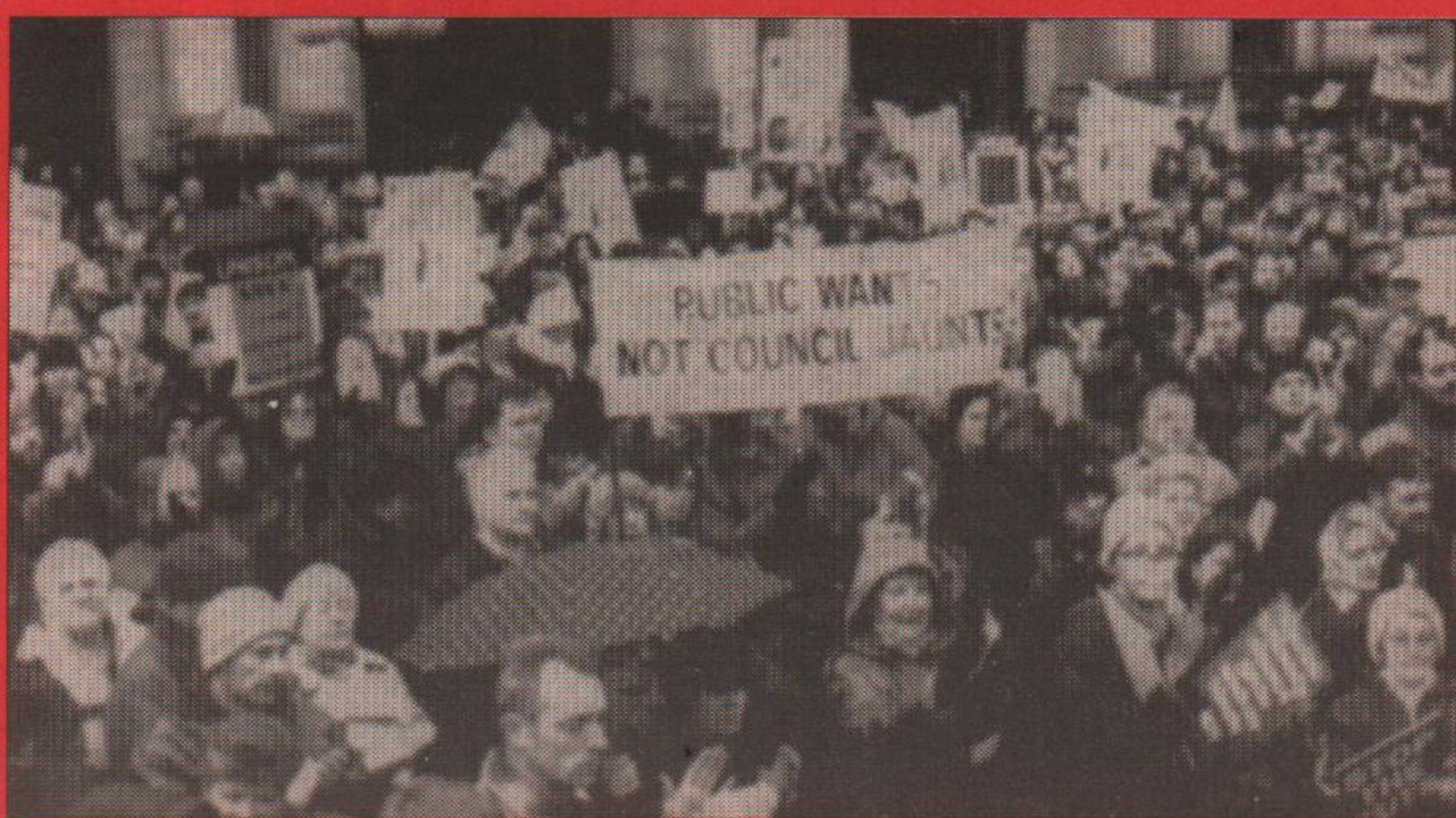
That is why we want a Labour landslide. We need to put workers' illusions in Labour to the test of office, to demand Labour begins to meet our basic needs, and at the same time, organise to fight Blair on every battlefield where he does the bosses' dirty work.

The sight of Major slinking from office and top Tories

knifing each other as they go down will give heart to working class militants who have weathered the Tory years, as well as to a new generation that is already beginning to look beyond Blair.

The well-heeled brigade at Labour's Millbank HQ are preparing their champagne and caviar for victory. Across the factories, offices and estates, workers should be preparing to fight them. ■

# TIME TO FIGHT!



Scottish workers strike against the cuts - page 3

## Gulf War syndrome

# Lying for Queen and country

**F**OR YEARS the Tories insisted that there was no such thing as "Gulf War Syndrome". For years they insisted that British troops in Kuwait had not been exposed to toxic pesticides.

Now the truth is out. Tory Minister Nicholas Soames was forced to admit that he had "misled the House" - i.e. lied - about the use of organophosphate pesticides that are suspected of causing a range of illnesses among Gulf War veterans.

The lessons could not be clearer. Ordinary soldiers are always cannon-fodder for the generals and the "laptop bombardiers". Though they took great care to avoid massive casualties in combat during their war against Iraq, they cared nothing about exposing soldiers to deadly drugs and pesticides. When the illnesses began they simply wrote off the victims as shirkers or statistical irrelevancies.

This lie is only the latest to be exposed about the sordid Gulf War. It was supposedly a war to "liberate Kuwait". Today's Kuwait is still under the thumb of a royal family whose dictatorship is not very different from that of Saddam Hussein.

In reality, the war was about protecting the oil interests of Britain and the US. The media presented a hi-tech war with little bloodshed - even though tens of thousands of Iraqis were killed by the carpet bombing of their camps and desert trenches.

The ultimate US aim was supposedly to topple Saddam Hussein. But when Hussein's rule began to crumble, the allied tanks stopped rolling. They allowed Saddam's fresh divisions to crush the rising in Basra, because it threatened the unity of Iraq, and thus the imperialist balance of power in the region.

It was a war of imperialist domination in which Workers Power stood out for the defeat of "our own" troops - because that was a better outcome than the consolidation of imperialist dominance in the Middle East.

Today recruitment ads for the Army or TA are almost everywhere. Soldiers are now told to go into pubs and buy drinks to get young people interested in an army "career". The Gulf pesticides scandal is a reminder of why young people should avoid the British Army like the plague.

The Army is racist, sexist, homophobic and riddled with sadistic bullies. It herds soldiers into battle for the oil companies in the Middle East, to protect a sectarian statelet in Northern Ireland, and to break strikes in Britain itself. Then it treats them like dirt when they get poisoned by their own officers.

We should demand an end to the coverage, with the immediate publication of all documents relating to the Gulf War pesticide scandal. Despite their role in the Gulf War, every victim of pesticide poisoning, post-traumatic stress or war injury should be entitled to full compensation and the best available medical care. ■

## ROCHESTER PRISON: Hunger strike ends

# Free the asylum seekers

**O**N 6 JANUARY asylum seekers held at Rochester Prison had had enough. Isolated, with almost no communication with the outside world, 17 asylum seekers at the Kent prison began a hunger strike. They were demanding a review of their cases to end their detention.

Despite constant harassment by prison staff and tactics designed to pressure individual strikers into giving up, the prisoners escalated their campaign as six stopped taking fluids from 27 January.

Now the hunger strikes are over. The Home Office and prison service imposed a media blackout, moved hunger strikers to other jails and threatened and intimidated them. The BBC assisted by sending a reporter to Nigeria just to rubbish an asylum seeker's claim.

The hunger strikes have laid bare the horrible truth about the way Britain treats refugees whose only crime was to seek asylum.

Throughout the seven weeks the odious prisons' minister, Ann Widdecombe, maintained a firm policy of "no deals", but the Tories wanted no martyrs. The few who have had access to Rochester tell of delirious, feeble prisoners subjected to rough treatment and deliberately harsh conditions, including no heat in their cells.

When this "persuasion" failed, prison officers turned to force-feeding some hunger-strikers. One striker was sectioned under the Mental Health Act in order to force rehydration treatment on him.

Just before the strike ended prison visitors who saw the strikers described them as stick figures unable to walk and

barely able to speak; a stroke had left one with extensive paralysis, and another suffering kidney failure.

It was left to socialists, along with church and anti-racist groups, to push the fight on the outside. Demonstrations outside Rochester began soon after the hunger strike commenced, with 300 at the national demonstration on 15 February. Few Labour politicians or trade union officials wanted to know.

The church leaders have bleated pathetically, with the Bishop of Rochester saying the asylum system is merely "getting out of hand", while offering himself as a go-between to negotiate on behalf of the starving prisoners. Liberal refugee groups called for

### Asylum seekers - the facts

**Asylum seekers** are forced to escape their country by any means necessary, including false papers, but the police are increasingly using this as an excuse to jail refugees. Most are given no reason for their detention. Few stand accused of any crime. Here are the facts about Britain's inhuman treatment of them:

- 60,000 asylum seekers currently live in fear as they await a judgement from the Home Office.
- 850 are in detention, and the number of imprisoned asylum seekers has increased threefold over the last three years.
- The largest number of detainees are from Nigeria, India, and Algeria, all states where torture is widespread.
- Asylum seekers in detention are held for an average of eight months.
- 27% had been tortured before arriving in Britain.
- 33% had been imprisoned.
- 33% had suffered bereavement in their home country, linked to political violence.
- 60% of detainees suffer from depression, and 27% from post-traumatic stress disorder from experiences in their home country.

an "inquiry" into the strikers' grievances - when they needed mass solidarity. The hunger strikers did not risk their

lives and permanently damage their bodies for only a handful to be bailed. They did it, with almost no contacts on the outside and unsure if anyone was listening, to draw attention to the whole racist immigration and asylum system in this country.

That is why we should now renew the fight to free all 850 detained asylum seekers. Only a fighting campaign stressing the right to asylum, using the trade union movement's numbers and power, can win freedom for all.

Despite the end of the hunger strike, campaigners are determined to keep up the fight. Trade union branches should keep on faxing messages of support and mobilise for future demos. We should pass resolutions in our branches that:

- condemn the government's brutal, racist detention practices
- demand the strikers' immediate release and an end to detention
- demand that the national union, and the Labour Party, support the campaign and that Labour scraps the 1996 Asylum and Immigration Act 1996.



## Tube privatisation

# London's transport hell

**T**HE TORIES have pledged to privatise the London Underground if they win the election. Though a Tory election victory now looks unlikely, the future of London's tube network is still a major issue for the 10 million people who live and work in the capital.

Unveiling the privatisation plan, Tory minister George Young revealed a £1.2 billion investment shortfall. The Tories' answer is to flog off the network at one tenth of its value of at least £6 billion and then give the proceeds back to the new private owners as a subsidy.

The Tube bosses were rubbing their hands in gleeful anticipation of fat-cat status. And many Londoners can't help thinking that the sharp rise in breakdowns and delays in the preceding months may have been engineered by the Underground bosses to foster a mood of "privatisation can't be any worse".

The Tories unveiled their sell-off plan in the same week that the recently privatised South West Trains announced the cancellation of hundreds of commuter trains because of job cuts.

The £1.2 billion investment shortfall, compounded by a £700 million cut in Tube subsidies in 1997 alone, is only half the problem. London needs an efficient service that workers can afford to use. At present the London Underground makes a £280 million profit. It has the highest fares in the world.

The cheapest single ticket on the Tube costs more than twice that paid on the Paris Metro.

Labour has pledged to halt the privatisation. But before Tube travellers start cheering they should ask what Labour will do about the spending shortfall. Its likely answer is a combination of public/private finance with little or no new money from central government.

Even the *Financial Times* noted: "The Tories believe in privatisation accompanied by public subsidy and regulation. Labour believes in public-private partnership. In practice it could take a sharp-eyed trainspotter to identify the difference."

Tying Tube investment to private finance will not solve the crisis in London's transport infrastructure. Private finance is notoriously hard to put into place - as shown by the Tories' Private Finance Initiative. And the privateers always want their cut, which means higher fares for decades and further attacks on workers' pay and conditions.

What we need is a massive injection of public funding, for renovation and new lines, combined with a huge cut in fare prices.

One million people use the Tube daily. That could rise steeply, with the added benefit of less traffic chaos and less pollution, if fares were reduced and capacity increased.

The danger is that Labour will usher in a back-door privatisation that will not affect the ministers in their Daimlers, but leave commuters to make their way through the ruins of the London transport system into the next millennium. ■

## Defend Holloway School!

**I**SLINGTON COUNCIL is threatening to sack nine teachers and seven non-teaching staff at Holloway Boys' School in London.

The school had been branded by Ofsted as being "at risk" and in need of special measures. You might think that this would mean more staffing and support. In fact, it has meant the threat of take-over by an education hit-squad similar to the one used to close Hackney Downs School.

The response of Islington's Labour Council? To do the Tories' job for them. They have taken over control of school

staffing, installed their own representatives on the governing body and announced their intention to axe 16 jobs.

Last month, Holloway teachers replied by walking out on a one-day unofficial strike. They were joined by NUT members from two other Islington schools. Now union members at all three schools may face disciplinary action by Islington. School management have been told to arrange individual disciplinary hearings for all strikers. This is a blatant attempt to intimidate union members and must be

resisted. NUT members at the school have organised a successful public meeting, a lobby of the governors and a demonstration. The NUT has balloted for a day's strike this month. But this will not be enough to defend Holloway. Strike action will be needed across Islington. The unofficial action showed it is possible to win a borough-wide strike. ■

Send messages of support, invite speakers, contact: NUT Rep, Holloway School, Hilldrop Road, London N7 0JG. Fax 0171-700 1100.

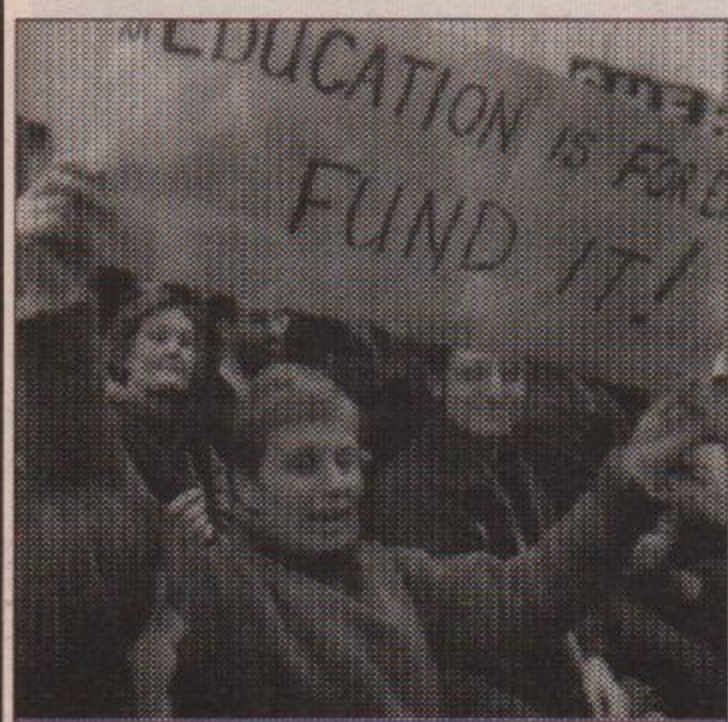
# EDITORIAL

WORKERS POWER 209 MARCH 1997

## SCOTLAND

# For a sovereign assembly! Strike against the cuts!

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**A** WAVE of anger is sweeping across Scotland in response to the latest round of council spending cuts. Tens of thousands took to the streets of Edinburgh on 1 March on a demonstration called by the Scottish TUC.

The Tories have fixed central government grants at such a low level that the mainly Labour-controlled authorities have proposed the closure of schools, libraries and nurseries, drastic cuts in service provision, sackings and outright pay cuts for council workers.

Earlier this year Glasgow City Council predicted the closure of five primary schools and the sacking of 300 teachers. Edinburgh has announced a staggering £55 million in cuts. The total level of cuts across Scotland stands at around £400 million. At the same time, working class people will be expected to pay more for council services. Council tax bills are set to rise by up to 13%.

Scottish workers are ready to fight. There have been angry demonstrations outside council meetings and the Scottish Grand Committee.

Glasgow's library workers have taken a week's strike action, and the city's Unison branch has voted to ballot for all-out action. A one-day strike is already set for 6 March. In Edinburgh council workers are voting on a week of strike action. Large-scale protests are also planned in Aberdeen and Inverness.

In the past, anti-cuts campaigns have foundered when confronted by the argument of Labour councillors that the Tories' restraints on spending have dictated the cuts - and that resistance is futile.

The alternative would be to fix illegal budgets and go into a head-on confrontation with central government, with its powers to surcharge councillors and appoint commissioners to run local authorities in place of elected councillors. This is an alternative Labour is not prepared to take.

Yet despite Labour's cowardice, this fighting perspective is gaining support in Scotland. The reasons are easy to see since the scale of the cuts is so enormous that hundreds of thousands simply cannot afford to tolerate them.

The general election and the prospect of a Labour government has actually encouraged many people to reconsider a strategy of open defiance. The independent-run Highland council has declared that this is "the best time to breach capping levels". Unison has issued an official circular calling on Scottish councils to defy the Tory spending caps to expose the severity of the cuts. The circular answers the standard objection from Labour councils with disarming frankness:

"The Secretary of State will ultimately be able to declare such budgets unlawful, but the legislative steps required intensify the campaign and provide an opportunity to win the political argument in the run up to the election."

Scottish workers are angry and they are prepared to fight. They do not accept that the Tory government in Westminster has any democratic legitimacy. Only one in seven Scots support the Tories: they could lose nearly all of their 10 remaining Scottish seats. Poll after poll reveals overwhelming support for a Scottish parliament: the latest showed over



Scottish workers demonstrate against budget cuts

70% in favour. The Tories' contempt for democracy and the rights of the Scottish people were further underlined by Stephen Dorrell's statement that a future Tory government would abolish any assembly established under Labour.

But the Tories are not alone in feeling workers' anger. Labour councils are doing the Tories' dirty work for them. The current crisis provides an opportunity to mount a co-ordinated challenge to the Tories, but instead Labour councils are pursuing the cuts with a real sense of urgency. Blair and Brown have enraged trade unionists and some Labour councillors by promising to remain within Tory spending limits.

There have been serious signs of tension since the farce of Labour's assembly U-turn. From a cast-iron guarantee of an assembly, Blair then moved to calling for a referendum. Then he added a further referendum, on whether the assembly would have tax-raising powers. His obvious aim is to prevent it doing what millions of Scottish people want it to do: tax the rich to pay for better services.

With Labour promising nothing but further attacks on its working class supporters, there is a real danger that the Scottish National Party (SNP) could win workers' votes, even though they offer no solution to the cuts.

So long as the democratic will of the Scottish people for an assembly is thwarted, nationalist big-mouths will be able to present the enemy as the union with England, rather than the capitalist system, and the solution as an independent capitalist Scotland.

**T**he political and social crisis in Scotland contains the seeds of a mass confrontation. For this, a revolutionary socialist response is urgently needed.

Socialists must champion the democratic right of the Scottish nation to determine its own future. Otherwise, the SNP will be left to divert the struggle down the nationalist dead end. Revolutionaries must demand the untrammelled right of Scotland to self-determination, up to and including separation. At present the Scottish people do not want separa-

est in creating a patchwork quilt of small capitalist states in Britain or elsewhere. But the working class does have an interest in assuring the right of every nation to self-determination and opposing the forcible retention of a nation in a state against the will of its people.

Even the most democratic assembly would not be a vehicle for achieving genuine socialist change. Like all other parliamentary bodies, a Scottish Assembly could, at best, be a platform for revolutionaries to voice their arguments and raise the call for mass workers' action outside the debating chamber.

And mass action is what Scottish workers are ready to take, with or without an assembly.

The way forward after the 1 March demonstration is to mobilise for a Scotland-wide general strike against the cuts.

We should fight for deficit budgets in every council based, not on what the Tories and Gordon Brown say the bosses can afford, but on the needs of the workers.

In every city and town, delegate-based committees of action should draw up an inventory of necessary spending, demand access to all council accounts and records, propose a needs budget and co-ordinate strike action until Westminster backs down. They should demand from an incoming Labour government:

- immediate elections to a sovereign Scottish Assembly
- the immediate scrapping of local government spending limits and the restoration of all the money stolen by the Tories since 1979.

Bold revolutionary policies are the best way to block the path of the SNP, who are relying on a coming wave of disillusion in Blair to bolster separatism.

In addition, a massive Scottish rebellion against the cuts will issue the clearest possible call to workers in England and Wales - themselves facing vicious spending cuts - to unite with Scottish workers and fight together for a massive redistribution of wealth in a Socialist Republic of Britain. ■

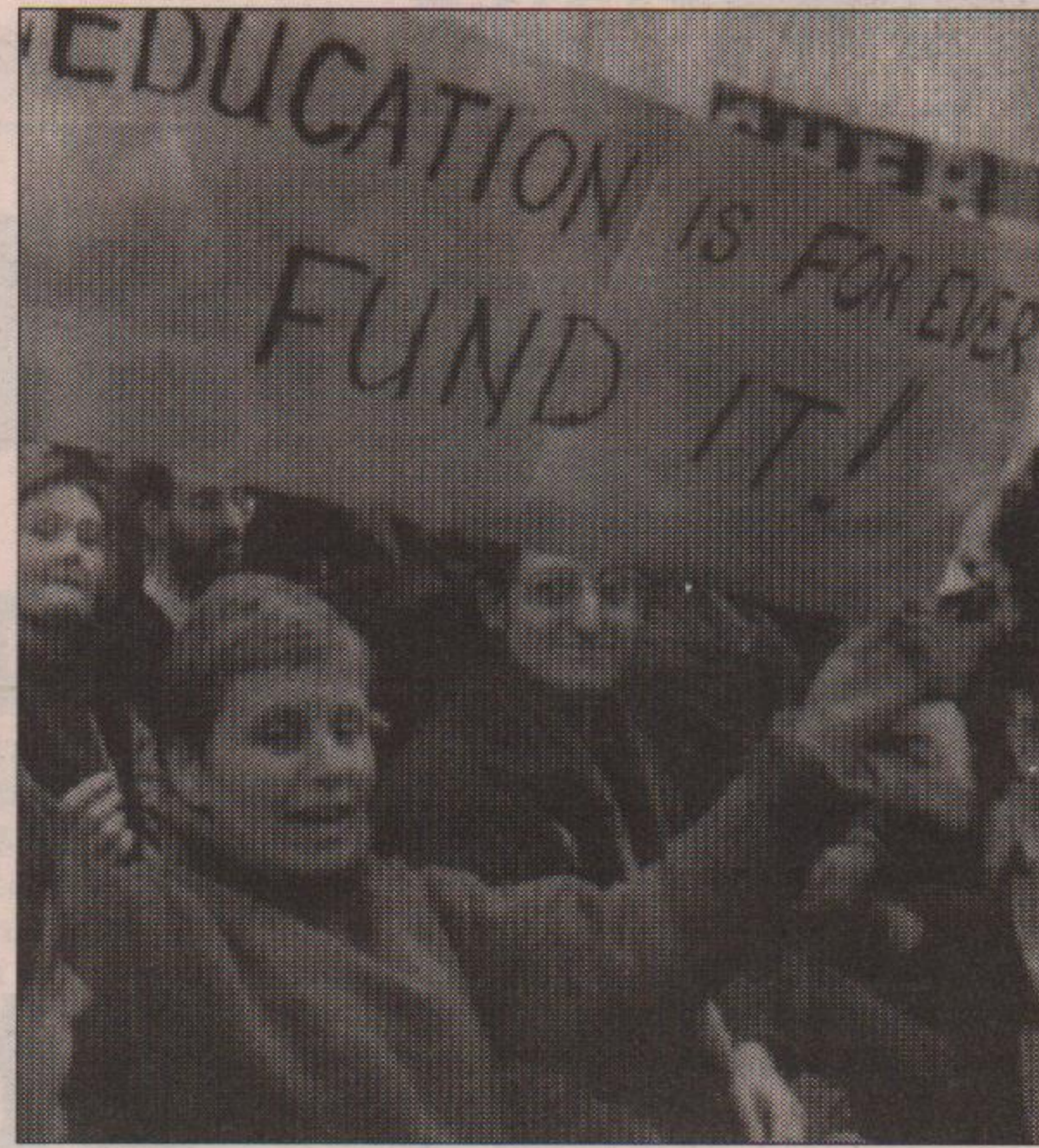
**fund drive!**

**TARGET**  
**£20,000**  
**TOTAL**  
**£7,405**

**Thanks to four supporters in London (£570) for their individual fundraising efforts this month. We also received donations as large as £600 from Sheffield and as small as 50p from a reader in Cardiff. It is all welcome and we need more. Rush your donations to the address on p15. Cheques to Workers Power, marked Fund Drive on the reverse.**

## SCHOOLS: Selection, privatisation and underfunding

# The end of comprehensive education?



**I**NCREASINGLY BOTH Labour and the Tories are telling us that comprehensives are old-fashioned, inevitably sub-standard and should be replaced by some form of selective system.

Along with their combined attack on the "trendy" teaching methods of the last thirty years, this is part of a move to turn the clock back in education. Under the guise of getting school students ready for a new millennium they are preparing a return to the pre-war days of educational apartheid.

Comprehensive schooling, introduced in the 1960s and 1970s, is based on an ideal. At its core is the belief in equal opportunities within education. For some, comprehensives are the answer to social inequality and injustice. Others see them as a byword for mediocrity and failure.

Socialists reject both these views, even though we defend comprehensive education against the blows being rained on it today. It is an ideal that has inevitably been tarnished by the needs of the capitalist system. Its failures are not a reflection of the inadequacies of an education model but the inability of the profit system to meet the educational needs of the majority.

### Undermine

Since Thatcher's election in 1979, Tory education policy has been designed to undermine, and ultimately destroy, comprehensive education and to bolster a selective system. It is a testimony to the power of the comprehensive ideal that the Tory attack has had to be slow and piecemeal.

The comprehensive model was never just an example of "political correctness" emanating from the middle class Labour left. It was pioneered by the pro-capitalist Labour right-wing, led by Anthony Crosland. It was a response to a burning injustice felt by millions of workers whose kids were being systematically thrown onto an educational scrap-heap aged eleven by the hated 11-plus exam.

The spinelessness and treachery of Blair's New Labour stands exposed by the fact that the Labour Party will go into the election with no promises to reverse the attacks on comprehensive education, only a promise to defend selection.

Education for all is a right that every generation of organised workers has fought for. Industrial capitalism needs an educated workforce; but the ruling class has always wanted it on the cheap with a better standard in a separate system for their own kids. This means a poorly-funded state education system for the majority alongside an elitist private school system for the rich, paid for by fees and government tax breaks.

For decades, stuck in the middle, was the grammar school system, designed to teach the children of a better-off section of the working class to be the office clerks of the capitalist system.

The introduction of the comprehensive system swept away most of the grammar schools, along with the 11-plus. But it never touched the private schools. And while the comprehensive ideal was conceived in a period of capitalist economic growth it was actually implemented over the last three decades of decline.

When the Manic Street Preachers collected their recent Brit Award they held it up to the crowd, saying, "This is for all the comprehensive schools in Britain. They produce the best bands".

But do they produce the best educated students? **Kate Foster** deals with the current arguments against comprehensive education.

Mass unemployment, de-skilling and low pay are the destiny of many school leavers. So the ruling class believes there is little point in educating everybody to the high standards of the technology-dominated new millennium. Only a minority will have access to that.

The rich kids will have that access as of right – courtesy of the £3,000-plus annual school fees their parents can afford. Working class kids will have to compete with each other for places on the education life-raft.

The same economic stagnation that drives up mass unemployment also drives the bosses to constantly cut public spending, which is a drain on their profits. That is why education has been systematically underfunded for years.

It is estimated that over £3bn is needed just for urgent repairs to school buildings. Local education authorities estimate that they need an extra billion in 1997/8 to keep up with basic running costs.

Tory reforms in education are designed to cut costs, to open up the education system to private businesses, and to re-introduce selection.

The biggest education con trick has been Local Management of Schools (LMS). This was sold as a means of giving power to parents and governors in schools. Its real purpose was to let central government off the financial hook, getting others to implement the inevitable cuts.

While the state schools have had their funds cut, financial bribes are on offer if you are willing to opt out. Creeping privatisation in education, as in the health service, has led to more and more schools scrabbling around for hand outs from business or, more recently, even

the National Lottery.

Meanwhile some get rich. There has been a proliferation of education quangos, stuffed full of supposed experts, getting fat salaries. Chris Woodhead, of the "Ofsted" school inspection service, gets paid £84,000 a year.

*The Guardian* recently carried a profile of the "first education millionaire", Kevin McNeany. An ex-lecturer, he now runs Nord Anglia plc valued at £18 million, with an annual turnover of £35 million. McNeany runs language schools, private schools and nurseries.

He employs inspectors who, under Ofsted, check around 150 schools a year. He provides a careers service as well as cleaning and catering services. For McNeany the future looks rosy. He plans to profit from nursery vouchers by opening more nurseries and, conveniently, inspecting more nurseries. He is also offering to take over any state schools considered to be failing – no doubt by his own inspectors – and turn them around.

Meanwhile the Tories offer tax breaks for private schools and assisted places which bring state subsidies into the private sector.

The Tory attack on funding is linked to their onslaught on the comprehensive ideal in education. The thin end of the wedge was the reintroduction of compulsory testing and league tables in the 1980s.

### Selective

The tests are designed to strictly label kids on a ten-level scale in every subject. Why? So that schools can be encouraged to stream and set, pushing the more able and concentrating

resources upon them. It also allows schools to be ever more selective about their intake.

Current proposals being discussed in the dying weeks of the Major government will allow grammar schools to select half of their intake without central government approval of the criteria. The basis of this selection may be on academic achievement or on whether your parents are suitably middle class.

Meanwhile they parade the illusion that LMS and the exam league tables allow parents "choice" in the selection of schools. The Tory theory was that parents would flock to the good, efficient schools, leaving the bad ones to be closed and demolished like the "uncompetitive" docks, steel works and mines in industry. The reality is different.

Covert selection already takes place on a huge scale. Go into any estate agents and you will hear middle class parents anxiously seeking a new house within the catchment area of a "successful" school. Try getting into that catchment area if you rent a council house or a private flat!

### Stakes

The stakes are high in the fight against the new education apartheid. Knowledge is power. In the 21st century knowledge will be a key commodity, hoarded and sold like a precious metal.

If you are rich, you will glide effortlessly along the information super-highway. If you are working class, but lucky, you might be allowed access to its inside lane. For the majority, the growing education apartheid places a big "No Entry"

sign on the slip-road.

Fully comprehensive education has never existed in Britain. Grammar schools were never completely abolished; comprehensive schools were never given adequate funding or a true mixed ability intake. Even within many so called comprehensive schools selection and streaming remain the main ways of organising pupils. Comprehensive education then is still something to fight for and something worth fighting for.

Comprehensives have developed mixed ability teaching; teaching which is aimed at meeting the varying needs of children in the same class, whatever their abilities. Selection means testing kids to label them; testing so that you know whether they go in the top or the bottom set, the grammar school or the sink school. In comprehensive education testing should be more of a diagnostic tool for teachers with results shared with pupils so that they could set their own individual targets for improvement.

Comprehensives have implications for resourcing. The comprehensive system, if it were ever to be fully introduced, would not mean all children getting the same resources, but that resourcing would be based upon need.

Comprehensive education is characterised by inclusion, all children being equally valued. It is also about allowing greater choice and equality of opportunity for all. Selective education on the other hand, is about elitism, valuing a privileged minority above others.

Of course, comprehensive education alone cannot transform society, but it would be a part of that transformation. Truly comprehensive education will remain an unattainable ideal unless it is fought for alongside workers' control of education – through parents, pupils and education workers – and funded according to need.

Comprehensive education stands for justice, equality and achievement for all. It is not just Manic Street Preachers who should shouting about it! ■

## Labour

# Back to grammar schools

**F**ACED WITH the Tory onslaught on comprehensive state education, how has Labour responded?

In 1974 the Labour Party declared its opposition to private education. Labour's manifesto promised to:

- stop direct grant schools
- withdraw tax relief from public schools
- withdraw charitable status from public schools
- phase out private education.

By 1979 they had only got around to beginning to phase-out direct grant schools. By 1983 the manifesto only promised to withdraw charitable status. This had gone by 1992. In 1995 Blair's Education spokesman, Blunkett, was slapped down by his leader for daring to consider putting VAT on private school fees.

Now Blunkett has made it clear, in the Wirral by-election, that Labour supports the continued existence of grammar schools. Blair sends his son to a selective grant maintained school. And even within comprehensives the Labour education gurus favour setting and streaming according to ability.

Those in charge of education policy for New Labour have no interest in comprehensive education. Michael Barber, of the Institute of Education in London, is one of the key advisers. This is the same Michael Barber who joined the education hit squad that closed down Hackney Downs School.

According to a recent poll in the Times Educational Supplement, most teachers will vote Labour in the general election. They don't like Blair; one Labour telephone canvasser told *Work-*

*ers Power*, "the teachers are the worst. When you ring them up all they do is criticise Blair!" Despite that, many teachers do think Labour will be different.

They are in for a big disappointment. The one "promise" Labour has been willing to make was that they would scrap the assisted places scheme, which subsidises private education by £125 million every year, and use the money to cut class sizes to 30 for five to seven year olds. Blunkett has recently announced that they may have been rather hasty and they probably won't be able to do that until the second year of a new Labour government.

In the teaching unions we need to use the support that exists for Labour, and the criticism of its current policies, to demand that Labour, if it wins the

election, fulfils every one of its 1974 pledges and:

- nationalises all private schools and puts all schools in a fully comprehensive education system;
- restores schools to local authority control, recognising the right of students, education workers and parents to exercise full control over these schools;
- provides massive funds to the education system to tackle the crisis of over size classes, inadequate teaching resources and crumbling buildings. Tax the rich to pay for the education needs of the majority.

We have no illusions that Labour will deliver any of these without a fight. The teachers' unions must be mobilised to force a Blair led government to meet these demands. ■

## NUS: Halt the retreat

# Time to fight

**THE TIMING** of the 1997 National Union of Students (NUS) conference could hardly be better. With only weeks to go before the general election, students have the opportunity to raise issues vital to themselves and to the workers in further and higher education.

Since the last conference, the plight of students has gone from bad to worse.

- Over £300 million is owed to the student loans company
- 32,000 students have dropped out for non-academic reasons
- 40% of students are forced to do temporary, part-time and low paid work.

College staff suffered worsening terms and conditions, which provoked a series of local disputes and November's excellent one-day national university strike.

This crisis in education means hardship, stress, exam failure and thousands forced out of education altogether. It is the direct result of massive cuts in funding for services like education and health, which the Tories have carried through on behalf of the richest employers and financial institutions. It is part of a vast redistribution of wealth from the poor to the rich.

The response from the Blairite leadership of NUS has been pathetic. Instead of attacking the real cause of student hardship and the funding crisis, they have completely accepted the "need" for a more "realistic" approach to funding. They want students to

expect very little from an incoming Labour government.

Above all they want to get the student movement to accept the need for "some student contribution", as Douglas Trainer the current NUS President put it. In other words, whether it comes in the form of tuition fees or a graduate tax, Blair will force us to pay for our education.

We can be sure the NUS leadership will do its utmost to prevent delegates to the conference causing any embarrassment to the Labour Party in this pre-election period. Trainer and his cronies have systematically excluded and marginalised many of those who have opposed the leadership's Blairite policies.

NUS regions that support free education have been disaffiliated or dissolved, and the self-organising sections of the NUS have been "reorganised" and subjected to bureaucratic censorship. Any attempts by the conference delegates to place straightforward demands on Labour, such as a return to full grants and tax increases to fund education, will be met with equal bureaucratic obstruction.

This NUS conference should be used to organise a fight back now - a wave of demonstrations and occupations against student poverty. Equally it should make plain to Blunkett and Blair that their plans for further and higher education will be met by massive organised opposition from the student movement. ■

**IN AREAS** of high unemployment it is often only further training and education that offers any respite from the dole.

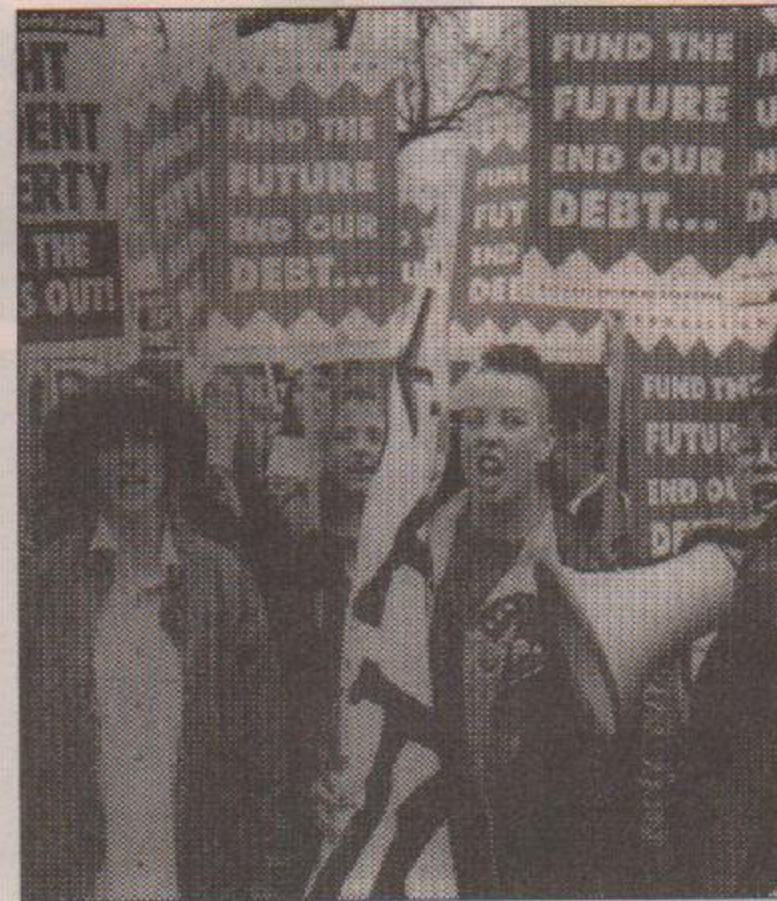
Since 7 October 1996, even that option is no longer available. Students who were previously able to study and claim benefit became subject to the new rules and regulations imposed by the Job Seekers' Allowance.

This new system continues to exclude thousands of 16-18 year olds from the right to benefit. It also cuts

the number of hours claimants can study from 21 to just 16. Those under 25 are penalised still further by a massive 20% reduction in benefit.

With tens of thousands of students in Further Education (FE) without living grants, the attacks on the benefit system now makes it even harder for working class youth to study.

The Tories have created a low wage, low skill economy, in which working class youth and their education come a poor second to the bosses and their



## Workers Power Student Societies demand:

- End student debt and hardship
- A massive tax on wealth and profits to pay for education
- A living grant for all students
- Restore all benefit rights
- No tuition fees, top up fees or graduate tax
- Free 24-hour crèche facilities for students with children
- Abolish the loans company and cancel student debts
- Abolish the JSA.

## Fight the cuts

- Link the struggles of staff and students for a decent, fully-funded free education system
- Build joint action committees of staff and students in universities and colleges to co-ordinate strikes and occupations.

## For fighting student unions

- End the ban on student union political activity
- Turf out the bureaucracy that prevents active student participation in union affairs
- All NUS officials to be elected, recallable and paid only the average income of the students they represent.

profits.

Yet while thousands of FE students suffer increasing hardship, the salaries of the NUS leaders have gone up and they have refused to organise to resist these attacks.

The NUS leadership was elected to defend the conditions of all students. We should demand they organise a campaign to smash the JSA and fight for a living grant, at the same time as building college-based action committees to battle for these aims.

## Unison women's Conference

# No way to treat sisters

**UNISON HAS** a membership which is overwhelmingly female, but a leadership dominated by male bureaucrats. Under the Tories the continued erosion of public sector jobs, pay and conditions has hit women hardest. Women in Unison desperately need effective strategies to fight - but our union has so failed to deliver.

The 1997 Unison Women's Conference did nothing to change the situation. The conference agenda was full of non-contentious motions.

Any motion suggesting even a hint of a fight around the immediate concerns of Unison's women members was ruled out of order. Motions asking Unison nationally to bring pressure to bear on the Labour Party around the minimum wage and the union's existing policy of not covering vacant posts were blocked because we can only instruct the National Women's Committee, not the National Executive Council.

A motion condemning Gordon

Brown's statements about no extra public sector spending was ruled out of order because it was a "citizenship" issue and therefore could only be discussed at national Conference.

But the stifling bureaucratic character of this event really became clear in the shameful treatment of the Hillingdon strikers.

Following the Unison executive's disgraceful abandonment of the strike in January, four branches sent emergency motions to the women's conference urging renewed official support for the ongoing strike.

All four motions were ruled out of order. Delegates from the four branches - all CFDU supporters - tried to challenge the ruling but lost. We did, however, win the two-thirds vote to allow Malkiat Bilku, Hillingdon shop steward, to address conference.

As she walked up to the microphone, about a third of the delegates, and a large section of the National Women's Com-

mittee on the platform, walked out of the hall!

Despite the despicable behaviour of the platform and many delegates, the left came away from Blackpool far more organised than when it arrived. Moves are now underway to arrange a meeting for all the women in the CFDU. We must ensure that conference never again turns its backs on women members who are actually fighting.

● Two Unison regional councils have passed resolutions deploring the national union's betrayal of the Hillingdon women and voted to contribute £10,000 each to the strikers' funds. Pro-leadership treasurers are blocking the payments. Funds are urgently needed to enable the women to carry on their fight. Rush your cheques and standing orders to: Hillingdon Strikers Support Campaign (HSSC), Lloyds Bank, 21-22 High Street, Uxbridge, Middlesex UB8 1JD. To write a speaker ring 01895 250781 or 0956 135511.



## Liverpool dockers' co-op

# It's a bit of pie in the sky

The leadership of the TGWU have put forward a labour supply co-operative as the solution to the 18 month-old Liverpool docks dispute. Sacked docker **Frank Carberry** told Workers Power why many of those who have waged the fight are worried about this idea.

**THE STRATEGY** at the moment is to create a non-profit labour supply unit which doesn't own anything but just supplies labour to the port. There are three groups involved: the Mersey Docks and Harbour Company (MDHC), the TGWU officials, the shop stewards' committee and the dockers themselves.

The TGWU officials' idea of the co-op is different in as much as they do not see the removal of Drake International and its scab labour from the port as a pre-requisite. The danger is that we could get into negotiations with the MDHC where some sort of compromise is put forward by the MDHC and the T&G officials which would not be acceptable to the shop stewards or to the men because it would involve Drake's staying in the port, or the labour supply unit having to bid against the other firms.

We have been informed by a high-ranking T&G official that Bill Morris (General Secretary) wants to impose a postal ballot on the 329 dock company workers, not the other 100 plus workers originally involved in the dispute. My fear is that if he does impose such a ballot, then it would include this version of the labour supply unit which might split the workforce. These are the dangers we face at present.

Having read the TGWU document, which the shop stewards appeared to support at first, I wasn't very happy. It refers to the conditions that the dock company would have to meet before it hired labour from a supplier, but says only that it should allow the right to union representation, abide by health and safety legislation, pension scheme, and appropriate training standards.

There is nothing to prevent the likes of Drake International or other scab firms from appearing to meet those criteria. I would rather see it spelt out in black and white that there has to be an exclusive contract with the labour supply unit as the sole supplier of labour.

From the beginning it has been a main demand that everyone gets reinstated, but we know that there are some who want to retire, with dignity. If the co-op doesn't look attractive to the workers that could encourage many more people to opt for a settlement. It could end up with a small group of 100 or less who are willing to go into a labour co-op.

A part of this paper calls for a 12-week period when everyone will be reinstated, but it would only be a paper reinstatement. They would not actually be going back to work. They would be sitting at home, and then have to either opt into the co-op or take a redundancy pay-off.

There is nothing wrong in principle with a labour supply unit if it is an exclusive contract to supply labour to all parts of the port. With it being non-profit making such a unit would enable us to offer more employment in Liverpool - with proper terms and conditions and pension schemes - than would ever be offered by the MDHC. But I think that it's a bit pie in the sky.

I cannot see the MDHC agreeing to that sort of scheme. In effect, they may as well agree to reinstate everyone and get rid of Drake International. So I am very much afraid that the current co-op proposal will be used to split the labour force.

On the bright side, on 21 January we called a day of action which turned into a fortnight. I think that the response was unprecedented in labour history, in terms of the international solidarity. Across the west coast of America ten ports stopped working, including the port of Los Angeles which is the third biggest in the world. More than 53 ships and 100 gantries were stopped. According to the Los Angeles Times, the whole of the trade between the USA and the Pacific rim was frozen, costing the ship owners \$500 million.

In Sweden there was a 24-hour blockade, and there were stoppages in the German docks. Fifty ports in Japan took limited strike action. The Assistant General Secretary of the Japanese Dock Workers' Union is coming over to discuss the issue with the Port Shop Stewards' Committee. All told it was a truly massive response.

The next international conference takes place in Montreal, Canada. Seven countries will attend a steering committee next month to discuss getting more continuous action in the ports around the world, because that is what we believe is necessary to get the MDHC to reinstate the dock workers. There will be a solidarity march in Liverpool so that the seven international representatives can address the people from the platform.

There have also been successes in getting certain firms to withdraw from Liverpool, including four or five car transporters. We also have a campaign across Britain with the support groups for a boycott of Argos, while they continue to use the port of Liverpool.

● Demonstration in support of the dockers on Saturday 22 March, 11.00am. Assemble Myrtle Parade, Liverpool 8. Send cheques, etc. to: Merseyside Dockers' Shop Stewards' Committee, c/o Mr Jimmy Davies, 19 Scorton Street, Liverpool L6 4AS. To invite a docker or Women of the Waterfront representative, ring 0151 207 3388. ■

1974-79: How Wilson and Callaghan demobilised the unions

# Labour vs the workers



Winter of Discontent, 1979

**T**HE LABOUR Party returned to office in 1974 against a background of the most intense class struggle seen in Britain for generations.

In its second confrontation with the miners, Edward Heath's Tory government had put the country on a three-day week, complete with systematic power cuts and scare stories of economic collapse and uncontrollable epidemics. When this failed to shake the resolve of the miners, Heath tried to isolate them by calling a general election in which the electorate was asked to decide, "Who Rules?"

Heath did not get the answer he wanted. He tried to hang on with a minority government for a few days but, within the week, Harold Wilson, the Labour leader, was back in Downing Street.

## Shift

Labour's manifesto was one of its most left-wing ever. It promised "a fundamental shift in the balance of power and wealth in favour of working people and their families". Its "Social Contract" with the working class - promising price controls, rent freezes, nationalisations and "planned" income growth - seemed to offer an alternative to the previous Labour government's endless round of pay restraint.

In practice, every progressive element within the Social Contract turned into its reactionary opposite. The much trumpeted deal to control incomes growth to allow increased state investment became an excuse for wage cuts and hand outs to private capital. "Industrial democracy" became a means of incorporating trade union figures into job-cutting "modernisation" programmes. Increased taxation of profits became a payroll tax that encouraged job cuts and national economic planning became a systematic transfer of wealth into the hands of currency speculators.

The five years of Labour government saw systematic attacks on the working class; the "shift" was in favour of the ruling class. When Thatcher entered Downing Street in 1979 what she faced was not the militant and confident working class that had confronted Heath, and then Wilson, five years earlier but a demobilised and politically disoriented trade union movement whose existing leaders had already agreed that wage rises had to be curtailed and that militant class struggle had to be stopped. Wilson and Callaghan paved the way for Thatcher's attacks.

During its first six months in office, Labour concentrated on consolidating its position. The miners' strike was settled, five day working was restored, all rents were frozen and a Ministry of Prices was set up. Chancellor Denis Healey's first budget introduced subsidies to lower the prices of bread, butter and milk and

With a general election and the real possibility of a Labour government only a matter of weeks away, **Peter Main** looks back at the record of the last Labour government, 1974-79, elected in very different circumstances to those of today and with a considerably more left wing programme than that on offer from Blair's New Labour.

also raised pensions.

In the summer the government firmed up its proposals on Equal Pay, Employment Protection and taxation. Tony Benn's Industry Department published plans for nationalisation of the docks and the aircraft industry and the creation of the National Enterprise Board to direct investment.

In October, Wilson called another general election, arguing that success for the social contract with the trade unions (which was a key part of the manifesto) was only possible with a majority in the Commons. Labour's vote went down but, because the Tories lost support to the Liberals, Labour was re-elected with a majority of three seats. Healey immediately introduced a new budget which marked a change of direction. Price controls were relaxed, concessions were made on corporation tax and there were cuts in subsidies to the public sector industries.

The April 1975 budget reduced price controls further and introduced a £100 million subsidy to private capital investment while cutting £900 million from the rest of public spending. Against a background of rising inflation and a falling pound, the government launched a campaign to pressure the TUC into accepting "its side of the bargain" in the shape of a voluntary limit on pay rises.

## Inflation

In July 1975 the TUC agreed to a wage limit of a flat rate £6 a week increase for the next year. At the time, inflation was running at around 30% and the £6 limit represented a cut in real wages of 2.5% over the year it was in operation.

Healey introduced tax changes such as an increase in national insurance and corporation tax which were effectively an encouragement to employers to lay off workers. Together with the impact of cuts in public spending and low exports, these led to a dramatic increase in unemployment. In January 1975 it was 678,000. By December it was 1,129,000.

Plans were drawn up to cut the education budget by £618 million, transport by £506 million and health by £150 million.

A major financial crisis developed in 1976. Trying to maintain the value of the

pound, the government had already borrowed heavily from the International Monetary Fund (IMF) but this money was gone by May. In June a further standby credit of \$5,000 million was negotiated with the IMF.

Against this background Healey demanded an even tougher, "Stage Two" of the wages policy. This time the TUC agreed to a limit of 4.5%, at a time when inflation was still 14%.

Even this was not enough to halt the slide in the pound. Once again, the Labour government turned to the IMF, borrowing a further \$3,900 million but now the loan came with quite specific

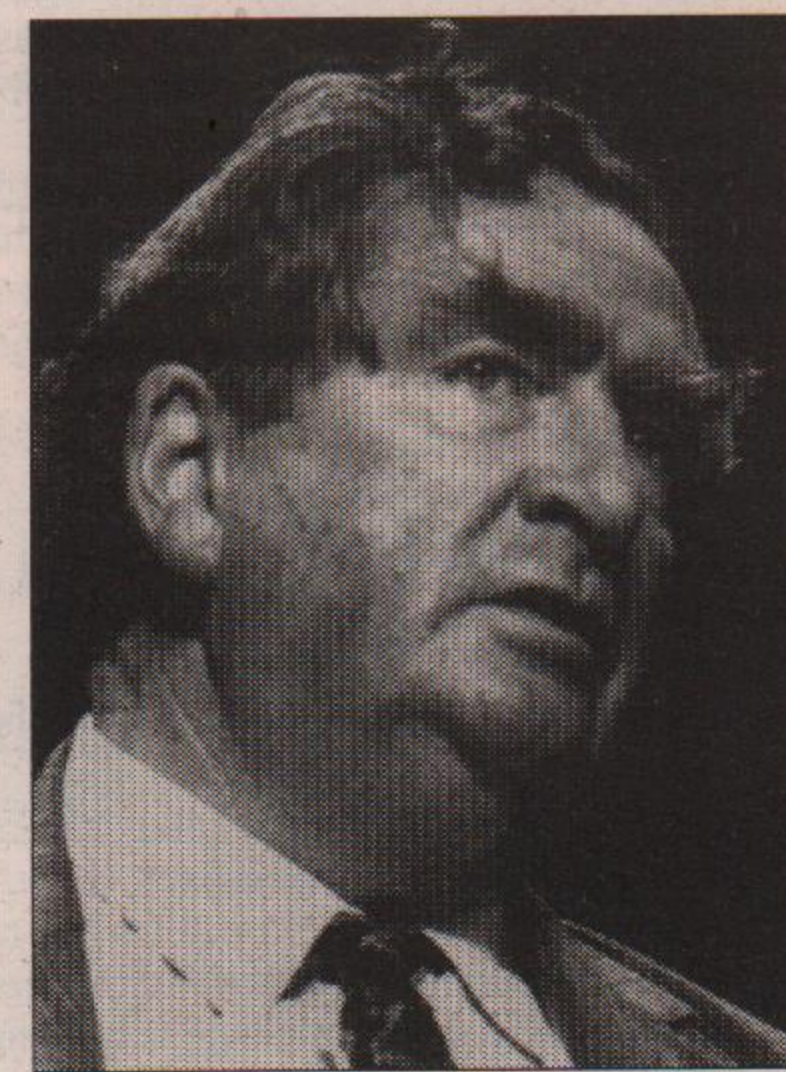
norm, but they also made it clear that they were not prepared to lead a determined fight against the government.

In their battle to make the working class pay for the economic crisis, Labour used three weapons. They were more than prepared to use state forces as scabs and to literally smash up workers' picket lines. The army were used to drive scab ambulances, fire engines and dust carts in order to undermine key strikes. In the Grunwicks dispute in 1977 pickets were attacked by the vicious Special Patrol Group.

## Participation

Labour also sought to undermine the organisational strength of the shop stewards' movement through worker participation schemes. These were cynically presented as a means of increasing "industrial democracy". But their real purpose was to enshrine class collaboration in the factories, undermining independent shop floor leadership by making it jointly responsible for decision making with management.

At the Triumph plant in Speke hundreds of jobs were slashed for the "good" of British Leyland. The shop stewards



**After the second election, Denis Healey immediately introduced a new budget which marked a change of direction. Price controls were relaxed, concessions were made on corporation tax and there were cuts in subsidies to the public sector industries.**

were unable to lead an effective fight against this since they had "participated" in the drawing up of a plan by Leyland's proto-Thatcherite boss, Michael Edwardes which included job cuts.

Labour's third weapon was playing off sections of workers against each other, fostering divisions between the public and private sector.

The percentage-based wage limits hit low paid public sector workers particularly hard and made better paid skilled workers in the private sector resentful about being held back. Flouting the results of repeated ballots in the miners' union, Labour introduced a divisive local

productivity scheme that set miner against miner and region against region - a key factor in creating the scab fifth column in the union when the showdown with Thatcher came in 1984.

A key test came with the pay claim of the Fire Brigades' Union at the end of 1977. Because it was in the public sector, this claim was a direct challenge to the government. Despite a solid eight week strike, the union was left isolated by the rest of the TUC and eventually settled within the government's limits, a clear warning to others.

Nonetheless, the FBU strike did make it clear that working class resentment at the government's wage policy was rising. When the government announced in July 1978 that it wanted to extend the "social contract" - which was now purely an incomes policy - with a wage limit of just 5%, when inflation was in double figures, it set the scene for a stormy final year in office.

Once again, the TUC, despite a refusal to endorse the limit, resisted all attempts to mount a campaign against the government. Its preferred strategy was for the government to call an early election while agreeing to a refurbished "social contract"!

## Discontent

Callaghan's rejection of this, a calculated snub to his TUC allies, opened the way to the resurgence of class struggle in the "Winter of Discontent" of 1978/79. A nine week strike at Ford's broke the pay norm as far as the private sector was concerned. Their settlement, at 17%, set the target for other workers.

By January 1979, strike figures rose to their highest since February 1974, the month when Labour came to office. Among the strikers were 1.5 million low paid workers in the public sector, as well as train drivers and oil tanker drivers. Although settlements on average were in the region of 10%, double the government's norm, some, like the tanker drivers', were as high as 22%.

The TUC responded to this by negotiating a new version of the "social contract", now called a "concordat" which included reference to price controls but was hinged on agreed annual limits to pay rises, with a target of 5% by 1982. Not surprisingly, opposition to this amongst the rank and file of the unions grew as surely as support for the Labour government collapsed. Ministers from Callaghan down now called on trade unionists to break picket lines, demanded an end to secondary picketing and threatened major job losses in the public sector if wage rises were conceded.

Faced with the prospect of further attacks on wages, jobs and union rights, millions of workers deserted Labour in the general election of May 1979. Many even voted Tory in the belief that Thatcher's "free market" philosophy would allow them to re-establish wage differentials that had been eroded under Labour. Thatcher came to power with a majority of over 40 seats.

As the 1997 general election approaches there are harsh lessons for the working class from the experience of the 1974/9 Labour government. Whilst Blair may be promising a lot less, he will surely attempt to use the tried and tested methods of his predecessors to destroy any working class resistance.

In 1979 on the eve of the election Workers Power wrote:

"The Labour government ends its term in office by handing over a working class which is seriously vulnerable to the inevitable continued attacks of the Tories. Despite the fighting ability displayed in recent struggle the movement is more divided than it was when it sent Heath packing."

The attacks were not long in coming. On the eve of possibly the first Labour government in eighteen years, the working class must be united in its determination to fight for its own demands, with no illusions in what a Labour victory means for us. ■

## Oil, blood and organisation

# The story of the OILC

**O**N 6 JULY 1988 the Piper Alpha production platform exploded into a gigantic ball of flames in the North Sea. The inferno claimed the lives of 167 oil workers in the worst accident in the history of the global offshore industry.

The tragedy of Piper was no accident but the product of "a system which... had made the disaster inevitable", in the words of Piper survivor Bob Ballantyne. The horror of Piper marked a crucial turning point in the history of the offshore industry. In particular, the developing struggle between the industry's bosses and workers gave birth to a militant breakaway union, the Offshore Industry Liaison Committee (OILC) in late 1991.

The struggle for trade union rights offshore forms the heart of *Paying for the Piper*. This book is a fine example of meticulously researched, yet unashamedly progressive scholarship. More than 600 pages long, it is likely to be the definitive account of this strategic industry and those who have fought to achieve safe working conditions.

### Contribution

The authors include Matthias Beck, an economist from St Andrews University, and two Glasgow-based academics, Charles Woolfson and John Foster, known for their previous studies of the 1972 work-in at Upper Clyde Shipbuilders and the 1980s Caterpillar factory occupation.

The authors have not only made a major contribution to working class history but also constructed a damning indictment of the "hard right" of the trade union bureaucracy, especially in the former engineering and electricians' unions, now merged in the AEEU.

The oil and gas fields of the United Kingdom Continental Shelf (UKCS) have become vital to the British economy. The revenues generated even from the minimal taxes on the oil giants' profits enabled the Tories to avert a public sector borrowing crisis in the 1980s.

More recently, New Labour has signalled that a Blair government will pose no challenge to the anti-union regime offshore. There is not even a commitment to extend the European Union's working hours directive to the UKCS. When asked by the *Glasgow Herald*

**GR McColl** reviews *Paying for the Piper: Capital and Labour in Britain's Offshore Oil Industry*, by Charles Woolfson, John Foster and Matthias Beck; Mansell Publishing Ltd, £29.99.

about union rights offshore, Blair replied:

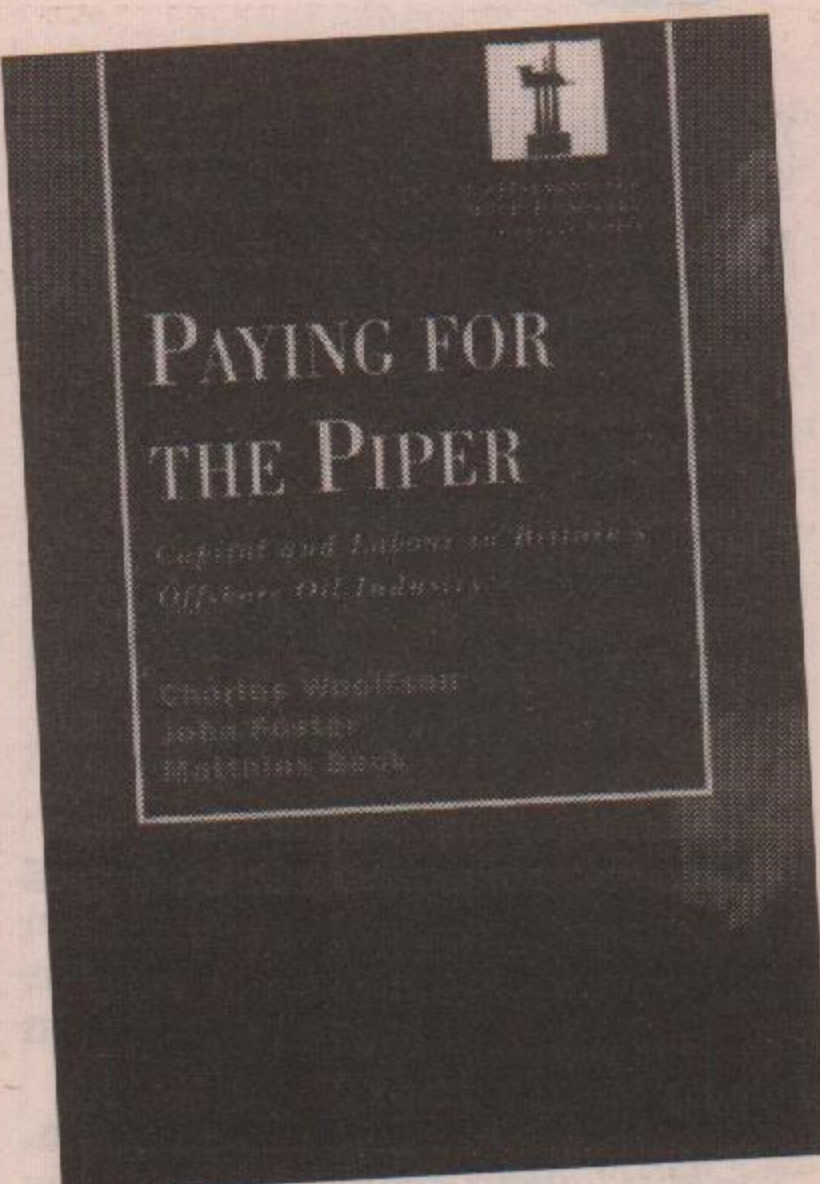
"This is a matter for the employers and individual employees. I don't envisage any change there."

From the early 1970s until the early 1990s, the UKCS absorbed between 10% and 20% of all UK industrial investment each year. Since the early 1990s, however, the UKCS has witnessed fundamental changes, with both Shell and BP shifting their patterns of investment away from the North Sea and "back towards the traditional overseas oil production bases that had been their staple prior to the 1970s".

The authors maintain that a mounting crisis for the bosses in the battle between capital and labour triggered these changes in corporate policy towards a growing emphasis on the exploitation of the resources of countries such as Colombia (BP) and Nigeria (Shell). The catalyst to change was the transformation of widespread anger and bitterness following Piper Alpha into industrial militancy.

*Paying for the Piper* explains the way in which industrial action in the summers of 1989 and 1990 became a challenge to "managerial authority and legitimacy in the area of health and safety". The offshore rebellion provoked a campaign of victimisation, orchestrated by the major oil corporations. Nearly 1,000 workers were sacked and blacklisted at one stage, in a sector with fewer than 25,000 employees.

Much of the autocratic managerial regime that ultimately caused the Piper disaster survived the strike wave. But the authors point to important changes that marked a retreat from the earlier obsession with deregulation. Following Lord Cullen's 1990 report on the Piper



disaster, a new offshore health and safety regime slowly emerged.

The Department of Trade and Industry and, to a lesser extent, the Health and Safety Executive, intervened to foster the development of a new relationship "between management and a smaller, more concentrated and more stable core workforce." In short, new methods required far greater sophistication, and management needed to incorporate workers, "within a new value system that recognised joint interests and a measure of consultation", but, nonetheless, did not grant collective bargaining rights.

The continued absence of such rights in the UKCS stems directly from the defeat of the 1990 strikes and sit-ins. The ultimate responsibility lies with the leaders of the existing trade unions which had membership bases offshore.

### Crucial

The original OILC was not a trade union, but a ginger group of activists – some of them veterans of earlier organising drives – from a number of unions. They recognised the crucial impact the Piper tragedy had on the mass of the workforce. With anti-union laws blocking any prospect for official action, even the right wing of the bureaucracy was initially willing to give a nod and a wink to the OILC as the organiser of unofficial strikes.

Here we disagree with the authors'

argument that the unions could not give official backing to the illegal action called by the OILC in July and August 1990. This assessment ignores the extent to which the bureaucrats were quite happy to hide behind the excuse of the Tory laws. Nonetheless, they brilliantly unmask such fake left full-timers as the (then) AEU's Jimmy Airlie elsewhere in the text.

Without official backing, the balance of forces weighed heavily against a sustained campaign of indefinite strikes and occupations. The OILC's ad hoc standing committee may have made a serious error by declaring a 10-day moratorium on 26 August 1990, pending the outcome of a meeting of union officials at the TUC conference.

At the TUC, Jimmy Airlie made promises to the OILC and the conference that he had no intention of keeping. He declared that:

"If we don't get a negotiated settlement then we will stop every installation throughout the Continental Shelf. That is a guarantee."

In fact, the unions made only a half-hearted attempt to register members for an official ballot, relying on OILC activists to do all the work. The key unions postponed and eventually abandoned the ballot, with the AEU disavowing support even for an overtime ban.

By spring 1991, Airlie was spearheading a smear campaign against the OILC at the Scottish TUC in Dundee. Briefings from the AEU's press office spread the word that the OILC had become "too politically motivated by a handful of extremists". The authors argue that this hatred of the OILC was closely linked to the bureaucracy's drive to merge with the EETPU to "create a right-wing trade union bloc that would powerfully dominate the entire civil engineering construction industry both offshore and onshore".

In August 1991 the AEU, joined by the EETPU and GMB, signed a new "Hook-up" agreement, which continued to freeze out the unions in the crucial area of health and safety. In the OILC's words it was "a squalid little sectional deal signed on the back of the sacked workers" and effectively meant that these unions had "endorsed their own marginalisation".

The AEU leadership ferociously

defended the deal they had cut with the Offshore Contractors' Council. At a press conference, Airlie took exception to questioning from a freelance researcher. He shouted, "you're a wee Trot! Now, get out!" Eventually, Airlie's performance led to the abandonment of the media event.

The 1991 Hook-up agreement proved to be the point of no return in the evolution of the OILC from a loose collection of activists into an industrial union seeking to organise the whole offshore workforce. *Workers Power* supported the OILC's decision to break away from the official trade union movement. Experience since then has confirmed our position.

### Campaign

Nevertheless, despite a membership of some 3,000, the OILC has so far failed to achieve its key objective of mass unionisation in one of Britain's most strategic industries. The fledgling union has faced a campaign of vilification by the AEEU in particular, which has included naked collaboration with the bosses. Legal battles, financed by the Tories' Commissioner for Rights of Trade Union Members, almost paralysed it in 1994.

On the positive side of the balance sheet, the OILC has forged international links, particularly with the OFS union in the Norwegian sector of the North Sea. It has also been to the fore in support of the Liverpool dockers and the Glacier occupation in Glasgow and has been crucial to the developing campaign against BP's use of government death squads to silence opposition to its destructive operations in Colombia's Casanare region.

Eventually, a new, bigger and more sustained wave of industrial action will be required to unionise the UKCS workforce. In the meantime, all offshore workers should heed the authors' words:

"Such is the nature of the oil industry that the actions of a very few thousand workers on desolate oil rigs in the North Sea remain intimately tied to those of their counterparts in Ogoniland, Cusiana, Abu Dhabi, Siberia, Baku and, not least, the Norwegian waters of the North Sea, only separated from the UK sector by an invisible line on the map." ■

## Ireland's war on drugs

# Legalisation is the answer

**TIM MURPHY** poses the question, "Is current drug policy – as manifested in the legal prohibition of certain drugs – right or wrong?" and concludes that:

"it is ineffectual because it is falling far short of its objectives; irresponsible because it is contributing to the creation of greater social problems; and illegitimate because it employs criminal sanctions in an improper manner."

In support of this he has produced an intelligent and challenging analysis of the "War on Drugs" that is being waged by the Irish and other governments. He presents important insights into the social factors behind drug addiction and delivers damning criticisms of the punitive legislation that is achieving nothing positive, but he fails to come up with an adequate policy for dealing with the issue.

Murphy recognises that the most serious drug problems occur in working class communities. It is the working class who are most vulnerable to the escape that drugs offer, and it is these

**Andy Johnston** of the Irish Workers Group reviews *Rethinking the War on Drugs in Ireland*, by Tim Murphy, published by Cork University Press at £4.95

communities which are targeted by the police in their attempts to "solve" the problem. It is the criminalisation of drug use, combined with poverty, that leads to increases in crime and violence.

Given that drug use is associated with youth culture, the recent stringent legislation and crackdown on drugs in Ireland is also a reaction against an increasingly vibrant youth culture.

It was not always so. Murphy points out that, up to the 1960s, drug use was seen as an issue to be dealt with by the medical profession, "an expression of mental disorder rather than a form of criminal behaviour".

With the rapid change in drug-use patterns during the 1960s came a change in the attitude of the ruling class. Laws were brought in to control what was

now seen as a sweeping social disease.

Murphy points out that the Irish Misuse Of Drugs Act of 1977 lacked any analysis of what is meant by "drug-abuse". It assumed that it was a self-evident social problem, and that supply-reduction and abstinence were the only policy options. Consequently, the bill was more concerned with drug control than care.

The government's denial of the social base of drug abuse thus led to a prohibitive and punitive regime and an avoidance of the social issues that lead to drug addiction and drug-related crime. Such an approach compounds the original causes of drug use:

"The use of drugs is more likely to become misuse under the circumstances

created by a war on drugs."

Murphy also calls into question the legitimacy of state action concerning drugs. He argues that capitalism itself encourages the problem – the consumerist, escapist culture increases the attractiveness of drugs, as do unemployment and low wages.

It is here, though, that Murphy's analysis shows its weakness. He goes as far as to say:

"Drugs do not exist in a social vacuum, they do not constitute an autonomous 'social problem'. They must be viewed in the moral context of social and economic organisation generally."

But he falls short of calling for the abolition of this "social and economic organisation". All he can say is:

"The appropriate response is a multi-sectoral state response, including moves towards socio-economic redistribution, and also a deconstructive awareness of ambiguity and inherent contradiction in present forms of social organisation and social values."



Despite everything he has said about the social origin of drug use, his answer is to call on the state to establish an "innovative social service", designed to monitor and regulate drug consumption in as safe a manner as acceptable and possible.

This does not go far enough. Though at least Murphy recognises that since criminalisation is a major factor in worsening the problem then legalisation is needed to reduce it. In the context of the Irish debate on drugs this is a welcome stance. ■

**WHEN THE SLP** was launched Arthur Scargill not only denounced the anti-working class politics of New Labour but made a point of attacking the Labour leadership's witch-hunts of the left. SLP constituencies, he emphasised, need not fear for their autonomy. There would be no imposed candidates in the SLP, no removal of "good socialists".

But the warning signs were there at the founding conference. Members were not allowed to debate or amend the party constitution, drawn up by John Hendy QC and agreed by a self-selected group around Scargill. This constitution is now being used as the basis for the expulsion and suspension of Scargill's opponents in the SLP.

Just like New Labour it is the left in the SLP that is being witch-hunted. Just being accused of being a member of the "CPGB", publishers of the *Weekly Worker*, appears to be enough to warrant instant expulsion. Evidence isn't required.

In December just such an accusation was made against John Pearson, a former SLP branch secretary from Stockport. Despite a clear rejection of this witch-hunt by his branch the January National Executive Committee (NEC) "voided" Pearson's membership for "actions incompatible with the constitution of the party". The "actions" were never specified.

In Vauxhall, South London, a Union activist from Southwark, Barry Biddulph, received a similar verdict in February.

His letter of expulsion came shortly after he had put himself forward as prospective parliamentary candidate for the constituency on a manifesto which differed from national policy on a number of points. It argued, for example, against all immigration controls whereas the SLP is in favour of "non-racist" immigration controls.

#### Voided

While Biddulph was never accused of being a member of a covert left group he still received a letter from Arthur Scargill saying he had evidence that he was "not abiding by the rules". For acting "in defiance of the constitution" his membership too was voided. Needless to say the "evidence" has yet to be

## Socialist Labour

# Scargill launches S

produced.

Worse was to come. The Vauxhall constituency secretary then received a letter from Scargill demanding the names of all those who had put forward manifestos and of those who had voted for them! Fortunately the constituency did not comply with Scargill's dictat, which would undoubtedly have resulted in another set of expulsion letters.

At its next meeting the constituency refused to recognise Barry Biddulph's expulsion and instead demanded that an NEC member present should explain Scargill's actions. The NEC member did not provide a shred of evidence but did warn that, by voting to reject the expulsion, the branch was putting its very existence in jeopardy.

#### Pattern

The current purges are part of a pattern in the SLP. The party is being built in a classically Stalinist bureaucratic fashion, from the top down, and the NEC is hardly accountable to the membership. Members who are expelled have no right of appeal, to either an elected appeals body or to the party congress.

When Patrick Sikorski resigned as General Secretary, supposedly because of pressure of work, the NEC redistributed the national posts making Scargill General Secretary and Treasurer, with complete disregard to the party's own constitution which leaves such elections to the Congress. The same NEC put off the party congress, due to be held under the constitution by 31 May, until October.

No one had their membership "voided" for these breaches of the rules!

It is Scargill's perspective for building the SLP that leads him to ride roughshod over the constituencies and

its members. He is determined to present the SLP as a significant parliamentary alternative to Labour at the general election, however weak it is in terms of numbers. He has been trying to drive the party to put up candidates in at least 100 constituencies.

The first step was to refuse to recognise the branch organisations that had originally been formed in the SLP. They had to break up into constituency based groups to be recognised by the NEC. Some of these constituency parties had only a handful of active members. Nevertheless, Scargill set about bullying them into standing not only in their own constituencies but in adjacent ones as well on the basis of "a General Election address alone", that is, one leaflet.

One internal party publication, *Socialist Labour Action*, describes how in South East Wales the branch only discovered from a local newspaper that

a candidate had been adopted in their area!

Arthur Scargill had approached RMT Executive member Peter Skelly and asked him to fight Pontypridd, Kim Howells' seat, despite the fact that the constitution gives this right only to constituency parties. When the branch, with only a handful of members, decided that it could not fight Cardiff Central, Scargill told them that it was within the power of the NEC to adopt its own candidate for the constituency.

#### Appeal

Not surprisingly this policy has met opposition. Twenty four SLP members in the South West issued an appeal for a discussion of electoral policy. They correctly recognised that the scramble for candidates was connected to the leadership's view of how socialism will be achieved. As they put it:

The Socialist Labour Party (SLP) was launched last May. As it approaches both its first anniversary and its first general election, the party provides a sorry spectacle. Resignations at the top, bureaucratic expulsions and suspensions of members, bullying and overruling of local constituencies: SLP members must be wondering whether Arthur Scargill's regime is any better than Tony Blair's.

Militant Labour's transformation into the Socialist Party might seem to provide a better alternative. But it does not. The change of name signals, if anything, just one more lurch to the right by this organisation.

Neither of the new parties provides the revolutionary alternative to Labour that the working class needs or deserves, write **John McKee** and **Colin Lloyd**

## Militant Labour/Socialist Party

# "Does anybody want a new

**FEBRUARY SAW** the official launch of the Socialist Party, formerly Militant Labour. The weekly paper *Militant* has changed its name to *The Socialist*. The party has declared its intention to stand 25 candidates at the general election and published a *Socialist Party Manifesto*.

The launch of the Socialist Party (SP) represents yet another "turn" by a leadership fundamentally disorientated by the collapse of its 40-year long perspective of transforming the Labour Party into a mass Marxist party. Unfortunately, neither the new perspective, nor the Socialist Party's new programme, are qualitatively better than their predecessors.

They embody the same refusal to spell out the revolutionary tasks facing the working class in its struggle against capitalism that was the hallmark of Militant under Ted Grant and Militant Labour under Peter Taaffe.

For more than forty years Militant carried out "strategic entrism" in the Labour Party. The tactic was premised on the theory that the majority of workers would "inevitably" flow into the mass socialist parties as the class struggle intensified, transforming them into centrist or proto-revolutionary parties. The task of Marxists, according to Militant's then leader Ted Grant, was to stay in the Labour Party at all costs to provide the leadership when that event occurred.

The theory was underpinned by an even more basic revision of Leninism: namely that what Grant liked to call the

"hammer blows of the class struggle" would spontaneously transform workers' consciousness into revolutionary consciousness.

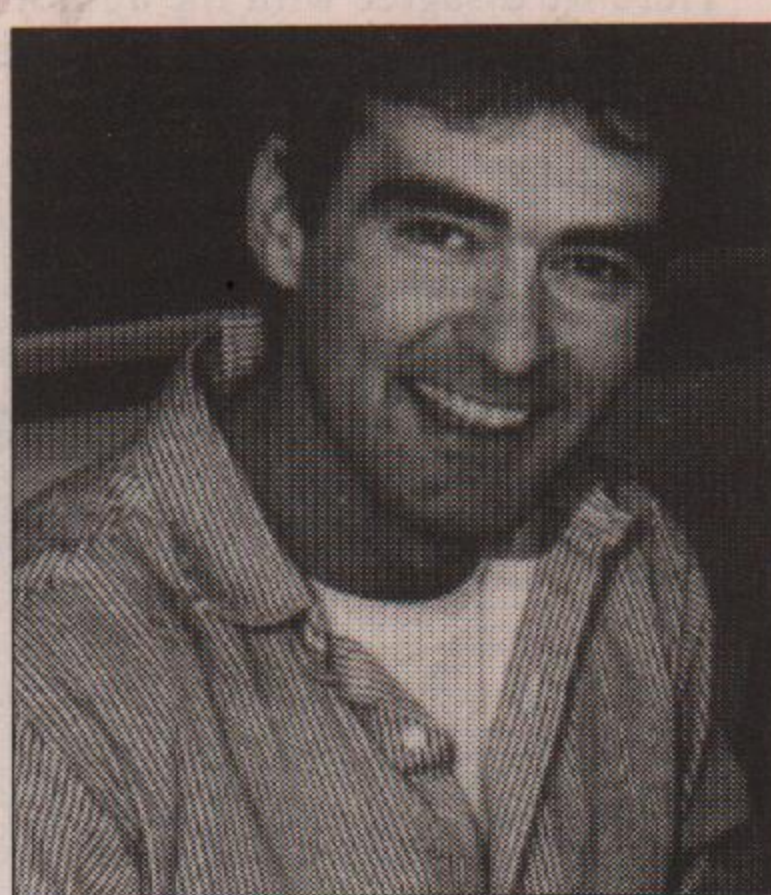
This led Militant to present its politics as a version of left reformism, as an "organic" part of the Labour tradition. Nowhere was this more clearly demonstrated than its adoption of a reformist perspective on how the workers could achieve state power.

Specifically, Militant reduced the demands of the Trotskyist Transitional Programme - such as expropriation of the capitalists, workers' control and the revolutionary workers' government - to a set of demands on Labour. The crucial question of the smashing of the capitalist state machine, of working class organising to take power through its own councils, was dropped.

#### Enabling Act

Instead, Militant called for a "socialist Labour government". Such a government, they argued, backed by a mass movement outside parliament and an "Enabling Act" inside, would be able to march towards socialism.

As generally happens when socialists dress up fantasies as "perspectives", events proved Militant completely wrong. The struggles of the 1970s and 1980s did not see the masses flow into the Labour Party, still less its transformation. Nor did the workers' consciousness spontaneously move in a revolutionary direction. By the early 1990s, with a strategic defeat inflicted on the



Tommy Sheridan

trade unions and Neil Kinnock in the ascendant, Militant was witch-hunted out of the Labour Party.

It responded not with an honest reappraisal of its former politics and perspective, but with a bureaucratic purge of a group around Ted Grant who opposed what they saw as a turn away from the Labour Party work. Under force of circumstance Militant's new leadership, headed by Peter Taaffe, embraced "open" work outside the Labour Party.

The new Socialist Party bears all the hallmarks of Militant's old opportunist politics but this time without any of the excuses of working within a reformist party. The main change, perspectively, is in Militant's view of the state of working class consciousness. According to February's *Socialism Today* (the theo-

retical journal of the SP):

"The collapse of the Stalinist states and the ideological capitulation of the Labour leaders to capitalist triumphalism has set back socialist consciousness among broad layers of workers. The politically active workers who consistently participated in the trade unions and political organisations has largely disappeared. There has been an extreme weakening of the layer of class conscious socialist activists.

"Our role therefore can no longer primarily be that of presenting a distinct Marxist programme and strategy to a broad socialist movement. We have to reach out to broad layers of workers and youth who, while they may not consider themselves socialists at the moment, are looking for an alternative to capitalism and a way of fighting back."

This is a familiar refrain of an opportunist who reasons, "the party is not growing, the workers are in retreat, therefore let's throw overboard some more programmatic ballast and make ourselves more acceptable to masses." It has a name in the Marxist movement; it is called "liquidationism".

So what does the Socialist Party present before the "broad layers of workers and youth" who are looking for an alternative to capitalism in its election manifesto? Warmed over reformism, pure and simple.

As Dave Nellist told a launch rally in Coventry, "the Socialist Party will do what Labour promised to do, but never did." But Labour only ever promised to

reform capitalism.

The Socialist Party's *Manifesto* does put forward some excellent demands. Who would disagree with a minimum wage of £6.00 an hour or the repeal of the anti-trade union laws? The 35 hour week without loss of pay, the restoration of benefits for 16 and 17 year olds, the abolition of the JSA, proposals to build "a million homes in the first year", the restoration of student grants to 1979 levels, £6 billion for the NHS. They are all excellent reforms that any socialist, indeed any left Labour Party member, would agree with. But they are reforms; they do not amount to socialism or a socialist programme.

#### Reform or revolution?

Revolutionaries know that reforms, forced out of capitalism by workers' struggle in one period, can be seized back in another. But this is another weakness of the *Manifesto*. There is not a word about how these reforms will be forced out of the capitalists, the type of fighting organisations in the unions, on the estates, in the schools and on the streets that will be needed.

A section on "Democracy" calls for the abolition of the monarchy and House of Lords, the strengthening local government, and "real powers" for Scottish and Welsh assemblies. But it fails to utter one word about British imperialism's war in Ireland in defence of an Orange statelet that was founded on the oppression of the nationalist community. Is the Socialist Party



# Stalinist purge



Arthur Scargill

Rather than argue out these differences and in the process educate and consolidate the membership, the leadership prefers to impose its own policies and purge those who obstruct it.

The NEC itself clearly has a policy, never discussed by the members, of not standing against "left" Labour MPs. When Brent East SLP decided to stand against Ken Livingstone, their adopted candidate, Stan Keable was immediately "voided". The first Brent East knew of this was when they read it in a quote from Arthur Scargill in the *Morning Star*.

## Heroic

When the SLP was formed many trade union militants joined on the basis that Arthur Scargill was a good class fighter. He had led the heroic struggle of the miners against Thatcher, opposed expulsions of socialists from the Labour Party and stood out against Blair's rightward charge. They thought the SLP would be different and allow the pos-

sibility of regrouping a fighting left.

But the politics of Arthur Scargill, always heavily influenced by the Stalinist version of reformism, are increasingly dominating the party. The traditions of bureaucratic control and the monolithic party have been strengthened by a significant number of recruits from the Communist Party of Britain.

It is no accident that while leftists are expelled, organisations like "the Stalin Society" or the "Economic and Philosophic Science Review Group", a group of open homophobes who praise the regime in North Korea, are given pride of place in helping to shop revolutionaries to the leadership.

The response to the current purge by all those in the party who want to defend workers' democracy should be intransigent opposition. The left in the party should be ringing alarm bells in every branch. It must refuse to accept the undemocratic expulsions and suspensions and demand an immediate congress.

## Response

The signs are not good. Some on the left of the SLP already appear to think that if they retreat or keep their heads down they will "live to fight another day". The SLP West London Aggregate's response to Stan Keable's expulsion was to pass a resolution which criticised Brent East for going ahead and standing a candidate against their advice. Instead of condemning Scargill they criticised his victims!

In Vauxhall Alan Gibson, another self-proclaimed "revolutionary" moved a motion declaring that whilst the Vauxhall branch had correct policies "we recognise that Socialist Labour must present a united face to the electorate. Therefore in our public propaganda we

will not use elements of our platform which contradict national election policy". Very bolshevik indeed!

The left of the SLP should remember the history of the Militant in the Labour Party. For years they retreated before every NEC attack, they even allowed the Young Socialists to be closed down without a fight. Every retreat emboldened the bureaucrats at Walworth Road to step up their purge. The SLP leadership will do the same if it is not fought now.

## Congress

SLP members should demand an immediate halt to all expulsions and the readmittance of all voided members. They should demand the convening of a congress as required by the constitution. They should fight at that congress to amend the constitution to make it democratic, to set up an independent appeals procedure and to remove the ban on socialist groups affiliating to the SLP.

They should refuse to be bound by an election policy or manifesto which has never been discussed or voted on by the members. They should demand an open internal discussion bulletin where members can argue their case and they should rescind the leadership's decision not to allow debate and argument in *Socialist News*.

This will mean a real fight against the Scargill and his allies who are out to turn the SLP into Stalinist mausoleum just like the CPB. It will mean organising the left into a force that can take on and politically defeat the present leadership. This is the only perspective that holds out any hope of salvaging the SLP as an organisation that could help build, rather than act as a roadblock to a real revolutionary socialist party. ■

# reformist party?"

ashamed to put forward Militant's rotten position of refusing to support the democratic rights of the Irish people against the imperialist partition of their country? Its silence is equally shameful.

But what about socialism? According to the manifesto socialism means: "taking into public ownership the 150 or so major companies and financial institutions with compensation to former owners on the basis of proven need".

It means running these under: "democratic working class control and management. Decisions at every level would be made by democratically elected representatives of workers, users of services or local areas".

This measure would leave whole swathes of the economy in private hands. It is a radical sounding version of the reformist utopia of a state directed "mixed economy". It is not socialism. But how would such a take-over come about? The *Manifesto* does not say, it avoids the whole issue of the nature of the capitalist state.

## Chile

Does the Socialist Party really believe that the capitalists would passively stand by while it implemented this programme? Don't they remember what happened in Chile when the Allende government tried to implement a radical reformist programme?

Of course the leaders of the Socialist Party do know their history but they prefer to conceal it. They prefer to lull

the "broad layers of workers and youth" with the idea that these demands can be achieved as part of the normal parliamentary struggle. They believe that uttering the word revolution, which does not get a mention in the *Manifesto*, will alienate the "broad layers".

They are peddling a reformist vision of socialism, with no strategy for achieving it. It is little more than a set of "nice ideas" for the future.

In fact there is only one way to get socialism: through a government of workers' councils - what the Russians in 1917 called Soviets - backed up by an armed workers' militia which takes on and smashes the repressive forces of the capitalist state. For more than 80 years support for this form of struggle is what has divided revolutionary socialists, true fighters for working class interests, from reformist socialists.

It is these reformists who have again and again rescued the capitalist system in periods of crisis, often hiding behind a mask of sanctimonious "socialist" phrases and even "anti-capitalist demands". They have led the workers to defeat after defeat in country after country and even, like Allende, into the jaws of bloody counter-revolution.

Leon Trotsky and the Fourth International developed a different method and a different programme. The *Transitional Programme* did not dispense with immediate demands. It linked them to a series of transitional demands and methods of struggle which formed a bridge between the everyday struggles and reforms fought for by the

unions and reformist parties, and the final struggle for state power.

The purpose of demands like the picket defence squad, the factory committee, workers' control of production, the sliding scale of wages and hours was to develop and direct the daily struggle of the working class and its organisations towards a struggle for power.

## Trotsky

In the Ted Grant years, Militant cadres would proudly defend the tendency's programme as a modern version of Trotsky's *Transitional Programme*. In fact they had gutted it of all life and reduced it to a series of demands on Labour. The Socialist Party's new programme represents a further step away from genuine Trotskyism. The last remnant of the "old Trotskyism" has been junked.

Trotsky wrote:

"Classical Social democracy... divided its programme into two parts independent of each other: the minimum programme, which limited itself to reforms within the framework of bourgeois society, and the maximum programme, which promised substitution of socialism for capitalism in the indefinite future. Between the minimum and maximum programme, no bridge existed. And indeed social democracy had no need of such a bridge since the word socialism is used only for holiday speechifying".

Just short of 60 years later, the Socialist Party has produced a programme of the exact same type. ■

# U

## The A to Z of Marxism

### is for Unions

BY BILL JENKINS

**T**HIS MONTH sees a repeat screening of Unison's groundbreaking "ants and bear" TV advert. The ad shows a bear bullying some ants. Then the ants get together and defeat the bear.

It's an old message, but one that remains true today: unity is strength. On your own, you can do nothing against the power of your employer. But together, workers can resist their employers' attacks. That is why wherever industry exists, wherever a working class is created, trade unions will be formed.

In Britain, where capitalism first developed, the initial attempts to form "combinations" (trade unions) began towards the end of the 18th century.

By the 1830s and 1840s the unions were allied to a revolutionary democratic movement - Chartism - which threatened to topple the entire social order. But after the defeat of Chartism the capitalist economy began to change. Britain ruled the world. Its empire, covering a quarter of the world's surface, meant that it could siphon-off part of its profits to buy off a skilled section of the working class at home - a layer that Marxists called the labour aristocracy.

The bosses fostered this conservative layer within the working class which came to dominate the trade union movement of the second half of the 19th century, limiting self-organisation to skilled workers.

But as Britain's long economic boom ended so the trade unions once again became the organisations of the masses. New unions sprang up. Frederick Engels wrote:

"The organisation of the great mass of unskilled workers... their founders and promoters were socialists... we see now these new unions taking the lead of the working class movement generally, and more and more taking in tow the rich and proud 'old' unions."

But the rise of the mass unskilled trade unions - though it was a major advance - also exposed two linked problems for revolutionary socialists. The limitations of trade unionism and the existence of the trade union bureaucracy.

Trade unions might be "schools for socialism", but trade union consciousness is not spontaneously socialist. The overwhelming majority of strikes, negotiations and union meetings are about questions that can be resolved within the capitalist system. It can be anything from the length of a tea break, or a health and safety issue, to a national pay strike or redundancy battle.

At this level, the trade union struggle presents workers with only part of the whole picture. It can appear that the boss is cutting your wages because he is a particularly bad or incompetent boss. It can appear that if only you were paid "the rate for the job" everything would be alright.

In fact the system does not exist to reach a static and socially just equilibrium between workers and employers. It exists to make a profit for the employers. Full stop.

Anything that stands in the way of that gets ruthlessly attacked by the employers. The ultimate interest of the working class doesn't lie in gaining temporary advantage in an endless round of localised struggles against individual bosses. It lies in transforming society to meet the needs of everyone, by abolishing the profit system.

Revolutionary Marxists understood that trade unions and strikes were only the start. Strikes and working class solidarity are the best way for workers to learn the truth about the enemy they are up against. Sooner or later, when a strike gets nasty, workers are victimised or sacked, the police turned against the picket lines, the courts unleashed against the union funds.

Mass strikes like the miners, the printers, the seafarers and the dockers in the 1980s, open the eyes of millions of workers to the fact that the state is not neutral: it exists to protect the capitalist system.

Likewise a strike tells you who your friends are. There is no better cure for racism or nationalism than the kind of cross-community and international solidarity that mass strikes generate.

The task of socialists is to intervene in strikes, and across the whole trade union movement, to develop revolutionary socialist consciousness in practice: drawing the lessons of victory and defeat, encouraging rank and file organisation, and ultimately effecting a revolutionary transformation of the unions into all-embracing mass organisations with real workers' democracy.

That brings us to the second problem: the trade union bureaucracy.

Any fighting organisation has to have a working leadership. Today that means offices, faxes, phones, e-mail, printing presses, radio stations, and a dedicated layer of activists to make it all work. Marxists are not against the unions having all this and more - including full-time officials.

But ever since the mid-19th century, the growth of trade unions has meant the growth of a bureaucracy. Instead of rising with their class, the bureaucrats rise out of it. Today's full-time union officials and leaders have wages significantly higher, and jobs far more secure than those of the workers they represent.

And not only that: they are systematically encouraged by the ruling class to incorporate themselves into the high echelons of the capitalist system. This happens under both Labour and Tory governments. Thatcher may have abolished beer and sandwiches at Downing Street for the union leaders, but she went on appointing them to health and safety boards, training boards, the BBC and the House of Lords.

The struggle to transform the unions inevitably comes up against this conservative bureaucracy, whose jobs depend on maintaining their role as middle-men in the struggles and negotiations between workers and bosses.

That is why transforming the unions is not just a fight to change the leaders but also the structures so that union officials are elected, recallable and paid the same as their members. And to achieve this requires the organisation of the rank and file of the unions against the bureaucracy.

In this respect the Unison "ants and bear" advert misses one crucial point. An ant colony has workers, soldiers and - at its centre - a big fat lump of a queen-ant who does nothing except eat and lay eggs. An ant colony cannot function without this hierarchy.

A trade union can function without its bloated bureaucrats however. In fact it will only really function as a force for socialist change without them. ■

# personal view

DIN WONG

## Don't blame me!

**L**AST WEEK, my friend Ellen sat drinking tea in my kitchen. Seeing the headline in the newspaper - "11 DEAD AS GALE SWEEP BRITAIN" - she sighed and said, "that's about the only thing they can't blame me for!"

Ellen is a working mother with three boys of her own. Guilt is becoming her way of life. She feels especially guilty at the moment because of the latest attack on working women.

It seems that research shows that boys with working mothers under-achieve in schools, or so the papers say. For the last ten years everything seems to be Ellen's fault: illiterate pupils, indiscipline in the classrooms, youth crime in the streets and now, even her sons are doomed to under-achievement!

Few papers reported the actual details of the research, or its fundamental weaknesses. Like the story about pregnant women's brains shrinking during pregnancy, why let little details like the truth get in the way of a good story. The research, carried out by North London University over two years in Barking and Dagenham, attempted to find out why some boys leave school without GCSEs.

Had they looked at unemployment, poverty or school underfunding doubtless their research would, at this very minute, be gathering dust on a library shelf. But this research looked at the impact that working mothers have on educational achievement. And what is more, if you took one tiny part of it you could make it look like women were to blame for their own kids' failure.

It wasn't surprising that the tabloids had a field day, but what was a little more disturbing is that papers like the *Guardian* carried it on their front page and *Panorama* on the BBC made an entire programme about it.

The research also showed that the largest number of boys who leave school with no GCSEs have mothers who are at home. The papers failed to report that. In the study of 600 families 36% of boys whose mothers were at home gained no GCSEs. This compared to 25% of those whose mothers work full time and 11% of those whose mothers work part time. Why then, did the headlines not scream "WOMEN GET OUT TO WORK - FOR YOUR KIDS' SAKE"?

The researcher, interviewed on TV, said this finding was discounted because the "at-home mothers" in the survey had lower education levels than the working mothers. So, is a woman to blame for her sons' under-achievement only when she is educated enough to get a job?

Well here is some other research about working mothers which the media conveniently chose to ignore.

### Women who work are happier

Research recently done in Scotland actually showed that the more time women spend out of the home, at work, the happier they are. Of course, many working class women work because they have to; because they are single mothers or to pay for essentials like kids' shoes and clothes.

They are often forced to work long hours because they earn so little, working mainly in part time, low paid jobs. They have to fit work in around child care arrangements, house work and school holidays. Seventy six per cent of women who work would continue to work even if they didn't need to. They enjoy being out of the house, meeting other women and the com-

radeship and banter in the workplace.

### Men working long hours damages family life

All the fathers in the Barking and Dagenham study worked full time. But they were clearly not to be held responsible for their sons' under-achievement. Many people are forced to work extremely long hours through compulsory overtime. Recent research by the Rowntree Foundation has shown that long hours puts an additional strain on the entire family.

### Kids who get good quality preschool child care do better

Research from the Institute of Child Health showed that all children benefit from day care. Children develop social skills more easily as they get the chance to meet other children. Unfortunately research published by the Daycare Trust at about the same time as the North London University research showed that there is only one child care place for every nine children under the age of eight.

So if everyone wants to help children do better let's see the press campaign for: more better paid jobs for women; a cut in working hours and the abolition of overtime; guaranteed free, good quality child care for all.

It's easy but somehow I don't think we will find it in Labour's manifesto, let alone that of the Tories!

**S**ometimes you feel that as a working class mother you just can't win. If we work, we are accused of having latchkey children and "home alone" kids. If we don't or can't work because of lack of child care facilities, then we are sponging off state benefits.

This contradictory role for women is founded on capitalism's need for women's unpaid work in the family to reproduce, socialise and care for its workers. From time to time capitalism also needs to draw women from this pool of reserved labour into work, usually poorly paid, and then kick them out again when they are not needed.

All the fuss about working mothers has nothing to do with kids failing at school. It is all about reminding us that we don't have a right to work under capitalism and that our "proper place" is in the home.

To socialists, the cause of under-achievement in education is obvious. Working class kids do not achieve good grades in GCSEs because schools in working class areas are generally run down, under resourced and have large classes. They under-achieve because they have no jobs to aspire to after GCSEs.

Under-achievement has more to do with poverty than with working mothers. You can bet your bottom dollar that the five children of working mother Ms Horlick, ex-investment fund manager will not under-achieve. Nor would Cherie Blair's children, nor Harriet Harman's. They don't send their children to comprehensive schools and they don't need to send their kids to after-school clubs to do their homework.

Working class women shouldn't feel guilty about not being able to afford private school fees and expensive nannies. They are not responsible for the fact that their kids education is being properly funded or fairly organised.

Of course, that doesn't mean we can't do anything about it. Getting organised, getting involved in the fight to change society is the best thing you can do for your kids.

So, Ellen, don't feel guilty, feel angry. And don't just get mad, get even! ■



China's leaders pay their respects to Deng Xiaoping. Will the bureaucracy now split as it attempts to restore capitalism?

## CHINA: The legacy of Deng Xiaoping

# Echoes of Tiananmen

**S**EVERAL TIMES in the last few years the Hong Kong stock exchange dropped sharply because of rumours that China's "paramount leader", Deng Xiaoping, was dead or dying. When the butcher of Beijing actually did die last month, however, shares rose sharply.

Capitalists the world over were salivating at the possibilities of the next stage of the restoration of the profit system in China.

Summing up Deng's significance for China, the *Financial Times* concluded: "However controversial the political legacy... the verdict of history on the late Chinese leader's economic achievements must be overwhelmingly positive."

The rest of the "quality press" joined the *FT* in eulogies to the man who opened up China to capitalist exploitation. Along with ex-Tory leader Edward Heath they shrugged off suggestions that Deng - who presided over the massacre of over 1,000 student protesters in Tiananmen Square in 1989, and over the crushing of China's independent trade union movement - should be criticised in death.

Deng leaves behind a China riven with contradictions and potential instabilities. What Hong Kong's businessmen are hoping is that with Deng gone, political changes can be made which will resolve those problems by opening the way to the full restoration of capitalism in the whole of China.

The return of Hong Kong itself to Chinese sovereignty is one of the causes of potential instability but ultimately more significant will be the consequences of Deng's policies on the mainland. At the heart of the dramatic economic growth of the last eighteen years were two key policies: privatisation of agriculture and opening China to foreign trade and inward investment.

There is certainly no doubt about the impact these have had. The Chinese economy has grown at an average 9% over that period and the country now attracts more foreign direct investment than anywhere else on earth. Such rapid growth, even if it were uniform and steady across the whole country, would generate a great deal of social change as, for example, improved agricultural techniques stimulated the drift of population towards the cities.

Growth, however, has been very far from uniform. On the contrary, the fastest economic development has been concentrated in the coastal provinces, with the interior left far behind. In addition, much of the new industry is export oriented: trade now accounts for 38% of Gross Domestic Product. This means that much of the wealth created does not circulate into the rest of the economy but is part of the international cir-

ulation of capital.

The greater part of the Chinese economy is still dominated by the state owned industrial sector. Giant enterprises, built on Soviet lines and often employing the populations of whole cities, still function according to government plans. As they become ever more obsolete, they are a mounting drain on state finances. The majority operate at a loss. Attempts to modernise such industry, either by state investment or by means of joint ventures with foreign corporations, will be a further source of serious political instability. Urban unemployment has already rocketed as a result of the influx of over 100 million former peasants into the towns.

More importantly, however, the state industrial complex, closely tied into the military and party structures, is the basis of the power of the Communist Party. To transform this industrial core of China into capitalist industry would mean challenging the role of the party and the bureaucracy which it holds together.

When Deng ordered the massacre in Tiananmen Square in June 1989, he made it clear that his reforms would never be allowed to create such a challenge. It was because Deng remained opposed to any questioning of the party's "leading role" that his death could be seen as the possible

**It was because Deng remained opposed to any questioning of the party's "leading role" that his death could be seen as the possible beginning of the end of party rule.**

beginning of the end of party rule.

Already, western experts are trying to establish the criteria by which to judge whether their hoped-for changes are actually underway. They focus, first of all, on the make up of the "collective leadership". This term has often been used to describe what is actually a political stalemate between competing factions. If any changes are made it suggests one or other faction is gaining ground against its rivals.

Afer Deng's death the stability of the new leadership under Jiang Zeming. The leadership maintained that Deng had not played a role in government for several years and that his passing would make no difference. His successors were determined to maintain the policies he had initiated.

The key question here is what will happen to the prime minister, Li Peng, who reaches the end of his constitutional term of office next year.

Li is widely associated with the Tiananmen massacre. When the Communist Party holds its congress in the autumn it may review the 1989 events. Any suggestion that the demonstrators were not "counter-revolutionary enemies of the people" would automatically imply that the order to send in the tanks was unjustified.

If such a conclusion were to be drawn it could legitimise criticism of the party leadership and possibly even the return to favour of Zhao Ziyang. He was Deng's chosen successor until he reportedly refused to give the order for the troops to attack the Tiananmen demonstrations. Related to these considerations will be any relaxation of the repression of the activists still held in jail or under house arrest for their activities in 1989 or in the underground democratic and trade union movements since then.

Any such moves would imply changes within the ruling bureaucracy. But what is more important is the change taking place in Chinese society as a whole. Deng's policies set in motion strong capitalist forces whose dynamics are far more powerful than the machinations and manoeuvrings of bureaucrats.

To date, none of the Stalinist parties has succeeded in maintaining its bureaucratic rule over society while completing the full restoration of capitalism. Within the bureaucracy, many have already taken steps to transform themselves into capitalists but this cannot be an option for the bureaucracy as a whole. Indeed, the more "cadres" who establish themselves as capitalists, the more this will disintegrate the party and bureaucracy as a caste and undermine its capacity to rule.

The workers of China have no reason whatever to mourn the death of Deng Xiaoping. Millions will remember how, in 1989, they smashed small glass bottles (coincidentally also pronounced, *xiao ping*, in Chinese) to demonstrate their hostility to his rule.

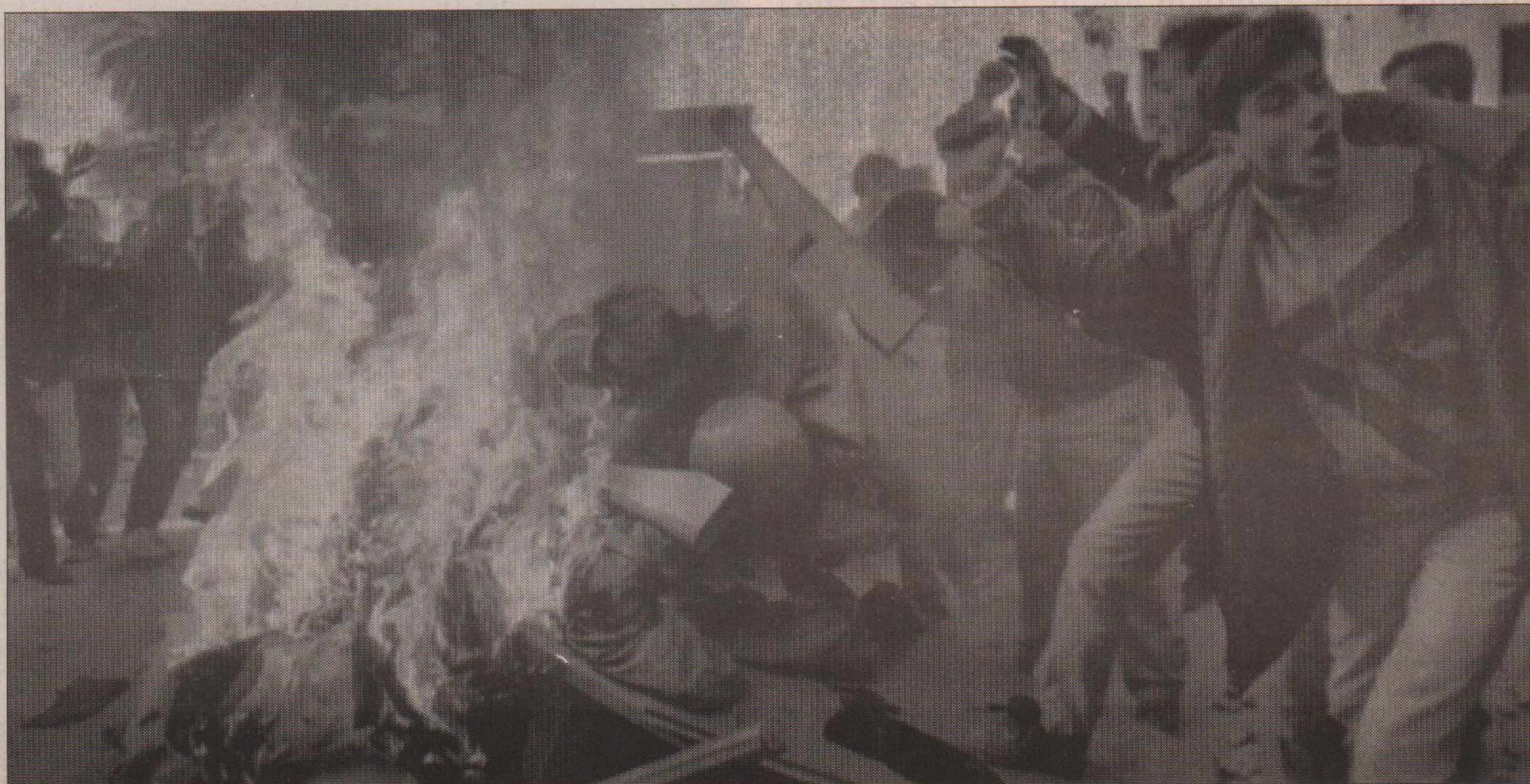
But they have every reason to take advantage of any potential divisions within the bureaucratic elite to mobilise once again in their hundreds of millions against the bureaucratic dictatorship, for political revolution and workers' control of the whole Chinese economy - including the vast swathes of western capital in the coastal regions.

Only then will the real economic potential of a quarter of humanity be used for the systematic improvement of its own living standards and working conditions and for real progress towards genuine socialism. ■

## ALBANIA: The agony of capitalist restoration

# The masses fight back

In February the people of the southern port of Vlorë in Albania took control of their city. Massive protests first beat back the local police and destroyed the headquarters of the ruling Democratic Party (DP), then forced the police to withdraw from the city. Fearful of the same happening in the capital Tirana the police attacked a mass rally in the main football stadium. **Jenny Lynch** looks at the background to these momentous events.



Riot police put to the torch

**T**HE POLITICAL crisis that opened in Albania towards the end of January was precipitated by the collapse of two "pyramid finance schemes" (Xhafferi and Populli) in which some 230,000 Albanians had invested. Already, in September 1996, a smaller scheme had collapsed.

On 5 February, a further scheme (Gjallica) based in the port of Vlorë, collapsed pauperising some 80,000 local people who had invested up to \$300 million in it.

The western media have portrayed the collapse as the result of the "naïveté" of the backward Albanian people, "cut off from the west and its ways" for so many decades. It is presented as part of a harsh but inevitable "learning process" about the market economy.

This is a chauvinist lie. The scandal of the pyramid schemes is a product of Albania's transition to capitalism since the 1991 elections which brought President Sali Berisha and the DP to power.

Since then the mass of Albanians have been impoverished, driving them to seek desperate solutions to raise money in order to live. Built up over the last three years and growing feverishly during the course of 1996, the pyramid and other rival schemes attracted funds on the basis of the very favourable interest rates offered (around 8%-50% a month) compared to the banks (20% a year).

Only able to pay out such sums if they continued to receive further investments, the DP encouraged the unchecked rise of the schemes during 1996 to promote a "feel good factor" in election year and profited directly by having the DP's election campaign bankrolled by the schemes' owners.

### Backward

Albania was the most backward and impoverished of the Stalinist degenerate workers' states in Europe. After the political break with the USSR in 1963 and China in 1978, Albania, under Enver Hoxha's Party of Labour (PLA), lapsed into autarky (deliberate economic isolation) and a development strategy that, unusually, emphasised the primacy of agriculture over industry.

The PLA built up its social base in the countryside and its policies favoured the rural population over the urban working class. The dictatorship of the ruling Stalinist bureaucracy was harsh. Opposition was crushed.

The final crisis of Stalinism, when it came, did not result in a mass opposition movement in Albania outside of

the student demonstrations of 1990. The main form of popular dissent was expressed in the exodus of 300,000 Albanians from the country during 1990 and 1991 (mostly to Italy and Greece).

The leader of the PLA at the time of the fall of the Berlin Wall, President Ramiz Alia, attempted to forestall further political challenge by introducing Gorbachev-style "market socialist" reforms of the rigidly centralised planning system in 1990.

On the basis of these reforms (a free market in agriculture, enterprise autonomy in certain areas, relaxation of ban on religion, retirement of state officials of old regime, diplomatic overtures to imperialism), Alia and the PLA stood in open elections and won a commanding vote in March 1991 against the newly formed DP. The DP, however, won most of the urban and working class vote.

### Protests

Neither the DP nor imperialism reconciled themselves to this victory. As with Bulgaria they encouraged mass protests against the new government (there was a general strike in April 1991) and made it clear that the IMF would refuse aid to the new regime. Further economic crisis ensued and new elections were held in 1992 which the DP won.

The DP was formed primarily out of middle layers of the ruling PLA, intellectuals and professionals. Its programme was not very different from the PLA in the 1991 elections but, once in office in 1992, the DP proved itself to be firmly committed to radical market reforms.

Imperialism backed the DP regime wholeheartedly. It was to be the bulwark of pro-imperialism in a crisis torn Balkan region. It was needed as a stable buffer state between disintegrating Yugoslavia and Greece. The US oversaw the purging of the Albanian high command and the reduction of the armed forces by two-thirds between 1992 and 1995. Berisha allowed Albania's coast to be used by NATO as a base for operations into ex-Yugoslavia and agreed to backtrack on support for Kosovo's fight for independence from Serbia.

The DP opened up the choicest parts of the economy - oil and minerals - to Greek and Italian investors. In return, imperialism gave a three year IMF package to Berisha; he was feted in Washington and Europe. He was guest of honour at the 1991 Tory Party confer-

ence in the UK. Imperialism was happy to overlook the increasing corruption within the Albanian state, which has become little more than the personal property of the DP and its closest supporters.

The economy of Albania between 1992-96 was regarded by the imperialist governments and international agencies as a model of the transition to capitalism. By the end of this period it was the moribund workers' state with the highest degree of private sector contribution to GDP, the most stable currency in the region and the fastest rates of growth in 1994/95 of the whole region. But this economic miracle was brought about at great cost and was built on sand.

Albanian workers, already impoverished in the 1980s, saw their wages fall further. With a GDP per capita of around \$900 a year and an average monthly wage of \$80 a month Albania's level of economic and social development is comparable to many imperialised countries in Africa.

In no small part this has been due to the utter decimation of state industrial output, which fell from being 41% of GDP in 1989 to 11.9% in 1996. The collapse of exports and of home demand in the face of plummeting real wages led to industry's collapse.

The closures and sackings of the state sector have left a pared down state industry which has yet to be privatised and while subsidies have stopped, it has not been restructured and no

bankruptcies have been enforced. In turn this has meant that the losses have been absorbed by the unreformed state banking sector. The three state banks are in bad shape; two of them (National Commercial Bank and Rural Commercial Bank) have portfolios in which 60% of their loans are non-performing; a situation which is deteriorating.

### Disaffection

The "pain of adjustment" between the elections of 1992 and 1996 led to mass disaffection with the DP's rule. In 1994 Berisha held, and lost overwhelmingly, a referendum to give him more power over parliament. So he had to seek an elected dictatorship via parliamentary elections.

The May 1996 elections were probably the most rigged elections in any transition state in Europe since 1989. The DP banned more than 130 candidates from the PLA (now renamed the Socialist Party). Police smashed up election rallies of the opposition. Ballot boxes were stuffed with DP votes. Even then the DP only gained 56% of the vote, with which they were rewarded with 122 of the 140 seats. Imperialism chose to ignore any complaints.

The structural crisis of the Albanian economy has been revealed by the collapse of the pyramid schemes. The possibility of the collapse of the remaining four schemes, including that of the largest (Vefa Holdings), the impossibility of the DP government providing mass assistance, indicate that the

crisis is likely to continue.

In the absence of external resources from the IMF or similar imperial agencies, Albania faces two stark alternatives: a hyper-inflationary crisis compensation is extracted; or a deflationary crisis, a slump as a result of destruction of savings of the people and income provided by interest on investments. On the back of such economic chaos, the political crisis will continue to deepen.

Imperialism is desperately seeking to prevent this. With the US in the lead it has distanced itself from DP and Berisha. It has warned him off repression and counselled him to open talks to draw in and incorporate opposition parties to take responsibility for the solution of the crisis.

The Socialist Party has shown itself willing to be drawn into this trap. The SP Congress last year the "reformers" won out and are seeking to legitimise the results of the October municipal elections (a clean sweep for the DP) and urge the SP deputies to end the boycott of the national parliament. They want to show themselves to be "responsible opposition".

The workers and poor peasants of Albania need an economic and political solution that forces the DP and cronies to pay for the crimes they have committed. It is a solution that must not aim at putting the SP back power but rather a revolutionary workers' and poor peasants' government. ■

## A workers' answer to the crisis

On a national level a revolutionary workers' and peasants' council, a democratic assembly of revocable and directly elected delegates, must fight for the following programme of action.

- For a General strike in all state industries and services to bring down the fraudulent regime of Berisha! For mass organised protests in all towns and cities; for factory committees in every industry; action committees of peasant co-operatives; for workers' self-defence militias to disarm police and army units and the hired thugs of the new mafia.
- Abolish the office of Presidency! For a sovereign revolutionary Constituent Assembly! For a workers' and peasants' government based on councils of action and a workers' militia!
- Expropriate all the assets of the remaining pyramid schemes; for full restitution of investments, paid for out of the nationalisation of imperialist holdings!
- Expropriate all the assets of the private industrial sector; nationalise foreign holdings and cancel the foreign debt!
- No to privatisation of the state sector or banks. For an end to sackings; for a minimum wage protected against inflation and monitored by committees of workers and household committees!

- No to the "round table" solution; no to the twin evils of hyper-inflation and deflation!
- For an emergency plan of production and distribution drawn up and supervised by a democratic congress of workers and poor peasants; establish direct links between town and urban centres to solve the food supply crisis!
- For all US and Nato advisers out of the country; no Nato bases in Albania; support the right of self-determination of Kosovo; for aid and assistance against Serbian repression!
- For a Socialist Federation of the Balkans!
- Build a revolutionary workers' parliament armed with a programme for taking power!

## EUROPE: Single currency

# Bosses' plans in jeopardy

This month is the fortieth anniversary of the signing of the Treaty of Rome, which laid the basis for the European Economic Community, the forerunner of today's European Union. **Keith Harvey** explains why, forty years on, the bosses still face enormous problems in uniting the continent.

**R**ECENT DEVELOPMENTS in Airbus, the European aircraft company, provide a graphic example of the forces at work in the debate over the future of the European Union. Airbus is the world's second largest aircraft manufacturing company, after Boeing in the USA.

Last year Boeing stole a march on Airbus by taking over its US rival McDonnell Douglas. Airbus had to respond. The problem is that Airbus is not a single company but a consortium, owned jointly by French, UK, German and Spanish companies. Decisions need the consensus of all four shareholders – a time-consuming and often fractious undertaking.

Under pressure from Boeing, the Airbus consortium last year took the decision to create a single new company which will fuse design, manufacturing, sales and service in one firm.

The dilemma faced by Airbus mirrors the one faced by European capitalism as a whole. Is it to continue as a consortium – with many currencies, colliding centres of policy making and competing multinational companies dwarfed by their larger US and Japanese rivals? Or should it seek the same advantages as the USA and Japan: a single federal state, single currency and common industrial strategy?

The European Union accounts for over 40% of global business and is the source of more than half of the world's manufacturing profits but it is losing ground in key areas of high technology manufacturing. The contradiction between the internationalisation of the economy and the narrow political superstructure of nation states is dragging European capitalism down.

This year will decide whether the EU moves from being just a "single market" to becoming a pan-European entity competing as a unit in global markets and diplomatic forums.

The project of a united Europe does not arise from any sense of internationalism, fraternity and solidarity on the part of the ruling classes of Europe. On the contrary, it is being pursued because it is in the joint national interests of Franco-German imperialism.

Germany needs a European state in order to carry out its global economic and political ambitions. Because of Germany's role in the second world war, it is necessary to pursue these goals behind the facade of "Europe". A majority of the French bourgeoisie have decided that their national interest is best pursued by forcing Germany to concede a large measure of political control of the nascent pan-European state to France – and to entrust the French military machine with a world role on Europe's behalf.

All other continental EU countries objectively need to rationalise and homogenise their multinational capital in order to compete globally; all are therefore forced to follow behind Germany and France, however slowly and reluctantly.

At the centre of the debate over the next stage of a "deeper Europe" is the Single European Currency (the "Euro"). This would involve the surrender of a considerable degree of national control over monetary and interest policy to a European central bank. Technical preparations are well advanced and the bank notes have been designed. Nevertheless, the whole project is in trouble.

Under the Maastricht Treaty, signed in February 1992, all member states agreed a timetable and criteria for adopting a single currency. The currency would

be introduced at the beginning of 1999 and those eligible to join would do so on the basis of economic data for 1997.

The criteria adopted at Maastricht expressed the view that the economies of the member states must be "converging" with each other. Inflation must be low; public debt must be below 60% of GDP; and the governments' budget deficits must be under 3% of GDP. Without these, the financial markets would speculate on the weakest currency in the run up to 1999, as they did in 1992 with the UK in the ERM.

Three months into 1997 the project is in jeopardy. Part of the problem has been the protracted recession in continental Europe in 1993/94 and a weak recovery thereafter. This helped keep inflation low; but it wrecked projections on public finance. Tax receipts went down and spending went up as unemployment mounted, wages have been pegged and profits have faltered.

Only Finland, Sweden and Luxembourg are on target for the "Maastricht criteria" and Sweden is unlikely to join in 1999. Germany and France, without which the launch is impossible, face major difficulties.

German unemployment rose by more than 500,000 in January to over 11%. This alone puts a big hole in the government's budget deficit projections. In addition, the forecasts for economic growth for 1997 are already looking optimistic. This will force German government borrowing to overshoot its target.

Germany and France, therefore, have a choice. They could postpone the project beyond the year 2000 but this would mean the EU falling further behind the USA, strengthening the argument of those within the EU who want to sabotage the project completely.

The alternative is to cheat. France and Italy have already indulged in "creative accounting" in their budgets for 1997 to get them within the convergence criteria. Germany may be tempted to do the same.

The problem with this is that powerful forces will insist on a "strict" interpretation of the criteria. The Bundesbank, for example, has made it clear that it will not surrender the D-mark for a weak Eurocurrency based on false accounting.

All this means that we will see attacks on welfare budgets across the EU in 1997 as governments struggle to meet the Maastricht criteria. The Italian government has announced it will pass another budget this Spring in order to slash spending further. Germany may be forced to reverse its tax cut proposals or look for budget cuts.

It is inevitable that this will provoke further resistance from the European working class – which is showing increasing confidence since the French strikes of late 1995.

In Germany, the best organised sectors have defeated an attempt to reduce their sick pay. In France, truckers went on the offensive in December 1996 for higher pay and earlier retirement – and won. Danish and Spanish truck drivers did the same. In Belgium, workers have taken to the streets in their tens of thousands to protest against proposed closures of state-owned plants and have been supported by the mass movement against state corruption.

This resistance can open the way to a different type of European unity altogether – workers' unity in the struggle for a Socialist United States of Europe. ■



Chirac confers with the German finance minister while Kohl negotiates with the bottle top.

## No choice for workers

**A**LL THE major parties are going into the election keeping their options open on the single currency. Both Labour and Tories are promising a referendum on any proposal to join the Single Currency.

What should the working class do when offered the choice between the Eurocurrency and the status quo of holding on to the pound sterling?

Many in the labour and trade union movement argue that the first priority is to reject Maastricht and the single currency. These form the major strategy of the Euro-ruling class – and provide the justification for the Europe-wide austerity drive – and must be defeated at all costs, they argue.

Others – particularly Labour lefts like Benn and Livingstone – argue that surrendering "sovereignty" to the EU means that a left Labour government could not pass measures like national-

isation and subsidise industries to maintain jobs. This argument is backed by the "little Englander" Scargillite leaders of the Socialist Labour Party.

Both arguments are wrong, if they are used as justifications for a working class "no" vote in a Euro-referendum.

The Euro-austerity drive did not originate with the single currency. Margaret Thatcher, an arch opponent of the Euro, managed to destroy one fifth of the UK's industry in the years 1979-82 by a vicious austerity policy. Switzerland – which is not part of the EU – is carrying out exactly the same attacks as France and Germany. More to the point, a capitalist Britain outside the Single Currency would have to attack working class living standards just as hard – if not harder – to survive.

The point is that joining with the anti-Euro capitalists to reject Maastricht

does not provide a shield or a breathing space against the pan-European austerity drive. Only co-ordinated mass resistance can do that.

If the bosses offered us a referendum which asked, "do you want Maastricht or a Socialist United States of Europe?", workers could vote against Maastricht without embroiling themselves in a dead-end nationalist campaign.

Likewise, if the bosses offered us a vote on "do you want massive public spending cuts and an end to the welfare state" voting would be easy. But they will not do this. They will only offer us – at a moment of their choosing and in words they get to write – a choice between the Europe of Chancellor Kohl and the Europe of John Redwood.

We want neither. That is why workers should abstain in any referendum on Maastricht. ■

## Tories' Euro splits

**N**OT EVEN the need for unity on the eve of a general election has prevented a public fall-out between Cabinet members over Europe. Last month Foreign Secretary Michael Rifkind insisted that Britain "is, on balance, hostile to a single currency". Chancellor Kenneth Clarke publicly rebuked him, saying that Britain will keep its options open until the end of 1997. What is going on?

The rift inside the Cabinet reflects a wider rift in the capitalist class in Britain over what kind of Europe they want.

Regardless of Rifkind's comments, all surveys of bosses' opinion show that a majority of UK-owned multinational capital and a majority of the financial institutions in the City favour the Single Currency and want to join in the first wave.

These firms do their main business in Europe, the biggest market in the world. A single currency would cut transaction costs and improve profits. The financial services in the City earn £20bn a year in profits. Any failure to be in at the start of a single currency

would shift the centre of gravity of Euro-money business to Frankfurt.

When the chief executive of top UK multinational, Unilever, spoke out in favour of a single currency in February he spoke for this layer. It is shared by important sectors of foreign-owned multinational capital which produce here but whose markets are Europe-wide. This was the meaning of Toyota's warnings to the Tories not to get left behind when the Euro is launched.

But there is a mainstream section of the UK ruling class that is deaf to this argument. A powerful section of multinational capital is oriented away from the EU. For example, some 45% of the earnings of the top 200 UK companies come from their North American subsidiaries. UK firms own more than 18% of all direct investment in the USA; Germany only owns 4.5%. Similarly, more than one-third of all UK company assets are held abroad, compared to less than 7% for Germany, the next highest in the EU.

This makes many multinationals fear the current "regionalisation" of the

world economy (EU versus US versus Japan) because it contradicts an open world economy in which they could prosper. Hence they seek to slow down trends towards pan-European institutions.

Another layer of ruling class opposition to the single currency comes from domestic-oriented capitalists who depend on the advantages they get from Britain's low wages and non-existent labour rights.

When Hoover closed its French plant in 1993 and moved to Scotland it was because non-wage labour costs (like national insurance and health benefits) were 45% of total cost in France and 10% in the UK. Any moves towards monetary or political union would undermine these advantages.

The Cabinet disagreements, therefore, flow from real differences within the structure of British imperialism; at present they are expressed via different factions within the Tory Party. After the election, they could even be reflected in different parties arising from a possible split within the Tory Party. ■

## EUROMARCH: Centrists waffle at Brussels conference

# The fight for a class-struggle Euromarch

**A** MASSIVE Euromarch against unemployment, poverty and exclusion is scheduled for 14 June in Amsterdam, the same day that the heads of the European Union governments are meeting there. Feeder marches will come from all over Europe.

A Euromarch planning conference was held in Brussels over the weekend of the 22/23 February. The LRCI sent delegates from France, Britain, Germany and Austria, distributing several hundred copies of our manifesto "Fight the bosses' Euro-offensive!"

The Brussels conference was both a success and a failure. It was a success because of the large number of activists present, between 500-600 from nearly every country in Western Europe.

The conference, and the rising level of support by trade unions for the Euromarches, demonstrated a growing understanding within the various national workers' movements of the need to organise a Europe-wide response to the capitalists' austerity policy.

This was particularly reflected in the presence and lively intervention of delegates from the Liverpool dockers and the Magnet strikers, an important break with the traditional insularity and "anti-European" stance of the British labour movement. Ian Crammond, secretary of the Magnet Strike Committee said they were backing the Euromarch to "support all those homeless, in dispute and unemployed".

The greatest success of the conference was that it demonstrated the potential the Euromarches hold for creating an international movement of the unions, the unemployed, and the victims of racial and other forms of oppression, for the first time in living memory.

One defect of the conference was the low numbers and profile of women, youth and black people. Perhaps unavoidably, given the legal situation, there was too small a participation by the victims of state racism and those excluded from citizenship.

## Platitudes

But the conference was a failure in a political sense too. The principal organisers, the United Secretariat of the Fourth International (USFI), blocked any serious discussion about the political objectives of the Euromarches. They limited the plenaries and workshops to reports of the national situation and platitudes on the necessity "to work together and to be optimistic".

A draft manifesto was distributed by the organisers a week or two before the conference. Like the Florence Declaration which initiated the project, the Brussels draft dared not identify capitalism itself as the cause of the mass unemployment and misery afflicting Europe today.

The Florence Declaration did not even mention the words "capitalism" or "socialism" and the Brussels draft only referred to capitalism once when talking about its restoration in Eastern Europe.

Worse, its answers to unemployment and racism were limited to impotent assertions of "human rights". What few measures it suggested were imprecise and utopian.

The Florence declaration called for a "different [sic] distribution of wealth, ensuring taxation of financial speculation", and claimed that "a massive drop in unemployment can be brought about during a period of increased productivity, [our emphasis] by a substantial reduction in working hours, without a drop in wages, and with an immediate increase in recruitment."

The suggestion that the taxation of speculation (only speculation?) will pay for "a different Europe" (how different?) and that wages can be raised, hours shortened and workers taken on merely because of "increased productivity" ignores rather than challenges the logic of profitability.

It confuses the greater output possible



German workers on the march against the Maastricht austerity drive. The banner reads, "Fight social cuts and the theft of pensions".

as a result of new technology with increasing the rate of profit per worker. European capitalism is not witnessing "increased productivity" in this sense. And that is why the European bosses' drive for greater productivity means fewer jobs, lower wages and slashed social services.

The two declarations were afraid to indict this very logic of profitability/"productivity" as the root cause of the Maastricht austerity drive. If they did it would become obvious that a Britain or a Sweden out of the EU would be slashing jobs and shutting down hospitals as well.

This omission is not because of ignorance of the laws of capitalism and the measures needed to defeat it (workers' control, expropriation, planning, the struggle for workers' power etc.). It is a cynical refusal by the USFI's "Trotskyist" drafters to tell the truth. They hope to draw in reformist, liberal, green allies by mimicking their language and confusion.

## Struggle

Such declarations are not a recipe for uniting Europe's workers and oppressed in a common front of struggle against the Maastricht criteria budgets, against Shengen and Trevi. They are a means of getting a grand cross-class jamboree in Amsterdam with NGOs, liberation theologians, liberal anti-racists and the like.

The conference was run in such a way as to block any amendments to the manifesto - despite the fact that the organisers announced in the draft that it would be amended and adopted at the conference.

Neither in the workshops nor the plenaries, and not even in the special workshop devoted to the manifesto (meeting Saturday night at 22.00!), was anyone allowed to move and vote on a single amendment!

Even though the leaders of this march have avoided putting in any overtly anti-EU statements in the manifesto, this crucial question was not properly debated at the conference.

There was considerable support for LRCI comrades who proposed the necessity of including the demands for open borders for the whole EU and militant action to deny democratic rights to fascists and racists who organise actively against immigrants. But we were told that it was impossible to put them as amendments for voting on.

The ridiculous argument of the organisers was that such voting would be counter-productive and agreement could only be reached by consensus. Any other

method would exclude organisations. But: how can you know, without voting, if there is consensus?!

Such methods are profoundly anti-democratic and they reduced the conference to a talking shop, a facade behind which the organisers could do what they wanted.

## Vetoed

Yet one person did overturn the whole laborious process. Some individuals turned out to be "more equal than others", indeed than all the others put together.

Behind the scenes the representative of the Italian party, Rifondazione Comunista, ("external" supporters of the Prodi government that is ramming through the Maastricht budget) vetoed the whole Brussels manifesto.

Rifondazione would only support the Euromarches if the Florence manifesto remained their sole basis. The USFI swiftly caved in to this blackmail and relegated the Brussels text to a "declaration of demands" for further discussion.

A small and unelected working group did put in some minor amendments. At the final plenary the results were announced without warning and without the possibility to challenge anything.

In the coming months it will be urgent for the national campaigns to get not just the formal but also the active support of trade unions and reformist mass parties for the Euromarch.

To mobilise the rank and file and to force the bureaucrats to fight against unemployment will be decisive in the coming years.

To do this, precise demands and specific methods of struggle will be needed. No one will find them in either the Florence declaration or the Brussels "demands".

Despite the rotten political basis of the campaign, the European sections of the LRCI have committed themselves to building the marches and mobilising the maximum forces for the demonstration in Amsterdam on June 14.

But we will also fight for the class struggle, revolutionary strategy that the workers and unemployed movements throughout Europe need. ■

**STOP PRESS:** The TUC in Britain has decided to refuse to support the Euromarch on the grounds that it is "anti-Maastricht". It is circulating its affiliates with a warning not to support the march. Instead it plans to stage its own conference at Congress House. We call on all trade union members to oppose this move.

# a world to win

## IRAN

**O**N 21 FEBRUARY, protests were held around the world, including at the National Oil Company of Iran in London, demanding the release of Iranian oil workers who were arrested during a demonstration in Tehran on 16 February.

Workers Power spoke to Paymann, a supporter of the Workers-Communist Party of Iran and a UNISON Convenor.

"Every spring the government body responsible for setting the minimum wage, the Supreme Council of Labour (SLC), announces the new figure, invariably below the high inflation rate. In the months leading up to this announcement the pay issue becomes 'hot'.

Last August, 500 workers from the Tehran refinery, mainly from the central gas and local transport depots walked out and assembled outside the Oil Ministry and demanded to see the Minister of Oil, Aghazadeh. Their demands included an inflation-proof pay rise, recognition of their collective bargaining rights and improved housing and medical allowances."

The oil workers in Iran were decisive in bringing down the Shah in the 1978/79 revolution; many workers from that time are still in the refineries. Oil is crucial to Iran's economy, responsible for the bulk of its export earnings. Both objectively and subjectively the oil workers form a key part of the vanguard of the working class. The government is very aware of this and has tried to suppress their self-organisation and break up their cohesion as a workforce. As Paymann explained:

"The government has sought to introduce different contracts (permanent, three month, weekly and daily) for different workers. It has tried to impose a distinction between manual and white collar workers which gives different rights. Housing subsidies were only to be given to those reclassified as white collar workers, which would put them outside the terms of the Labour Law. They have enforced overtime under the threat of dismissal."

During last August's protest, the oil workers gave Aghazadeh two months to address their grievances. These were ignored.

"In response refinery workers in Tehran, Shiraz, Tabriz and Esfahan held a two day warning strike on 18/19 December. They told the government that if it did not concede the demands then this would be followed by an all-out strike."

The news of the strike was censored in Iran. The regime responded by mov-

ing the leaders around from one refinery to another to destroy the organisation being built. This failed. On 16 February, twice as many workers converged on the Oil Ministry as last August. After the breakdown of the negotiations the armed forces and riot police attacked the oil workers, wounding several and arresting nearly 500 workers.

"After the arrests, on the evening of 16 February, the government started to round up those from other refineries who had led the December strike, as well as activists in other industries. The bulk of those detained from the Tehran refinery had to undertake to return to work the next day. Those who led the protest from Tehran, together with those from other refineries, were kept inside."

The Workers-Communist Party of Iran has many supporters exiled all over the world. They responded to the arrests with an international campaign of solidarity.

"The international pressure on the government was very important; the regime has been surprised and appalled by the publicity. In December they tried to deny the strike existed, but on 16 February they could not suppress the news of the protest and arrests inside Iran. We started to move internationally, recognising the significance of this revival of the Iranian working class."

We contacted many organisations around the world. We have been extremely successful. Over 200 trade unions, internationally and locally, have supported the demands of the oil workers: the TUC in Britain, the LO in Sweden, CGT in France, the CTU in Canada. Dockers in Sydney threatened to stop unloading Iranian bound ships if those detained are not released."

The campaign is demanding the immediate release of those still detained, government recognition of the right of the oil workers to organise and recognition of the right to collective bargaining.

"The Iranian regime is a signatory to the International Labour Organisation (ILO) but refuses to recognise its provisions. The ILO has turned a blind eye to the violations for years. Iran must be expelled from the ILO. All trade unions and workers' organisations must put pressure on the ILO to act now."

Paymann concluded by emphasising the important turning-point represented by the struggles of the last six months:

"Everyone in Iran recognises that when the oil workers move, society moves, and there has been huge sympathy for them. The tide has turned and the balance of forces between the labour movement and the government has changed. The oil workers now feel stronger and more confident." ■

## EUROMARCH '97

Unite across Europe for jobs and welfare

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**SOUTH AFRICA:** Three years after Apartheid...

# ANC – imperialism's loyal servant

BY LESLEY DAY

NELSON MANDELA recently introduced Zaire's rebel leader, Laurent Kabila, to reporters in Cape Town. He was there, as were representatives of the Mobutu regime and Under-Secretary of State George Moose, to participate in "talks about talks" aimed at settling the growing African civil war.

The press conference symbolised South Africa's new role in the imperialist pecking order. Its ability to act as broker in Central Africa's latest crisis is one of the benefits world imperialism has gained from the dismantling of the apartheid regime.

For decades, South Africa's white ruling class had enjoyed a privileged status as US and British imperialism's senior partner in Southern Africa. Under apartheid, Pretoria's role was to stabilise surrounding "frontline" states like Mozambique and Angola, which the US considered dangerously close to the USSR. But the apartheid state became an absolute obstacle to the development of South Africa's monopoly capitalism, which remained cut off from many lucrative markets by the country's pariah status.

Having shed the trappings of legal apartheid, South Africa under Mandela intervened in black Africa both economically and politically in ways denied the apartheid state. Two new nations are now trained and ready to run "international peace-keeping missions". Meanwhile, the arms industry enjoyed special protection from the African National Congress (ANC) dominated government. Weapons continue to be the second largest manufacturing export.

The last few years have seen the mining houses increase their investment overseas, in Australia as well as sub-Saharan Africa. The South African Breweries monopoly has been buying breweries in Czechoslovakia and Poland. The Southern African Development Community has become an important means for extending white African investments in neighbouring states.

While it has had to make some concessions – for instance to Zimbabwe in the textile trade – South Africa's fundamental aim is to ensure its own dominance in manufacturing with the Community. Its exports to sub-Saharan Africa have been rising at 50% a year since 1990. But the picture is not completely rosy for South African capitalism.

South Africa remains a small player on the world stage, a minor imperialism, which only a few years ago was racked by general strikes and mass protests which finally destroyed apartheid. The ANC-led Government National Unity (GNU) had to promise the super-exploited black mass real change.

While the winning of democracy and end to the system of apartheid brought great gains for the masses, the restoration of economic change quickly came to the fore. The masses had fought just for the vote but to use that vote to remove the massive disparity between white wealth and black poverty in the country.

When the GNU first took office in 1994, its redistributive aims were modest. The ANC leadership had already made clear that it would preserve capitalism in South Africa. The vague commitments in the ANC's Freedom Charter to nationalise the mines and the banks had been buried.

A power-sharing agreement involving the architects of apartheid, the National Party, as a partner in government was brokered to reassure South African and international capital. The ANC has been so "moderate" and protective of capitalism since then that when the National Party left the Cabinet last year, the international financial markets didn't blink.

But the ANC had offered the masses something in the April 1994 elections. The GNU's plans for improving the lives of the majority centred on the Reconstruction and Development Plan (RDP), which included a large-scale housebuilding programme, state-led job creation measures, the provision and improvement of municipal services and limited land redistribution. Jay Naidoo, the former leader of the trade union federation, COSATU, was given a special brief to ensure the RDP's implementation.

But by 1996, the pressures of South African big business and of international capitalism effectively put paid to the RDP. Its office was shut, at first with a promise that the aims of the RDP would be integrated into the government's general programme.

In fact, the language of Keynes and state-directed economic growth and development quickly gave way to the language of neo-liberalism in government circles. As the economy was shaken by a massive fall in the rand (it lost 35% of its value against the US dollar last year), pressure grew for more and more concessions including public spending cuts, and privatising and restructuring the public sector.

By the time the World Bank stepped in with a modest loan, it hardly needed to make its usual demands. The GNU was already following an "orthodox" policy – the black masses were being asked to pay for the crisis.

The new plan for Growth, Employment and Reconstruction (GEAR) effectively scraps the RDP. Its aims include 6% growth rates by the end of the century, 400,000 new jobs and "fiscal discipline" to ensure a cut in the budget deficit. This squeeze on public spending will mean axing 100,000 public sector jobs a year, according to trade union estimates, a figure that makes a mockery of GEAR's job creation element.

At the same time, the public sector

**South Africa remains a small player on the world stage, a minor imperialism, which only a few years ago was wracked by general strikes and mass protests which finally destroyed apartheid.**

is to be "restructured". After initial protests from within the alliance at the privatisation plans, the ANC leadership has effectively pushed them through. In some cases there will be full-scale sell offs. In others, there are plans for private sector partnerships. Jay Naidoo was moved to the Communications Ministry where his new job was to search for private sector partners for Telkom.

All talk of nationalisation has long gone. For Mandela "privatisation is the fundamental policy of the government". COSATU's first reaction was that GEAR would be "a recipe for disaster". Under intense rank and file pressure, the unions led anti-privatisation march-



**Making South Africa safe for capital: President Mandela signs the post-apartheid constitution**

es. ANC leaders faced down COSATU. "The unions know they do not have the power of veto", remarked Nelson Mandela's heir apparent, Thabo Mbeki.

While the masses have been asked to make sacrifices and tighten their belts, the aspiring black bourgeoisie has been helping itself to the spoils which came courtesy of the masses' struggles against apartheid. The more farsighted of the monopoly capitalists, like the mining multinational Anglo-American, have gone out of their way to encourage the development of a black bourgeoisie and petit-bourgeoisie,

as Transnet director Sakkie Macomoza, with an annual salary of R1 million. And it's not just the ANC leaders going for a piece of the action. Former Pan African Congress leader, Dipkang Moseneke, is now a Telkom executive. Even the Civics organisation, SANCO, has gone into partnership with Liberty Life insurance in SANCO Investment Holdings, chaired by ex-metal workers' leader Moses Mayekiso.

While this layer has gained wealth and privileges, the vast mass of South African capital remains firmly in white hands. Just 1% of the market value of the Johannesburg Stock Exchange was black-owned by mid-1996. And of South Africa's 176 judges, 16 are black and seven female!

In education there continue to be bitter battles over access and employment of black teachers. For the black majority the most telling statistic is that according to official figures, 65% of the black population live in poverty compared to just 0.7% of whites. The talk of "black empowerment" from the ANC parliamentarians and bureaucrats means nothing to the vast majority.

This shift in policy, the abandonment of the RDP and the drive to sell off state-owned industries, has had little effect on the "alliance" of the ANC, the South African Communist Party (SACP) and COSATU, despite the initial protests of the unions.

Despite their rhetorical opposition to GEAR and privatisation, the COSATU and SACP leaderships derive numerous benefits from continuing the alliance. The ANC government and the employers have had more sense than to

become full-scale Thatchers or Reagans. At the moment, they know that some concessions to the workers' leaders have to be maintained.

There are still features of "co-determination", such as planning forums and national bargaining, which together with the new Labour Relations Act guarantee a role for the union bureaucracy. The SACP has MPs and even ministers. In return for these privileges, they help police the workers' movement and prevent dissent turning into a real struggle against the government.

Last year, the NUMSA (metalworkers) leadership managed to overturn the union's historic support for an independent workers' party. This was a victory for the SACP leadership, which continues to insist that the working class must be subordinated to the ANC-dominated "alliance".

While Mandela's government was driving through its privatisation policies, the SACP worked overtime to convince its members and union militants how important it was to support a capitalist government.

This class treachery is theoretically justified by the SACP Stalinists on the basis that South Africa is passing through a "National Democratic transformation". Socialism is still the supposed "aim" of the movement, but the current stage of "struggle" involves maintaining a broad democratic alliance while attempting to place – in the words of a recent editorial in the African Communist – "the national democratic project under the hegemonic leadership of the workers and the poor".

The article further emphasises that this means keeping a bloc with, "a large majority of the middle strata and significant sectors of an emergent bourgeoisie – 'a patriotic bourgeoisie'."

In practice, maintaining this bloc – in effect a popular front – always means subordinating the interests of the workers and the poor, not promoting them. Once again Trotsky's prophetic words that all such alliances end up putting a "noose around the necks" of the workers, are confirmed again; this time in South Africa.

When the bourgeoisie is ready, and the SACP has served its purpose in demobilising the workers' opposition to the government's policies, the bosses will happily fling the SACP out of office, as they have done everywhere else the bankrupt popular front strategy has been pursued.

The workers' movement can afford no more delays. Breaking with the Alliance is an urgent necessity. If workers do not take the step of forming their own party soon, they may find that big business is reconstructing the political scene for them.

Already the *Financial Times*, echoing comments in the South African financial press, is bemoaning the "time consuming debates" that the Alliance brings.

A new revolutionary workers' party will need a programme based on the needs of the working class and rural poor, not those of a spurious national unity with a "patriotic bourgeoisie".

The forces that rallied against privatisation, the municipal workers whose jobs are threatened, the workers in the private sector facing "wage restraint", the agricultural workers facing poverty wages – these are the forces who can and must be rallied to an alternative way forward: to struggle for a revolutionary workers' government and a Workers' Republic of South Africa. ■

## Lesbian and gay youth oppression

Dear Workers Power,

Your article "What's wrong with the youth of today?" (December 1996) succinctly detailed and analysed attacks on youth across the board, through unemployment and low wages, homelessness, the nuclear family and the restrictions of the Criminal Justice Act.

However, your references to the Age of Consent law, which "tells us we are unable to make decisions about our sex life", mentions only the heterosexual age of consent at 16.

Young gay men are denied the right to consenting sexual relationships until the age of 18 and the law refuses even to mention a lesbian age of consent! Under the notorious Section 28 of the Local Government Act of 1988 (pioneered by an unsightly array of Tory backbenchers and Christian fundamentalists), the teaching in schools of

"the acceptance of homosexuality as a pretended family relationship" is prohibited. What this odious encapsulation of sheer prejudice means in practice is that gay and lesbian teenagers are told at school that their love and feelings are inferior to those of heterosexuals.

To this we can add the antics of the Tory tabloid press, which viciously denigrates and insults lesbians and gay men on an almost daily basis, and the hatred preached by religious bigots, as well as discrimination in housing and employment, lack of parenting rights and no legal recognition whatsoever for gay partnerships.

No wonder then, that studies suggest that as many as 20% of lesbian and gay teenagers make an attempt on their own life (London Gay Teenage Group Survey, 1984). Frequently it is gay kids

from working class backgrounds who suffer in particular from homophobic prejudice and bigotry.

Shamefully, the Labour Party, under the neo-Christian Democrat Tony Blair, has now reneged on all its former promises to end anti-gay discrimination and counter anti-gay prejudices that cause so much suffering.

The Workers Power article described both youth and lesbians/gays as especially oppressed sections of the working class. Gay youth, therefore, have an extremely tough time of it, and will continue to do so, unless we all work to end homophobia and discrimination on the grounds of sexual orientation forever.

Yours fraternally  
Rhys Parry  
Aberystwyth,  
West Wales

## Kent anti-fascists beat the police

Dear Comrades,

You may recall the affair in 1993 when two anti-fascists were prosecuted for distributing an anti-racist leaflet in Gravesend, Kent. The leaflet detailed the activities of the nazi thug, John Cato, and exposed the fact that the police were giving him 24-hour protection at public expense.

When a passing policeman and the parents of a local nazi claimed that they were "offended" by the leaflet, Reg Weston and Gill Emerson, two Kent anti-fascists, were arrested. This occurred at a time, when a local nazi had been exposed as a thug on national TV and when a member of the local Sikh community had suffered a racist attack that left him on a life support machine for weeks.

In September 1993, the charges against the anti-fascists were thrown out by a local magistrates court and they were awarded their costs.

After a three year legal argument over a claim by the two anti-fascists for false imprisonment, malicious prosecution and battery both of them have been awarded £2,500 plus, to be paid

by the Kent police. Despite this the Chief Constable of Kent has stated that he does not accept any liability for the actions of the police!

In a statement the two declared: "As far as we are concerned the outcome shows that opposing racism is no crime and that we have a right to free speech... Now we hope our small vic-

tory will encourage others to stand against racism and fascism and against arbitrary actions of a biased police."

You gave us support at the time. This is to inform you of the result and to thank you once more.

A. R. Weston,  
Kent

## Wrong on Broad Lefts?

Dear Comrades,

The headline about last month's Broad Lefts conference saying "it offered no way forward" was wrong. The meeting was flawed democratically but it was a start.

I agree that the programme outlined in the article (the "bureaucracy as a whole has to be politically defeated" etc.) should be fought for. Indeed, no one disagreed with this policy on the day. What was said was that an initial liaison meeting cannot impose policy on its constituent bodies.

Many left groups say that they do not want to repeat the sorry history of

sell outs by broad lefts. The conference, which saw attendance from Trotskyists, Labour lefts and ex-Communist Party of Great Britain members, could be won to such a perspective. I hope to attend the next conference and hope that Workers Power will support it and build for it.

Clive Power  
South London

We reply:

We stand by the article and headline and would like to hear other views on this vital question of trade union strategy. Write in now.

## Defend Brian Higgins

Dear Comrades,

Brian Higgins, Secretary of Northampton UCATT and of the rank and file Building Worker Group remains threatened by a costly libel action, a High Court injunction and imprisonment. His "crime", as you reported in your December issue, was to make what he felt were justified criticisms of a

UCATT full time official, Dominic Hehir.

Hehir alleges that he suffered distress and anxiety because of these criticisms and is demanding retraction, apology and substantial damages.

Brian, a victim of the building employers' blacklist, is suffering long term unemployment and has no money to fight against this attack on his right to free speech. He says:

"I will not be gagged. The courts have never looked favourably on trade unionists. Why doesn't Hehir use the established methods to settle disputes within the trade union movement? What is he afraid of? I call on all trade unionists to repudiate and condemn an act which can only damage our movement."

Brian needs your support to help him defend himself. He is calling a public meeting open to all trade unionists

and socialists (see below for details) to put the case for free speech in the labour movement. Already he has won the support of numerous branches and individuals within many unions, including UCATT, and he is offering a platform at his meeting to representatives of the Liverpool dockers and the Hillingdon Hospital strikers.

Brian Higgins Defence Campaign  
For more information on the campaign ring Terry Liddle on 0181-850 4187 (evenings)

PUBLIC MEETING

**Defend  
Brian Higgins!**

Thursday 20 March, 7.30pm  
Conway Hall, Red Lion Square,  
London WC1

## WORKERS POWER

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BCM Box 7750,  
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Telephone: 0171 357 0388  
Fax: 0171 357 0344  
E-mail: lrci@easynet.co.uk

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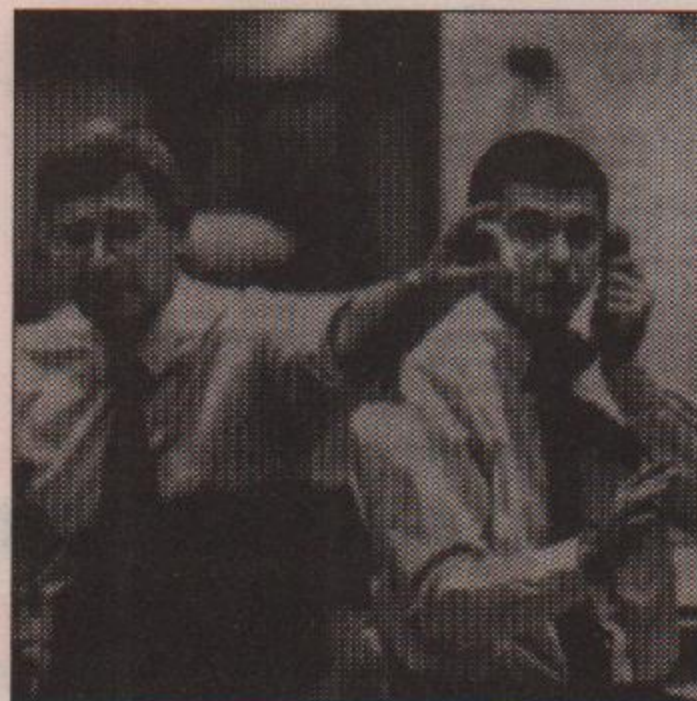
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## WHERE WE STAND



### Capitalism

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



### The Labour Party

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



### The Trade Unions

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



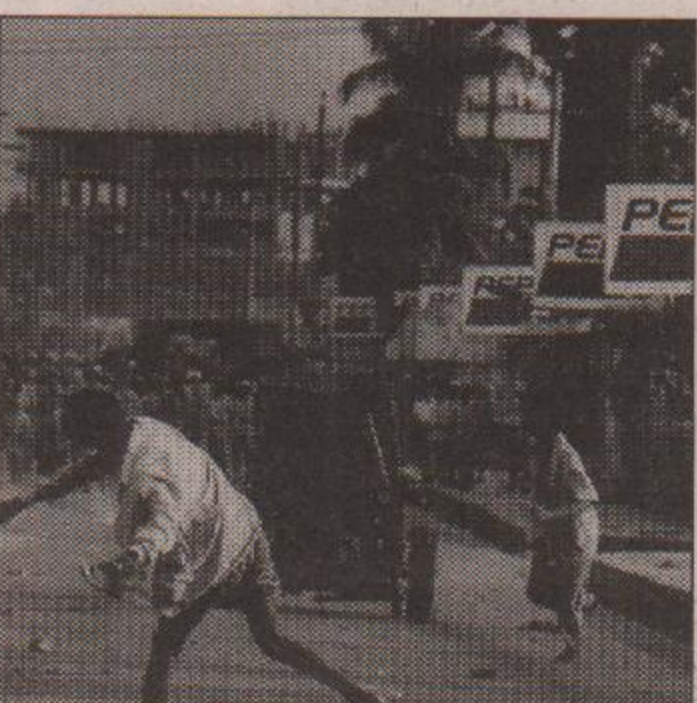
### October 1917

The Russian revolution established a workers' state. But Stalin destroyed workers' democracy and set about the reactionary and utopian project of building "socialism in one country". In the USSR, and the other degenerate workers' states that were established from above, capitalism was destroyed but the bureaucracy excluded the working class from power, blocking the road to democratic planning and socialism. The parasitic bureaucratic caste has led these states to crisis and destruction. We are for the smashing of bureaucratic tyranny through proletarian political revolution and the establishment of workers' democracy. We oppose the restoration of capitalism and the 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

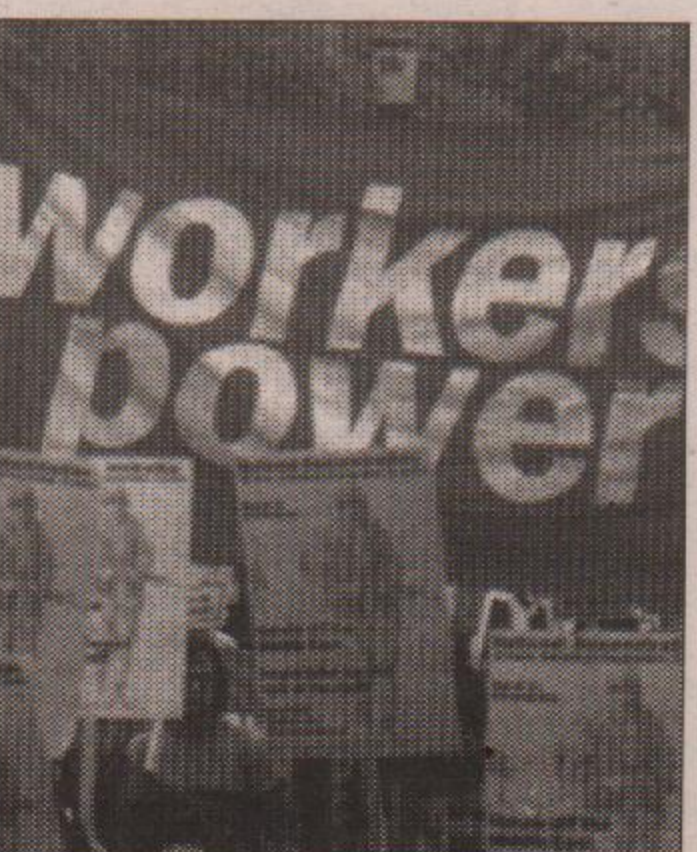
is an integral feature of capitalism systematically oppressing people on the basis of race, age, sex, or sexual orientation. We are for the liberation of women and for the building of a working class women's movement, not an "all class" autonomous movement. We are for the liberation of all of the oppressed. 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

# Workers power

## Albania erupts



Resisting the agony of capitalist restoration  
page 11

Socialism, Internationalism, Revolution

British Section of the League for a Revolutionary Communist International

No 209 MARCH 1997 ★ 50p

## FRANCE

### Government targets immigrants Fascists launch election bid

Join the demonstration against the FN conference, Saturday 29 March, Strasbourg. Phone 0171 924 0333 for details of the Anti Nazi League coach.

# FIGHT RACISM SMASH FASCISM!

#### FROM MATHIEU ROUX IN PARIS

**L**AST MONTH in France a massive demonstration of 100,000 marched against the right wing government's new anti-immigrant laws.

The march was swelled by alarm at the electoral advances made by Jean Marie Le Pen's fascist front organisation, the Front National (FN) in the south of France. Many marchers carried placards against Le Pen's organisation.

The FN regularly gets around 15% of the vote in national elections. They also control four major town councils, including the navy town of Toulon, in the south.

Last month, in a by-election in Vitrolles, the FN won control of the town in a straight fight against the Socialist Party.

Bruno Mégret, Le Pen's right-hand slimeball, was banned from standing for breaking electoral law on overspending in a previous election which he narrowly lost. This time his wife was elected, with Bruno making it very clear that he will be in control.

Catherine Mégret faced a Socialist Party candidate who was up on corruption charges and who boasted in a leaflet that he'd already carried out most of the FN's programme.

As Vitrolles fell to the FN, the government's new immigration bill had its second reading. The bill had sailed through its first reading in December with only one Socialist MP speaking against it – the rest of them didn't even bother to turn up!

This bill will mean a massive crackdown on all non-European immigrants: their fingerprints will be taken on entry to France; residence visas will no longer be automatically renewed; the police will have the right to search vehicles and enter company premises to look for "illegal immigrants".

One clause used virtually the same language as laws against the Jews passed during the Nazi Occu-



Above: Catherine and Bruno Mégret celebrate election victory  
Left: the real face of the Front National



pation. It said that anyone putting up a non-European resident would have to declare to the authorities when they arrived and when they left.

A recent court case sparked a nation-wide protest against the measure. A woman factory worker had put up a friend from Zaire. The friend had no immigration papers and she had not asked to see them when she invited him into her home.

The court found her guilty of aiding and abetting an illegal immigrant. She was arrested at work and her boss immediately sacked her.

This racist verdict led a group of film-makers to launch a petition stating that they too had put up an illegal immigrant, challenging the authorities to arrest them. The petition condemned the new immigration bill. It was a runaway success, over 60,000

have already signed and the protest led to the massive demonstration in Paris.

Faced with this opposition the government retreated over the one clause. But the rest of the racist law remains in place.

The government's aim is simple: they want to win over Le Pen's voters by showing they can be tough on immigration. But the FN has more than racism at its core. It is a fascist front organisation.

Last year it took a decisive fascist turn, setting up fascist "trade unions", mobilising on the council estates, leafleting picket lines.

It wants to turn its mass racist base into a fascist machine on the streets that can bid for power.

The FN's conference, to be held in Strasbourg on 29 March, is an important step down this road. In France, the anti-racist mobilisation around the immigration law has already been linked to demonstrating at the FN's conference in Strasbourg this month. Over 20,000 people marched in Grenoble to protest against the FN holding a small meeting. There is every reason to think that the Strasbourg demo will be far bigger.

The FN must be driven off the streets, destroyed before it can build the mass movement it wants. The French trade union federation, the CGT, supported the Paris march, but did little to mobilise workers on the day.

In the weeks and months ahead it is vital that the unions give more than token support to anti-racist demos.

The trade unions and workers' parties must build a united front to smash the FN altogether. ■

#### French left's fatal strategy

**T**HE BIGGEST French left organisation, Lutte Ouvrière (LO), boycotted the movement against the immigration bill, deliberately staying away from the massive Paris demonstration.

After the demo their main leader explained that the people who initiated the campaign were all "intellectuals who were going to vote Socialist Party in next year's elections".

This is typical of LO's sterile sectarianism towards anti-racist struggles.

But LO's abstentionism from the struggle against racism and fascism has deeper roots.

Few workers so far have been involved in the campaign against the immigration laws partly because racism has a hold on important sectors of the working class.

For any revolutionary organisation this would mean a redoubling of efforts to convince workers of the need for a united fight against racism and fascism. LO prefers to swim with the stream.

Twice a month LO produces several hundred factory bulletins throughout France. But those bulletins have said not one word about the fight against the immigration laws.

LO may make a substantial intervention into the working class, but all that is just so much waste paper if it doesn't warn against the dangers of racism and fascism and use its base to build a workers' united front against them.

Thankfully a group of LO comrades who were already fighting the opportunism of the leadership refused to go along with this abstentionist line and turned out for the Paris demonstration. ■