

Workers power

MAKE THIS A UNION SUMMER!

Organising from below... pages 4&5,8&9

Socialism, Internationalism, Revolution

British Section of the League for a Revolutionary Communist International

No 212 JUNE 1997 ★ 50p



Building strikes

The new militancy - page 5



Where next for Congo?

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Euromarch latest

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POVERTY PAY IS A SCANDAL

THERE WAS no "it could be you" about it: "It IS us!" said the Camelot Board of Directors last month.

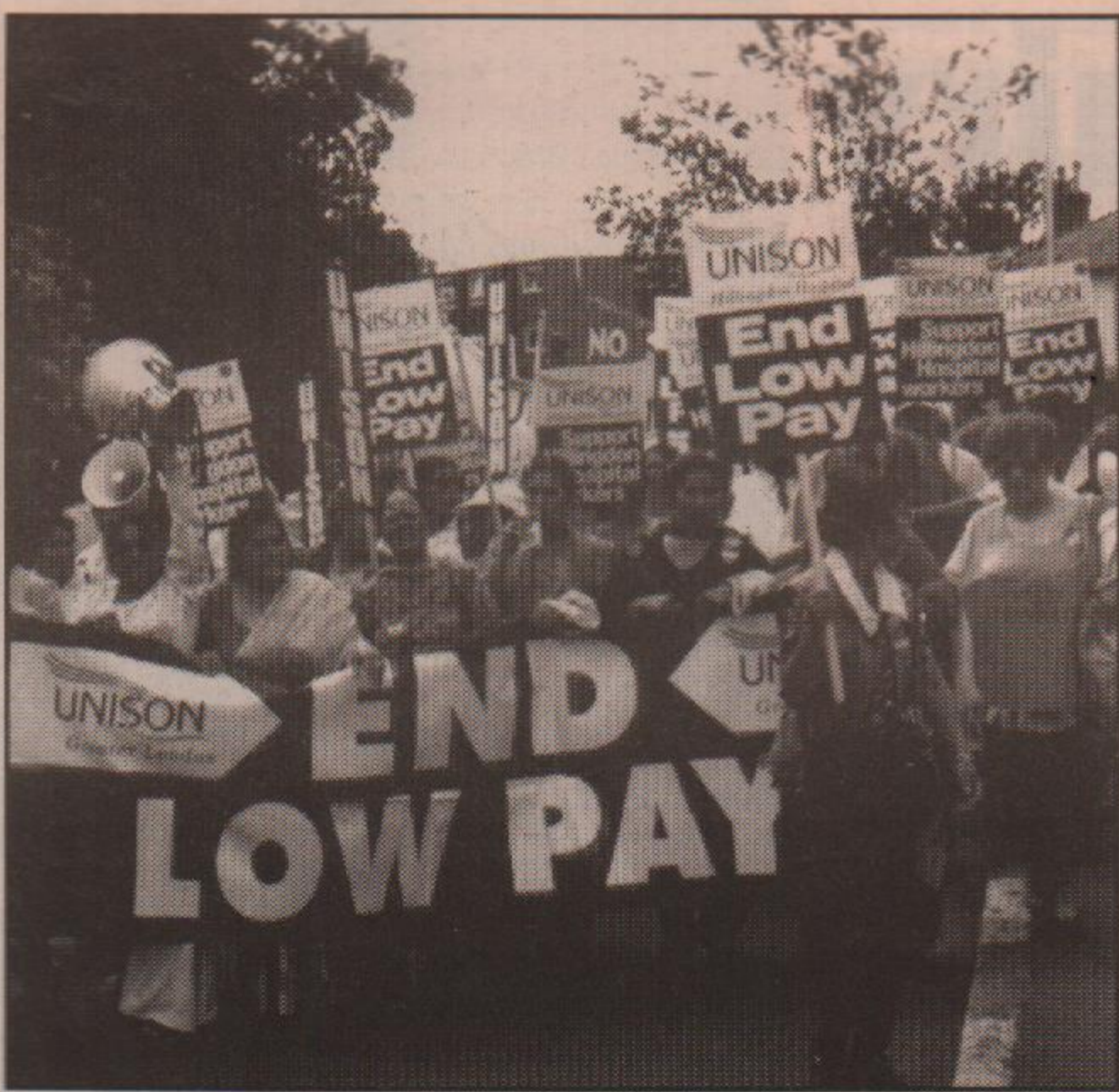
These greedy gambling magnates, who control the "people's lottery", awarded themselves 40% pay rises and bonuses.

Despite profits, sales and money handed over to charity all falling last year, Chief Executive, Tim Holley, paid himself £985,500 - nearly £3,000 a day!

And what has Labour done about this obscenity? Heritage minister, Chris Smith, assured us that Tony Blair's reaction was "one of outrage" and warned that Camelot better put its house in order or it would not run the lottery...in the year 2001!

Meanwhile, Chancellor Gordon Brown has told all public sector workers: no pay rises for at least two years. Workers across Britain must be asking themselves what exactly is new about Labour's government.

What's more, millions of



Hillingdon strikers defy union sell out - page 4

low-paid workers have been told to wait for a commission stuffed with bosses and economic "experts" to set the level of the minimum wage. Then wait some more before it is enacted.

When it is introduced Labour are hinting it will be around £3 or £3.50 an hour.

This is ridiculous. When the Tories abolished the Wages Councils five years ago the minimum wage the councils recommended was £2.98. Five years on and Labour are suggesting a possible rise of two pence!

We've waited 18 years to get rid of the Tories. With a

179-seat majority, there is no excuse for Labour and the union leaders to tell us to wait any longer.

Union conferences this summer must set their own minimum wage - just like Holley and his chums have done - and put it into action immediately.

A massive wave of strikes

for a minimum wage of £6 an hour is needed across all industries.

That may well "outrage" Tony Blair and Chris Smith - but it is the only way to ensure we all get a decent wage.

We must not wait for the lottery of the Low Pay Commission. ■

We need £6 an hour minimum wage now!

Blair attacks welfare state - page 6

FORCE THE UNION LEADERS TO FIGHT!

BP in Colombia: Oil bosses' lies unmasked

Stop the killings

B RITISH PETROLEUM (BP) thought it had got away with its dirty war against unions and peasant protesters in Colombia. It thought wrong. The campaign against BP's activities in Colombia is growing from strength to strength.

The appointment of BP's former Chairman, Sir David Simon, to the New Labour government has highlighted BP's involvement in human rights atrocities. Foreign Secretary Robin Cook was quick to launch a propaganda offensive to portray the Labour government as a force for democracy, peace and a sustainable environment.

Lauded by the *Observer* under the hopeful headline "Goodbye Xenophobia", Cook declared that under his stewardship British foreign policy is set to change. In particular he spoke of Britain breaking with years of Tory reaction, to promote new global rules on human rights and the environment.

In reality BP will be treated with the same kid gloves as arms manufacturers like British Aerospace, whose weapons' sales to Indonesia for use in its genocidal war in East Timor will continue under Labour.

Labour has been silent on the allegations that BP has handed photographs of campaigners to the Colombian military. The military has been denounced as acting illegally even by a Colombian government report. Richard Howitt, a Labour MEP, has released reports detailing BP's collaboration with forces carrying out disappearances and murders, torture and intimidation against anyone threatening the massive profits they expect to derive from the oil field in Casanare, Colombia.

Richard Brenner of the Coalition against BP in Colombia wrote to the *Guardian* detailing BP's human rights abuses and calling for the government to launch an inquiry and sack David

Simon immediately. Letters of support for the Coalition followed, from shareholders and even a member of the team responsible for the BBC's "Oil and Terror" documentary about the Casanare region and BP.

The Colombian ambassador — who has his own private death squad in Colombia — also responded. He pointed out that so far these allegations have never been tested in a court of law. Quite! The so-called investigation by the Colombian government has shown no signs of bringing the military and corporate human rights violators to trial. The ambassador failed in several hundred words to answer a single con-

crete allegation.

BP's managing director did, however, make three essential points. Firstly, that BP is required to pay money to the military under Colombian law. He neatly side-stepped the facts that BP has paid far more than legally required, has paid a specific sum to the notorious 16th Brigade, which is accused of rape, torture and assassinations, and is funding a new crack unit to intimidate opponents.

The second point was that it is necessary for BP to fund these operations to defeat guerrilla actions against their operations and plant. This is a typical excuse of state and corporate ter-

rorists all over the world. BP's security chief, Steve Devine (a former member of the British "special forces"), is accused of falsely naming one activist as a guerrilla and passing this disinformation on to the army, who arrested and imprisoned him.

Lastly, the Managing Director mustered all his indignation to reject the notion that BP denies its employees trade union rights. A handful of direct BP employees are "allowed" to join a union. But the overwhelming majority of workers at BP's Colombia plants and projects work for sub-contracting companies. They are emphatically not allowed to join a union. And BP-fund-

ed troops have violently repressed trade union organisation, murdering and imprisoning members of Union Sindical Obrero.

BP has not succeeded in pulling the wool over the public's eyes. There have been numerous press references to BP's alleged human rights violations and the Coalition against BP in Colombia will ensure that the embarrassment continues. ■

Colombian oil worker Freddy Puleicio speaks about the fightback in Casanare: turn to page 13

T HE COALITION against BP in Colombia was established last year and held a lively picket of the company's London headquarters in December. The Coalition has since organised various actions around the BP shareholders' AGM, BP-sponsored schools and a company-sponsored art exhibition at the Tate Gallery.

The coalition was initiated by REVOLUTION and Workers Power and has brought together journalists, the OILC, Colombian groups in London organised under Accion por Colombia, supporters of Reclaim the Streets, activists from Socialist Outlook and the Revolutionary Communist Group.

The Coalition must now constitute a formal committee to co-ordinate action more broadly. We can use the notoriety of David Simon's appointment to raise awareness, win backing from unions and from any Labour MPs with a conscience.

But how can we beat BP? Anti-corporate campaigning has had a high profile recently, with a series of successful stunts and activities at the Annual General Meetings of major corporations,

including Shell and other multinationals.

Publicity stunts and disruption of AGMs are popular with activists from Greenpeace and Corporate Watch, along with the sponsored resolutions from shareholders. These tactics can be useful for highlighting issues. Major companies are now clamouring for the intro-

How to beat BP

duction of new laws restricting shareholders' rights, to prevent the bad PR resulting from their crimes coming out at such events.

On their own such tactics will only win publicity. Most shareholders are interested in maximising dividends. And mass murder, torture and environmental destruction can be highly profitable. Attempts by groups such as Greenpeace to persuade BP shareholders to reject oil production are ultimately doomed to failure.

Shareholder-oriented tactics can only be part of an overall strategy, focusing on the force that can finally defeat the murderous rule of these corporations: the workers in the industry, internationally co-ordinated and linked to the power of the rest of the working class.

The Coalition makes no apology for emphasising trade union and working

class action. It is why we encourage links with Union Sindical Obrero, and why we have won support from teachers opposed to BP's sponsorship of schools. Our goal is not the utopia of ending all oil production. We want a powerful movement of direct working class action and global solidarity, to force BP to submit to a genuinely democratic inquiry, to grant real trade union rights, and to compensate the Colombian people for their crimes and environmental devastation.

These corporations are too powerful and too central to the future of the planet to be left in the hands of ruthless profiteers and polluters. Their foreign property should be placed in the hands of the workers of the countries in which they are operating, and their global operations should be planned by democratic collaboration of workers and consumers around the world.

Then we will be able to decide for ourselves the best and most sustainable methods of energy production: in a socialist world freed from the deadly dictates of private profit. ■

Manchester Airport

For a workers' inquiry

T HE EVICTION of anti-runway protesters at Manchester Airport looks set to be the focal point of environmental protest throughout the summer. The press and broadcasters love the story. Lots of nicknames, colourful pictures and characters. The danger is that the whole thing degenerates into a joke.

This has prompted a new debate about the limits of Swampy-style tree houses and tunnelling. Some feel the whole movement has become a way of life in itself and that the tactics are ultimately pointless. They advocate other forms of non-violent direct action, like the successful defence in court of the Ploughshares women who damaged a Hawk trainer jet bound for Indonesia.

What is missing from this debate is any sense of class politics and working class action. Both the aims and the methods have to be viewed from this perspective.

On the general issue of roads, airports and other transport developments revolutionary socialists, like most workers, want a democratic debate. We reject the utopia of zero development, and the campaign against car transport in and of itself. But we do recognise, as in the case of Manchester airport, that there are conflicting interests within the working class — as well as between local residents and the wider community. Manchester Airport, almost unique-

ly, is owned by the local council, which receives two per cent of its revenue. A new runway could increase that revenue, provide jobs and attract new investment in access roads and tramways. The downside could be an increase in asthma, which campaigners attribute to fuel dumping by aircraft, and more noise for residents around the airport.

We do recognise, as in the case of Manchester airport, that there are conflicting interests within the working class — as well as between local residents and the wider community.

So far opposition to the new runway has been led by two groups: the full-time environment protesters and local middle class residents. The vast majority of local workers support the runway.

The methods chosen for the protests are highly elitist, involving a handful of activists. On the other hand, those

advocating a return to passive resistance and taking the battle from the tunnels to the courts are equally mistaken. Ultimately, it is a debate about what form of middle class elitism can shame the bosses into temporary changes to their development plans.

Revolutionary socialists reject both sets of tactics. Neither do we support protests simply because the police and the capitalist developers oppose them. Though we do defend protesters against state repression, calling for their immediate release and the dropping of charges.

What is needed is a workers' inquiry into the pros and cons of a new runway. The whole population of Greater Manchester should be allowed to have its say, not just the local middle class and self-appointed guardians of the environment.

If the new runway can bring jobs and better transport links, and adequate ways can be found of minimising noise and air-fuel pollution, then no socialist should stand in the way of a new runway if that is what the Manchester working class decides.

But even more importantly, these tactics can mobilise thousands in an active struggle to exercise some control over developments that affect our lives. Then the bosses' media will suddenly decide that the "joke" is no longer funny . . . and we can all start laughing at that! ■



Defend protesters but reject their strategy

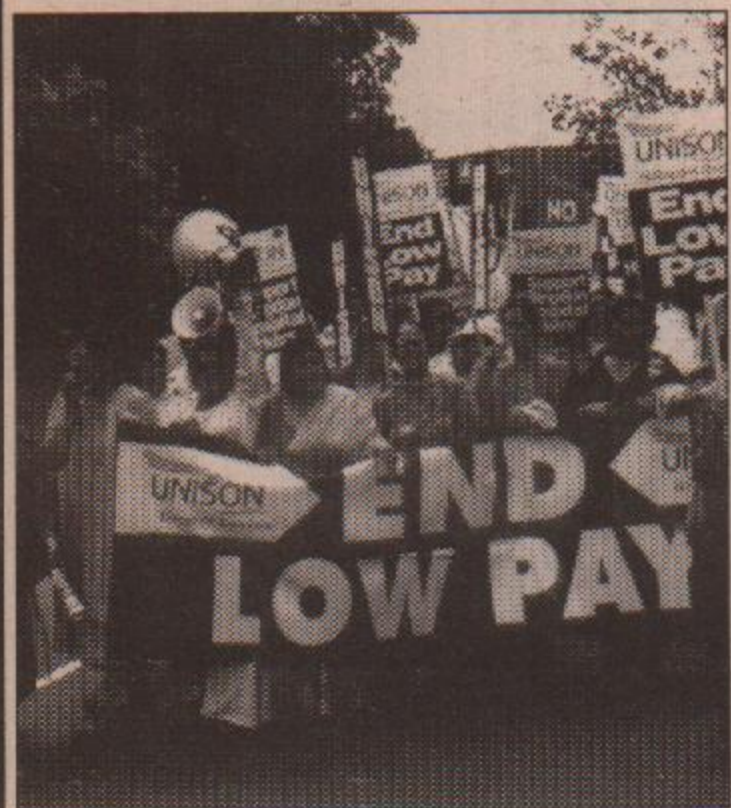
EDITORIAL

WORKERS POWER 212 JUNE 1997

Blair's first month

Things can only get better?

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THE NEW Labour government has "hit the ground running". But just over one month into its life it is clear that the ground is not the only thing Blair is planning to hit.

Labour's manifesto promises were modest, but even so there were some glaring absences from the Queen's Speech. The new Labour government failed to include its pledge to legislate for automatic trade union recognition wherever a majority of the workforce is in favour. Likewise, the low paid will have to wait at least another year before the introduction of any minimum wage.

The House of Lords will not be reformed. One hereditary peer, Lord Rothermere, owner of the Daily Mail, was so grateful that he crossed over to the Labour benches.

Nevertheless, Blair has created the image of swift, radical change. But will any of these measures make a real difference for the better in the lives of millions of working class and oppressed people who have suffered under the Tories?

Racism and Immigration

Home Secretary Jack Straw has already taken a couple of steps that would have been unimaginable under his Tory predecessor Michael Howard. He is about to scrap the "primary purpose" immigration rule which has kept so many families apart. Straw looks set to reopen the case of Stephen Lawrence, the black teenager who was brutally murdered and whose racist attackers still walk free. He has signalled that two new offences of racially motivated violence and racial harassment will be legally recognised.

Many anti-racist campaigners have welcomed this move, but the still undrafted legislation forms part of an authoritarian package, the Crime and Disorder Bill, which will strengthen police powers to criminalise black youth in particular.

But dozens of Algerian asylum seekers remain holed-up in detention centres like Campsfield and in prisons like Birmingham's Winson Green. Their "crime" has been to seek refuge in Britain from the murderous repression of state and Islamic fundamentalist death squads.

Several Algerians staged a rooftop protest at Campsfield in May. Another 15 asylum seekers went on hunger strike at Winson Green as well as a small group at Haslar naval prison in Gosport.



What was Labour's response to these cries for justice? Mike O'Brien, the new immigration minister, warned that, "disruptive behaviour or hunger strikes would not lead to their release".

The Asylum and Immigration Act railroaded through Parliament by the Tories last year remains in place. This law actually breaks the 1951 UN Convention on Refugees. It makes a mockery of Foreign Secretary Robin Cook's pronouncements about an "ethical" foreign policy, guided by human rights considerations.

Almost every trade union in Britain has now condemned the Asylum and Immigration Act. Such racist laws send out a clear signal that black people are to blame for Britain's problems. Defending the Act after Straw's move against the "primary purpose" rule, former Tory Home Secretary, Michael Howard, actually admitted that this its prime purpose was to keep black people out.

The labour movement must demand the Act's immediate repeal, along with all other immigration controls as part of the fight against state racism. Every progressive measure Labour carries through should be used to build the pressure for complete repeal.

Windfall tax

One Labour voter has already become disillusioned. Sir Iain Vallance, chairman of BT, complained when he heard the government might levy the windfall tax against his company, "I would not have voted Labour to put this government into power if BT had been named in the manifesto". BT reported a staggering £3.2 billion profit last year - £101 per second. It is about to combine with the US-based MCI in one of the biggest corporate mergers ever.

All the privatised utilities together

made an £8 billion profit last year alone. This puts Labour's windfall tax into perspective. Labour say they want "at least £3 billion" from the tax in order to get 250,000 young and long-term unemployed back to work. It is, Gordon Brown stresses, a one-off tax.

Even City financiers have said the utilities could easily afford £5 billion. Despite Labour's willingness to face down BT's threat of court action, the government is being too timid.

If, instead, Labour re-nationalised the privatised utilities without compensation, £8 billion a year, minimum, would be immediately available. Millions of jobs could be created at decent rates of pay, rather than 250,000 mainly low wage, dead end jobs. That is why we demand that Labour's answer to Vallance should be re-nationalisation of BT, the privatised utilities and the other companies sold off by the Tories without compensation and under workers' control. Then Sir Iain would have something to cry about!

Water

One privatised industry is more despised than the others: the water companies. Since privatisation, water rates have soared from about £20 a year to over £300 in some areas. Yet every summer, whatever the weather, there are restrictions on domestic water usage.

Why? Because the water companies refuse to invest. They rake in total profits of £2 billion, while losing 900 million gallons of water through leakages. Over 30% of the water in England and Wales is wasted through leaks. In London, the figure is nearly 40%. But investing in the infrastructure to stop this would cut into profits. That is the logic of privatisation.

John Prescott has announced Labour's "solution". He will set targets to bring the leakage rate down and force the industry's bosses to fork out compensation to customers affected by drought restrictions. This regulatory framework will prove an ineffective, bureaucratic nightmare. The lawyers will have a field day.

Water is essential to human life. That is why it is nationalised in so many countries. Instead of hiding behind "regulation", Labour should boldly announce the immediate nationalisation of the water companies.

This will stop the leaks and cut the salaries of the obscenely overpaid water bosses.

Frank Dobson, Blair's choice for

Health Minister, has spent the first month telling everyone not to expect any real change. He told the Royal College of Nursing's annual conference there would be no more money for healthworkers' pay.

After Labour had supposedly declared a moratorium on hospital closures in London, the Observer revealed that the closure of Edgware Hospital's accident and emergency wing would go ahead, in complete contradiction to the election addresses of five newly elected Labour MPs.

All Dobson can promise is a meagre £100 million to be switched from "red tape" to patient care. He knew he had to come up with something a bit more radical.

Profits

An obvious target was the tobacco industry which realises its profits through the sale of a highly addictive, cancer-causing drug. The tobacco industry spends £9 million on sports sponsorship in Britain and millions more on advertising. Dobson is to introduce a Bill this summer banning all this.

This may impress a few health fanatics, but it will do virtually nothing to improve the standard of care for hundreds of thousands of people suffering from smoking-related illnesses.

The government won't touch the profits of the multinational tobacco giants and the pharmaceutical companies. But nationalisation of such industries is the only way to guarantee a National Health Service worthy of the name.

New Labour has not yet unleashed major attacks on its working class supporters. Those attacks are still being planned (see page six for an overview of the plans for the welfare state). The hopes that such attacks were a thing of the past were dented for many when Blair ostentatiously invited Thatcher to Number Ten.

Labour's progressive reforms have been minor and inexpensive, however welcome. Its major policies will be disastrous for the working class.

The job of socialists, as the tension grows between the reality of Labour in office and the aspirations of those who voted for a real change on 1 May, will be to give a coherent shape and sharp focus to the struggles ahead.

Those struggles can lay the basis for breaking workers from Labour and towards the building of a revolutionary socialist alternative. ■



We need a building fund boom

WE HAVE now started hunting for a new office building. The very cheapest premises with the space we require are around £100,000. And these need a lot of work doing to them.

This makes raising our target of £20,000 towards buying a new office even more important. The bigger the fund we have to start with, the cheap-

er our monthly mortgage repayments will be. This month our total has leapt to £12,649.95. In one month we have raised £1,585.81. Of this, £1,000 was a donation from a supporter in London.

We are deeply grateful to this comrade and ask all our supporters to make as big a donation as they can. The bigger the better, but the small ones help

too. Money was also raised at a collection at our national rally (£252.81, the other £506 raised was shared equally between the Liverpool dockers and Hillingdon strikers). Supporters in Coventry raised £70 at a car boot sale. London supporters continued their enterprising role as food and drink sellers raising almost £100.

As the summer approaches

we need a big push to take us ever nearer our target. By the summer we want to start the process of moving so please rush donations to Workers Power, BCM Box 7750, London WC1N 3XX. Make cheques/POs payable to Workers Power and mark them "Building Fund" on the back.

Thanks to everyone who contributed last month. ■

Hillingdon strikers

Stop the sell-out

AT LAST year's Unison Conference General Secretary Rodney Bickerstaffe held up the arm of shop steward Malkiat Bilku in a solidarity salute to the struggle of the 53, mainly Asian, domestic and catering workers at West London's Hillingdon Hospital. Bickerstaffe's gesture was a theatrical act of gross hypocrisy.

At this year's Unison Conference in Brighton, Bickerstaffe and his supporters will be trying to persuade Unison delegates that the Hillingdon dispute with cleaning contractors Pall Mall ended on 16 January. Yet most of the 53 Hillingdon women are still fighting to win their jobs back.

The National Executive Committee (NEC) endorsed a deal which involved a lump sum payment of only £250,000. This amounted to less than £5,000 for each woman after 16 months on strike. The attraction of the deal for the Unison bureaucracy was the prospect of a "normalised" relationship with Pall Mall.

The Hillingdon women were forced to go through two ballots before the union nationally declared the dispute official. But there was no ballot on accepting the offer.

When the women voted unanimously at a strike meeting to reject this "final" offer and continue the fight, the NEC simply ignored them.

Since January the Hillingdon women have maintained their picket lines near the hospital entrance. The NHS Trust management took them to the High Court in March, having already torn down their hut and emptied it of personal belongings. But the women have persevered in their heroic defiance.

Support

Officers of the Hillingdon and Harefield Hospitals Unison branch have submitted a motion to national conference in support of the sell-out, but the strikers, including their shop steward, were not even aware of the meeting which agreed the motion. In the meantime, at least 10 motions which not only condemned the betrayal of the strikers, but demanded reinstatement of official support and strike pay, have been ruled "out of order".

Despite these bureaucratic attempts to stifle opposition to the national officials' abandonment of the Hillingdon strikers, there will be a debate at conference on a motion of censure against

the NEC. On its own, passing this motion will do little to win the dispute, but it will be a hugely important symbolic victory over the Bickerstaffe leadership.

National officials have attended branch meetings to persuade members that the dispute is over and that support for the women has collapsed. In Greater London and the East Midlands, regional treasurers have defied mandates from regional delegates to make contributions to the Hillingdon strike fund.

The most appalling expression of the bureaucracy's contempt for the strikers came in February at the national women's conference when nearly a third of the platform left after delegates had voted to hear Malkiat Bilku speak.

Where members have listened to the strikers, the support has been there. Malkiat and another strike leader, Kamla Persad, attended a Unison meeting in Leicester on 21 May, where a full-time official repeatedly told members that the branch could not give money to the strikers' fund since the dispute had finished on 16 January.

Malkiat replied: "Did you ever take a pay cut from £4 an hour? Did



Hillingdon women defy leaders

Rodney Bickerstaffe ever take a pay cut?" The two women left with a pledge of £500 to the strike fund from the branch. ■

There is a lobby of the Unison conference in support of the Hillingdon strike on Tuesday 10 June from 8.00 am in front of the Brighton Conference Centre. The Greater London Regional Committee fringe meeting at 12.45 pm will feature Hillingdon speakers.

Despite a highly successful 6 May benefit screening of Ken Loach's Riff-Raff, funds are urgently needed. Please send cheques made payable to: Hillingdon Strikers' Support Campaign (HSSC), c/o Cllr Wally Kennedy, Civic Centre, Uxbridge, Middlesex UB8 1UW.

Official Hillingdon t-shirts are available for £7.50 from Phil Richards, c/o Haringey Unison, 48 Grand Parade, Green Lanes, London N4 1AG.

Education

Blunkett's Tory agenda

LABOUR PROMISED "education, education, education". All we're seeing is Tory policy, Tory policy, Tory policy. Many felt that Labour's landslide would mean real change in education: cuts in class sizes and more funding for desperately needed resources.

But the Blairites have different plans. And these plans look horribly familiar.

It hasn't taken Labour Education Secretary David Blunkett long to make it clear where his priorities lie. Last month he named 18 "failing" schools. They'll be targeted by "help squads" (Blairspeak for hit squad). They were warned: improve, or be taken out of local authority control, or be closed down.

Purpose

What was the purpose of telling thousands of teachers and pupils that they're rubbish?

- Clearly not to inform parents. All

the schools had been identified by Ofsted, the schools inspection service, as requiring special measures. All parents were informed of the results. This information is available to anyone.

- Clearly not to support them. Additional funding may be available to these schools, but only £4,000. This is not enough to pay for a quarter of a teacher. But anyway, you're not allowed to spend it on teachers, or books, or repairs, or computers - you can only spend it on consultants!

No one wants bad schools for their children, but is Blunkett really targeting the "bad" schools? Ofsted is universally hated by the vast majority of teachers. The teams of inspectors are poorly qualified. Their reports are so full of errors and bad practice that they are treated with contempt.

The National Union of Teachers at its annual conference called for Ofsted to be abolished. The National Association of Headteachers unanimously carried a vote of no confidence in Ofsted

chief, Chris Woodhead. NUT members at Islington Green School in London have voted to challenge their Ofsted report which designated them as requiring special measures.

Typically, Blunkett has not only kept Woodhead as the head of Ofsted, but also appointed him as joint vice-chair in his new task force!

Blunkett's list is not even accurate by Ofsted's shoddy standards. Many of the schools on the list were inspected over a year ago; South Benwell Primary School in Newcastle, for example, failed an inspection back in 1995 and significant improvements have been made since. No account was taken of this.

Morningside School in Hackney received a glowing report last autumn commenting on the progress that had been made, yet it was on the list. Another named school, Earl Marshall in Sheffield, was inspected as recently as March. Ofsted wrote:

"Pupils responded positively to the

work in three quarters of lessons. This represents a significant improvement from the last visit."

The Department of Education was unable to explain how failure was defined.

The list will also be used to target teachers. Individual teachers, rather than the lack of resources and training, will be blamed for failure in education.

The list is designed to encourage greater competition between schools. Schools are already pitted against each other in the league tables, which Blunkett wants to continue. Now they will have a relegation zone - but no promotion!

Ration

Competition is necessary in a situation of scarce resources. Education is massively underfunded so league tables and hit lists will be used to ration the meagre resources available.

Selection is also encouraged by competition. If you are worried about your exam results, you think twice before taking on children with special educational needs. Success for them could be getting a couple of grade Gs, but that won't look good in tables that record how many A to C grades the school gets.

Blunkett says that New Labour is against selection... but only some kinds. He does not intend to abolish private schools. He is in favour of streaming, putting the more able in separate classes - academic apartheid within schools. Hit lists and league tables will mean greater selection of pupils.

Millions of working class parents, pupils and teachers will be angry at Labour's immediate betrayal of their hopes for better education. Revolutionaries should mobilise this anger in the fight to demand that Labour:

- Introduces free comprehensive state education across the board.
- Abolishes selection.
- Scraps the league tables.
- Introduces a crash programme of education spending so that no child goes to school in a class size of more than 30 or one lacking decent access to books and education resources.
- Taxes the rich to pay for quality education for all.

Round up

Sheffield walk-out

TWO THOUSAND Unison members staged a one-day unofficial walk-out in late May after the council issued a redundancy notice to a finance worker at a local school. There could be up to another 50 sackings, mainly in the Education Department, over the summer. An estimated 140 workers are threatened with redundancy.

At a mass meeting, 1,200 strikers agreed to ballot for a rolling programme of action, culminating in an all-out, indefinite strike after five weeks. The decision to return to work came only after a heated debate with more than a quarter of the members in favour of staying out there and then.

Unison regional officials have agreed to a ballot which will probably start on 6 June. Activists should fight for the biggest possible "yes" vote and for the election of a fully accountable strike committee under the control of regular mass meetings. ■

Cadbury strike

CADBURY CHOCOLATE factory in Birmingham has had its first strike in 20 years. Around 800 workers staged a two-day strike in May. Two further such strikes are planned for June.

The dispute centres around shift pattern changes which the Transport and General Workers Union say would cost workers £20 a week. The changes would also mean the company telling its workforce when they can take time off.

Previously, workers were paid for a 39 hour week but actually worked for 42 hours - with an extra £20 or taking accrued time off when they wished.

Cadbury now wants to scrap the system with a pathetic sweetener of a one-off £500 payment and an extra 4 days holiday a year. This strike can stop them. ■

Spread college strikes!

LECTURERS AT Southwark College have shown a determination to fight that has surprised the College Principal, Dorothy Jones. They have been on indefinite strike since the end of April.

Management want to force through £1.5 million cuts which will result in redundancies, the imposition of part time agency lecturers and redeployment of senior lecturers. One lecturer has already been sacked for refusing to sign a new contract.

Senior management at the college were banking on the strike crumbling over the half term. Instead, the strike has remained solid.

As one striker said:

"The strike has remained solid since day one. There has been no dribble back to work."

Southwark strikers scored a number of successes at NATFHE's annual conference. Delegates agreed to increase their strike pay. The leader-

ship has also been called on to organise a delegation to David Blunkett and a march to demand that the New Labour government solve the funding crisis.

It is important that support for the strikers from NATFHE branches, local unions and the Southwark community is stepped up. Unison workers at the college voted to hold a 24 hour strike. Their national leadership, however, has refused to endorse the action. Unison workers are defying this dictate to keep the heat on Southwark management.

Demands

Colleges across the country are facing similar cuts. The Further Education Funding Council (FEFC) cannot meet the funding demands of the colleges and so college managements are forcing through massive cuts. If Southwark strikers win it will send a message to other college managements that

we are not prepared to see education destroyed by the market. Nationally, NATFHE needs to build a united campaign of strikes and demonstrations against the cuts. London Region of NATFHE can start the ball rolling by calling action alongside Southwark.

The Labour government tells us education is its first priority. In the same breath they have told us that there isn't enough money for the FE sector if they are to meet their election manifesto promises. There is one simple solution to the problem. Labour should tax the rich and direct resources into the FE sector. ■

For details of Southwark college pickets, the national march, messages of support, donations etc.: Southwark College strike centre, Industrial Mission, 27 Blackfriars Rd, London SE1. Tel: 0171 401 8753. Cheques payable to Southwark College NATFHE Strike Fund.

BUILDING WORKERS: Skills shortage, PAYE

Summer offensive on the sites

THE STAGE is set for a summer of confrontation between construction workers and the employers. A building boom, a skills shortage and the recent move to end "bogus self-employment" on the sites have already provoked a rash of strikes and walkouts. Many have been led by rank and file building workers. Some have ended in outright victory.

Last month 180 electricians working for contractor Drake & Scull on London's Jubilee Line Extension (JLE) walked out, winning reinstatement for 11 workers sacked after management tried to victimise AEEU activists. Earlier this year Drake & Scull electricians won pay parity with other craft workers on JLE subcontracts after a walkout.

Just along the River Thames, 40 electricians were sacked after subcontractor Monitoring Systems went bust. The employer initially offered them nothing. But when pickets managed to turn away concrete lorries to London Underground's Bakerloo Line site at Jubilee Gardens – costing the clients £50,000 in one morning – London Underground stumped up all their lost wages plus £250 compensation.

Action

Rank and file direct action is having the same effect beyond London. At the Avonmouth Bridge site in Bristol, 47 workers were offered reinstatement by Costain after a walkout over denial of a tea break. The bosses relented after workers brought in from the North East

to scab also refused to work.

The background to this rash of disputes is a combination of economic pressures on the bosses.

Having bumped along in recession for longer than any industry, construction is now booming. There are Millennium Projects, Private Finance projects, Lottery-funded projects and huge transport jobs like the JLE, the Docklands Light Railway extension, plus a new house building surge. The only problem is that they've all come at once, they all have to be finished by the year 2000, and half a million construction jobs were destroyed in the recession.

This has created a massive skills shortage, exacerbated by a building boom in Ireland. It is a shortage worsened by the construction industry's terrible training record; employers are reluctant to take on apprentices.

The skills shortage means that where workers are prepared to fight back they can win significant pay increases and improved conditions. The task now is to use this favourable situation to make a massive and permanent leap forward for all construction workers – not just the skilled and qualified and those in London – by winning permanent rights and wage structures.

At present union leaders – who negotiate a basic national rate with the big employers – are threatening to reject a four-year deal that consolidates building and civil engineering wages into one scale, and bonuses into the main wage. There is a real danger that militants will

ignore the importance of these negotiations, in favour of creating local deals on the ground.

The strength of militancy on the London sites, which can win very good local deals, coupled with the relative dislocation of the rank and file from the bureaucrats and craft divisions within the unions, mean that national deals can seem of little relevance to the majority of building workers. But the national negotiations do set a standard, often a minimum, within the industry.

The union bureaucrats should be forced to rip up the deal and start afresh, fighting for a massive pay rise and permanent employment rights for all (with paid holidays and sick leave at the top of the agenda). We need a two-pronged attack: locally, on the sites, and nationally through taking over and transforming the official union leaderships.

Revival

In London, the revival of militancy has led to some left talking from union leaders, and the revival of the rank and file London Joint Sites Committee (JSC). It is not all plain sailing: the latest issue of the JSC's paper, *The Builder's Crack*, cites cases of builders being sacked, victimised, having their wages cut and – despite a fightback – losing. And, as the boom heats up, so does the tempo of deaths and injuries caused by contractors cutting health and safety corners.

Every building worker should get active, join the JSC and build a delegate structure, with direct representation of every site. Without doubt, this summer will see one or more big confrontations on the flagship sites in London. When that happens rank and file construction workers need to force the official unions to back the strikes. There needs to be mass picketing and flying pickets to launch a London-wide construction strike that can win the demands the JSC is fighting for:

- £100 a day minimum, now!
- Everyone on the cards (PAYE), with no cut in pay!
- Ban asbestos, jail bosses who kill building workers, safety reps on every job!
- Full employment rights for all construction workers!
- Unionise the industry!
- 30 minutes breakfast, 30 minutes lunch – minimum!
- Notice when laid off: one day's notice after one week's work; one week's notice after one month's work!

Contact the JSC on 0181 427 8480

Struggle on the cards

ADDING TO the construction bosses' nightmares is the Inland Revenue's blitz against "bogus self-employment". Since 1 April this year the Inland Revenue has been operating new rules to force construction firms to take workers "on the cards" instead of treating them as self-employed and thus avoiding deducting tax, granting employment rights and paying national insurance.

Paradoxically, this has long been one of the demands of the unions. But the Tories brought it in as part of a new strategy outlined in the 1993 Latham Report.

The Thatcher "revolution", giving self-employed status to hundreds of thousands of skilled workers, and encouraging the growth of small

subcontractors, backfired.

When the recession came in the early 1990s, the construction capitalists could not cut costs like factory owners: instead of "workers" and "unions" they had to do battle with an army of small businesses, gathered in federations with political clout and with more legal rights than any union.

The Latham Report advocates nothing less than what Marxists would call the "re-proletarianisation" of the construction industry.

The move to PAYE has led to subcontractors – the small firms who actually hire most construction labour – attempting to force workers to bear the cost of the changes. They are trying to cut wages, rather than paying national insurance themselves. ■



Workers on the Jubilee Line extension successfully stopped the sacking of union activists by going out on strike unofficially.



Youth: the future of the unions

The Transport and General Workers Union (T&G) have launched a Summer Organising Initiative targeting workers under 30 in the hotel and catering industry.

Lisa, a T&G member in London, attended a young organisers training weekend as part of the Initiative.

THE T&G have been trying to organise young people over the last couple of years. A year ago they appointed two new recruitment officers; one specifically to recruit women and one to recruit women and young people.

The weekend of training organised by the T&G was focused on recruiting young people to the union. The weekend was useful, though it was clear that the union leadership has a different agenda to many of the activists.

The most interesting part of the weekend was sharing experiences with other young workers, hearing about struggles and planning some action.

I was particularly interested in attending the weekend because I have worked in the catering industry since I was 16 and I know catering workers are poorly organised.

While union membership as a whole is low at 33%, in the retail, hotel and catering industries only around 10% of the workers are union members. And only 6% of people under 20 hold a union card.

The "service" industries, particularly tourism, are growing rapidly: four out of ten new jobs created in 1995 were in tourism. These jobs are mainly low paid, part-time and casual. The percentage of people staying in their job for less than two years is:

- 29% in total workforce
- 38% in retail
- 46% in hotel and catering

In other words, most people in hotel and catering are "lucky" to keep their jobs for more than two years. In Pizza Hut, for example, staff turnover is 104% over one year. And the statistics are much higher if managers and supervisors are not counted. If you have worked less than two years, you have no employment rights.

Retail

Hotel and Catering is now one of the most dangerous industries to work in, with 472 major injuries (meaning at least three days off) and nearly 3,000 injuries in total reported in 1995. The Government's Health and Safety Executive estimates that the real figure (including unreported cases) is more like four times this amount.

On top of all this, nearly half of those working in Hotel, Catering and Retail earn less than £4.00 an hour. This is a measly two pints of beer or a burger in the West End, where many of these workers are employed.

Many rely on tips to subsidise their wages, giving huge control to an employer over weekly income.

One member of the T&G explained how simply being put on different shifts, in different sections of the restaurant (with no reduction in hours) had meant a real wage cut of around £120 a week – half her wages.

People are beginning to get organised. As was mentioned in last month's Whistleblower, the T&G has made a number of new contacts with work-

places where people have already begun to organise.

Workers at Warner Brothers are keen to organise a campaign around "pay at the price of ticket", which would set their hourly rate at £4.50 an hour. And bar workers at the Bread and Roses pub in Clapham (run by the Workers Beer company) have recently won an agreement of £5.11 an hour – nearly double that of the average pub worker.

Young organisers in the T&G, with the help of the Organising Support Unit, are planning to "Turn up the Heat" on bad employers with a summer unionisation drive.

The focus will begin on Covent Garden where there's a huge concentration of expensive pubs, restaurants and theatres – most of which treat their staff appallingly.

Discount

We're also planning to focus on a shopping and entertainment centre in Dagenham in East London. Focusing on places like Warner Brothers and a number of fast food chains, this will be supported by some T&G activists working at the Ford plant nearby.

The T&G already has a discount rate for part-timers, those on benefits and workers under 18, which is half that of normal union dues. There is also a 25p a week rate for under 21s that are unemployed or on Government "training" schemes.

This will be great for organising the huge number of unemployed and low paid youth. Union leaders will be forced to take up issues such as the new Job Seekers Allowance, which is forcing more and more into a lifetime of poverty pay.

Now more than ever (in my working lifetime anyway) is the time for young trade unionists, activists and socialists to make sure the organising drives are a real success. We don't just want paper union members. We want young activists to fight back against the years of worsening pay and conditions throughout this country.

We want our union leaders to really put their money and support where their mouth is – to really take on the employers that have forced us into poverty and insecurity.

The opportunity is huge. Youth today know what it's like to be silenced by our bosses. But we don't know what it is to be silenced by a union leadership that is promising a "new union" and better organised workplaces, fighting for a better future.

As the union leaders now proclaim – the youth are the future of the new union movement.

Thankfully, our vision of the future union movement is vastly different to theirs. A union movement that is more organised, democratic, strong and willing to fight. We want a movement that supports the courageous struggles of the Liverpool dockers and Hillingdon Hospital workers. This is the kind of union movement which will recruit youth.

Begin the fightback now! Join your union and get organised! ■

WELFARE STATE: Single mothers are Blair's first target

Bringing back the poor law

Tony Blair has launched an attack on single parents' right to benefit. It is just the beginning of a massive onslaught on the whole welfare state, writes Colin Lloyd.

AFTER ITS last landslide, in 1945, Labour declared war on the "five giants" that stalked the land: poverty, homelessness, sickness, ignorance and unemployment.

To kill these "giants" Labour put in place state pensions, cheap public housing, the NHS, a massively expanded education system, the national insurance scheme and universal welfare benefits. Together these formed the basis of the welfare state.

Today the capitalists are demanding an end to the welfare state. They say Britain "cannot afford" its £90bn annual benefits' bill. The same goes for the NHS and, most of all, the state pensions scheme.

Throughout 18 years of Tory attacks neither Thatcher nor Major dared to make a direct onslaught on the main principle behind the welfare state – a universal health and benefit system. So, despite years of penny-pinching cuts in pensions and benefits the welfare state bill grew under Tory rule. Mass unemployment, the breakup of communities, relentless casualisation and low pay at work have seen to that.

But now, with Labour in power and desperate to please big business, the bosses have spied their chance. They are queuing up to "advise" Blair on how to dismantle the welfare state. Blair's new ministers have welcomed them with open arms.

Enemy

The teachers' enemy number one, Tory Chris Woodhead, has been given a powerful role in education policy. Right-wing maverick Frank Field has been appointed number two to Harriet Harman in charge of Social Security. Barclays Bank chief Martin Taylor has been put in charge of a task force to transform the tax and benefit systems. Peter Jarvis, Whitbread's £512 an hour chief executive, has been tipped for a place on the low pay commission. Former Tory Alan Howarth is to be a health minister.

Blair has assembled this modern equivalent of a poor-law relief board for one reason: a co-ordinated assault on the entire welfare system and its eventual replacement with the principle of "user pays" in everything from health to pensions and education.

The need for this dramatic change is dictated by New Labour's commitment to maintaining and deepening what the economists call "the flexible labour market". So that Sainsbury's, Pall Mall, Group 4 and Lucky Goldstar can carry on coining huge profits, the workforce has to be made up of low paid, part-time, temporary workers with no permanent job rights and no unions.

To force workers into these low paid jobs their rights to dole and housing benefit must be drastically cut back.



"Get a job or we'll cut your dole" – Blair's message to millions

Together these benefits can be more than they can earn at work, after travel costs and tax are calculated.

The future for the lowest paid under capitalism is bleak. It is a choice between poverty level benefits or a degrading low paid job. Politicians like Tony Blair know that the middle classes, on whom they depend and appeal to for electoral support, hate two things more than anything else: the "underclass" and income tax. The new onslaught on the welfare state is aimed at killing two birds with one stone.

Principle

The old Christian principle that "the devil makes work for idle hands" was first used to justify the 19th century workhouse. Now it is the principle behind forcing the riot-prone and crime susceptible "underclass" into long shifts stacking shelves at Tesco.

At the same time, reducing the social security bill will allow Labour to carry on cutting taxes so the middle class can spend more on life's luxuries. The drives of the middle classes will overflow with Mondeos. The lives of the poorest workers will overflow with misery.

The means by which Blair expects to carry out this transformation is the return to "contributory" benefits, combined with draconian rules limiting access to benefits.

Battleground

The welfare state has always been a battleground of the class struggle. Working class pressure in 1945 ensured that some schemes – like health – initially designed to be "contributory" were actually paid for through direct taxation.

Other contributory schemes like National Insurance demanded a payment from the bosses as well as the workers. Though large numbers of well paid, full time workers have taken out contributory pensions (both state run and private) the basic pension remains funded from taxation.

Blair's welfare hatchet-men have targeted the principle of "user contributions" as one key to the future funding of welfare.

Blair is planning not for this year but

for two years down the line and into the second Labour term in office. As yet much of the policy debate revolves around speculation: think-tanks and Royal Commissions. But the key attacks taking shape include:

- Compulsory contributory pensions and the phasing out of the free state pension. This is exactly what the Tories threatened before the election and what Labour slammed them for. Now Frank Field has welcomed to Britain the right wing Chilean politician José Pinera, who has pioneered a "pay as you go" private pension scheme.

- Work for dole: Labour's "Welfare to work" plan, which aims to take 250,000 young people off the unemployment register over the next three years, is little more than a revamped US-style workfare scheme. Employers will be given £60 a week per person they employ. Labour employment minister, Andrew Smith, has spouted Blair-speak about "quality", "monitoring", "task forces" and "helplines". What he has not done is explain where the jobs will come from that are not simply sweeping up and hod carrying.

Ordained

- Forcing single mothers to work: for years Frank Field has regarded this as his divinely ordained mission in life. Now Blair has announced new rules to force single parents with kids over the age of four to look for work or see benefits cut. There are 600,000 single parents with kids under 16 who do not work. Forcing them to accept menial jobs or stop gap "training" could reduce the social security bill by up to £7bn a year. But what is the human cost? It can only be done by reducing benefits to those who cannot work because they cannot afford the exorbitant costs of childcare. And without providing free childcare what is supposed to happen to the children when their parents are forced into work through cuts in benefit?

- Learning accounts: Labour plans to individualise state spending on education by dividing it into "individual learning accounts" that we can draw on through life. While this may seem appealing to the millions of adults who

were denied a second chance at a higher education it can mean only one thing from a government determined to stick to Tory spending limits. Existing funds will be diluted even further and then, somewhere down the line, we will be given the opportunity to "contribute" to our learning accounts through deductions from our wages. The same principle is already there in Labour's plans for a "graduate tax". Student grants and loans will be abolished and replaced with a 2% extra tax on graduates earning more than £15,000 a year. Another glimpse of what a learning account means came with the Tory nursery voucher scheme: those with money can "top up" the account's contribution to gain first class education; everybody else travels second class.

Tax

The other main lever open to Blair in the task of forcing us to work for a pittance is tax. Here Blair's think-tanks are still thinking. There is a massive tax obstacle to poorly-paid workers that kicks in just at the point on the scale where family credit gets stopped.

According to the *Economist* 645,000 people are in a trap that means for every pound extra they earn, 70p is taken away in benefit reductions and tax obligations. There are only two solutions: push the cut-off point for benefits up or lower it. But the former would bring masses more people into benefit entitlement with just a slight increase in the threshold – such is the state of poverty in Britain today. That would cost the Treasury billions and is thus ruled out.

So the main changes we can expect are the introduction of a 10% tax rate for low paid workers and a minimum wage that takes just about exactly the 600,000 caught in the benefit trap into £3-an hour slave labour.

In 10 years time, unless we resist these changes, we might come to see the Thatcher/Major years as simply the transition between the post-war welfare state and a neo-liberal nightmare where the 1930s "giants" of real hunger, homelessness, rising ill health and illiteracy stalk the land with bigger strides than ever.

Blair could, if his reforms go unopposed, turn the "flexible labour force" created in the Tory years into a new army of impoverished waged workers, forced – as in the USA – to enter an expanded stratum of working poor.

Let the US example spell out the danger loud and clear: since Clinton came to power 2.8 million people have been forced off welfare and into low paid jobs through exactly the mix of tax "incentives" and benefit cuts that Blair wants. They are still poor. Only now they work six, eight or ten hours every day, boosting the profits of the bullying bosses, for little more than they once received on benefit.

Answer

So what is the answer?

Across the labour movement the slogan "defend the welfare state" has become so commonplace during the Tory years that activists can forget that in fact the welfare state is shoddy, degrading and inadequate.

The NHS may retain its positive image among millions of users, but there is little positive identification with a DSS office among its "clients". Likewise, while state pensions remain the only lifeline for millions of elderly people, many of those in work have resigned themselves to paying £50 a month for life into a private pension, convinced that by the time they retire a living state pension will be a long lost memory.

Some of Labour's welfare "radicals" are, like Frank Field, right-wing religious nutters born and bred. Many others are simply reformists who have run out of answers to the central question facing all reformists: where does the money come from?

To win the battle within the labour movement against Blair's vision of a "contributory" welfare system that shifts the cost of benefits onto the poor themselves, we have to outline a clear answer to the crisis of the welfare state.

Full employment

The answer lies in an objective that was key to the pioneers of the welfare state and long abandoned by reformists left or right: full employment.

In one sense Harriet Harman is right: the best welfare is a job – but not the kind of part-time, low-paid, insecure job she has in mind. To bring back full employment would mean exercising the kind of direction, planning and control over the economy Labour has totally abandoned. It would mean taking vast swathes of industry into state ownership, taxing the rich and deploying society's wealth to ensure jobs for all.

Blair has no intention of taking such measures. He is committed to defending capitalism, not undermining it.

Yet, under capitalism, even the finest welfare state can only patch up the injuries caused by that rotten system. Sickness is, in large part, a product of poverty. So too, in large measure, is educational under-achievement. The best hospitals and schools in the world can only treat the symptoms, not cure the disease. Only a socialist state, not capitalist welfare, can really cure the disease.

That said, we have to fight Blair whenever he attacks the principles of the welfare state from the right: services and benefits must be universally available and free at the point of need. These should be paid for directly from taxation.

Contributory schemes like National Insurance should be steeply weighted so that the majority is raised from the employers and ultimately replaced with a comprehensive unemployment and sickness benefit scheme financed from direct taxation.

What all this points to, as inexorably as the finger on the Lottery ads, is that somebody has to pay. Instead of making the workers pay through contributions, instead of creating a two tier system with top ups and enhanced benefits for those with the income to invest, we need to make the big capitalist corporations pay through a steeply progressive profit tax and by taking their property directly into state ownership, without compensation.

Unless we do this, things won't get better, as Blair promised – they'll get a whole lot worse. ■

Girl Power

Is the future spice?



Karen Petrie reviews
Girl Power – how to get what you really really want (£7.99)

GIRL POWER has shot to No. 4 in the best-sellers list – and that's even before this review.

This is the "official" Spice Girls book designed to cash in on their global market success in the music business. It guarantees to tell you everything you want to know about "being a star, being yourself, living large and taking on the world."

So what are the Spice Girls all about? Are they just a cynically manufactured girl band or are they the new feminist icons for a growing number of young women?

I despise the Spice Girls. I despise them because they are no talent, Union Jack wavers who admire Margaret Thatcher. But I am interested in what it is about them that so many young women and girls find appealing. So I went out and bought the book.

The format is predictable. Lots of pho-

tographs of the Spice Girls looking sexy – all tits and ass. Don't get me wrong, I like looking at sexy photographs of women, but these images are the same old boring stereotypes that young women have been forced into for years. These images are male, heterosexual fantasies for the not quite Loaded generation.

Then we have the "in-depth" personal interviews with the Spice babes: Emma, Mel B, Mel C, Vicky and Geri. This is where we learn about what matters to them, and what they mean by "Girl Power".

The thrust of this philosophy is: all us girls should stick together and support each other. You should believe in yourself and control your own life. You can do anything if you put your mind to it (you can be a Spice Girl too!).

There is nothing new about the idea that sheer determination and will power can bring you success. Every girl grows up wanting to be a dancer, actress, singer, star. After all, the Spices came from humble working class and lower middle class homes. They are a "rags to riches" story for the 1990s. This is no doubt part of the secret of their success.

The Spice Girls describe themselves as feminists. Does this mean that they stand up for women's rights? If women's rights can be reduced to the right to wear a micro-skirt or a wonderbra then they are clearly in the vanguard. As Emma informs us:

"Of course I'm a feminist. But I could never burn my wonderbra. I'm nothing without it!"

Mel C tells us straight:

"This is the new attitude. Girls are taking control. If you want to wear a short skirt, then you go on and wear it."

They go to great lengths to explain how they are not "pop stars" because they refuse to fit into the image of what the music industry expects them to be. This assertion is laughable. The Spice Girls most likely chose their images from a selection on offer on the drawing board

of a young male executive in the marketing department of which ever record company decided it was time for a female version of Boyzone.

Each Spice girl has been constructed to appeal to every version of the male fantasy of female sexuality. You have Emma (Baby Spice), the virginal, innocent, childlike sex object; Mel C (Sporty Spice), the fit type who can perform gymnastics under the sheets; Mel B – exotic, wild and promiscuous, (fitting in nicely with racist stereotypes of black women); Vicky (Posh Spice) – the sophisticated lady, hard to get, classy type; finally Geri – big tits, sexually up front, with brains as well!

These girls make mid-1980s Madonna look "really, really" revolutionary.

They are one-dimensional, vacuous characters. They are plastic dolls, who have been moulded on the EMI/Sony/Virgin assembly lines, predominantly owned and managed by men. They may now have some serious money, but they haven't got any real power in their industry. As soon as this commodity loses its market value, the Spice Girls will be discarded as quickly as they were put together.

Of course, the media's obsession with the Spices isn't just about boosting sales. They are selling young women a con: that anything is possible if you put your mind to it. And then you grow up and realise that the careers officer doesn't have a training course in "stardom", but only a GNVQ in hairdressing, retail, health or social care.

If you are lucky enough to get a job, you go to work and realise that you have very little "girl power". You get paid less than men, are less likely to get promoted and your boss can sack you when he no longer needs you.

Being a young working class woman in Britain means having to get the permission of two doctors before you can have an abortion. It means having to choose between bringing your children up on the dole or paying £150 a week on child care. Wearing a won-

GIRL POWER IS WHEN...

You help a guy with his bag

You and your mates reply to wolf whistles by shouting "Get your arse out!"

You wear high heels and think on your feet

You know you can do it and nothing's going to stop you

You don't wait around for him to call

You stick with your mates and they stick with you

You're loud and proud even when you've broken out in spots

You believe in yourself and control your own life

GIRL POWER!

Page 6 – The Spice Girls tell it like it is

derbra or a short skirt isn't going to change things for these young women.

Fighting against sexism and discrimination isn't just a matter of changing the way we look. If girls are going to get real power it means challenging the power of the rich. Despite all their talk of "girl power" the Spice Girls support this system that keeps women in poverty. That is why I despise them.

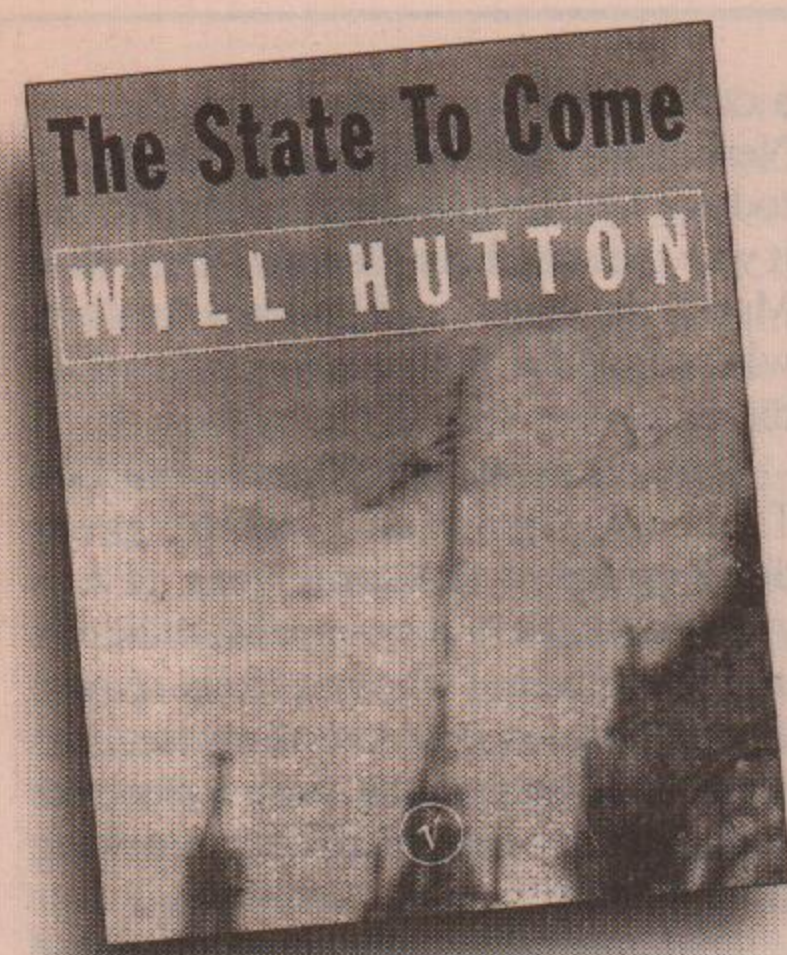
Geri complains that some girls don't understand that she "feels like a freedom fighter trying to give girls the right to

express themselves." She comments how at a Blur concert, "one girl stuck two fingers up at me. I thought 'where's your girl power?' ..."

I would have done the same to Geri. I have nothing in common with her or her Spice mates since they became "stars". I don't drive an MGB 1967 Roadster convertible with silver spokes, I can't afford to pay off the mortgage on my mum's house if she gets made redundant, and I think there is more to being a woman than wearing a wonderbra. ■

Hutton's dreaming

The state that will never be



Bill Jenkins reviews
The State To Come
by Will Hutton
(Vintage, £4.99)

WILL HUTTON wrote this book in a hurry and it shows. Published to coincide with New Labour's election victory, it is the sequel to his surprise best-seller *The State We're In*. Hutton believes it's time for a change, and this slim volume sketches his views on what is wrong

with Britain and how to fix it.

Hutton is editor of the *Observer* and a long-time Keynesian economics commentator. He is a liberal market reformist. He is certainly no socialist. Hutton believes the age of "utopian ideologies" is dead. He concentrates on a series of simple practical reforms that he believes would make Britain a better place and alleviate the growing inequality, uncertainty and fear that make up much of the Conservative legacy.

Following the publication of *The State We're In*, which advocated the adoption of "stakeholder" capitalism based on the German model, Hutton was widely seen as a man who had Tony Blair's ear. Two years later, it is clear that Labour's rightward march under Blair has continued so rapidly as to leave even Hutton far behind.

Hutton voices the worry that, "New Labour... will remain imprisoned by the ideas that it has learned to ape, and will govern too much within the parameters laid down by its predecessors." He calls for higher rates of public expenditure and income tax.

Even so, his reformist remedies are not really so far removed from the Conservative status quo he claims to be attacking. Hutton's disagreements with the classical political economists of free

market capitalism are not about the desirability of the market, but about the sources of market distortion. Instead of the trade unions, so despised by Friedman and Hayek, the main enemy for Hutton is "contract capitalism".

He recognises the possibility of crisis inherent in the system:

"Markets should be envisioned not as a means to produce successive points of balance with an inbuilt tendency to regulate themselves, but as in a constant state of reflexive experimentation with no point of balance."

His answer to market distortions is incredibly naive. It can be summed up in one word: trust – "The ethic of trust is equally vital in the wider economy and wider society." High levels of trust create a virtuous circle of high investment and growth in sales.

Britain still suffers from being an untrusting society. Such financial institutions as pension funds, insurance companies and unit trusts are all committed to maximising short-term returns on their capital. The operation of the London Stock Exchange encourages "predatory takeovers". So how does Hutton propose to create a cultural shift?

Here he gets even more vague:

"The response is not to call for the socialisation of capitalism, big gov-

ernment or a new corporatism, rather it is to design institutions, systems and a wider architecture which creates a better economic and social balance."

In practice this boils down to two significant measures. One would curb the power wielded by investment fund managers. The other would change the tax regime through introducing an across the board capital gains tax.

Hutton's vision goes beyond tinkering with the regulation of the City of London. He advocates constitutional reform and calls for "empowering cities and regions" to give local communities "real leverage over their economic base."

He sees himself as a defender of some kind of universal welfare state, but hedged with provisos. Hutton wants an NHS funded by taxation, although the Tories' market-based "reforms" should not be "torn up". He supports a £4 billion spending programme to improve the standard of comprehensive education, while "private schools' fiscal privileges need to be made conditional on their contribution to local educational needs and the savings invested in the state system." He straddles a similar line on state pensions and social security in general.

Hutton's manifesto would be a suitable programme for Blair's supposed "radical centre", but for the fact that Blair, Brown and his inner circle have publicly rejected many of his paltry reforms already. Even so, these reforms would not begin to address the scale of the problems confronting UK plc and its working class employees.

Capitalism is a sick system and its British model is faring particularly badly. It thrives on the poverty and oppression of the working class, not as an unintended by-product of an untrusting culture, but as a key prerequisite for its survival and success.

Across Europe, the capitalists – not just their pension fund managers – are pursuing austerity programmes designed to create the kind of insecure, flexible, low-paid and unprotected working class that was the main achievement of the Thatcherite offensive.

Hutton's capitalism is one without class struggle. His book implores us to trust each other and turn a complete blind eye to the realities of a capitalism that makes us redundant and attacks our pay and conditions. It offers minor reforms where major surgery is needed.

This book tells us very little about the real state to come because it isn't based on the real state we're in. ■

Make this a union summer

Rebuilding the unions

BRITISH TRADE unions underwent a severe crisis in the 1980s. Membership slumped, from 12.2 million in 1979 to 6.5 million today. Union density – the proportion of union members in the workforce – dropped from over 50% in the late 1970s to just 33% today.

Part of this collapse was due to the unemployment unleashed by Thatcher's slump policies. But that cannot be the whole explanation. We should not let the trade union bureaucracy – the highly paid, privileged and unaccountable full time officials who run the unions – use unemployment as an excuse for their miserable failure to recruit to the unions over the last 18 years.

In that period, millions of people entered the workforce. The Trade Union Congress (TUC) estimates there are 10.7 million non-union workers in non-unionised sectors and another 3.6 million unorganised workers in unionised workplaces.

Young workers in particular were not recruited. Only 24% of workers in their twenties are in unions and only 6% of workers under 20 have joined up. Yet they are the most vulnerable, have the fewest employment rights and receive the worst pay. They are a natural reservoir of support for trade unions since they need them most. But the unions have ignored them.

The same is true for the many part-time workers, mainly women, and casual workers, frequently immigrants. They, too, have been neglected by the unions.

The main reason for today's low membership figures was not unemployment. It was the political failure of the union bureaucracy to fight to win new members. On top of this, they also failed to defend those already in unions against the Tory onslaught: the anti-union laws; the direct attacks on the organised strength of key sections of workers like the miners and the dockers; the Tories' insistence that bosses had a right to maximise their profits and that unions were an "obstacle" that had to be ruthlessly dealt with.

At every key moment the union leaders gave in to the Tories, either through inaction (the refusal to mount a campaign against the various anti-union laws) or through treachery and cowardice (the betrayal of the miners, dockers and other workers who did fight back). Politically, the union leaders conceded to the Tories that unions were a problem.

They supported new, moderate, non-political forms of trade unionism – "new realism", "service unionism", even a self-imposed back seat in the political party they funded, New Labour – and agreed that strikes were old fashioned. Unions even changed their names to shed the "old" image of militancy. The only threat they fought was that falling numbers would cut their own fat salaries. Instead of fighting for recruitment, though, they engineered mergers between unions.

Each retreat meant lost members. Each betrayal put off potential recruits. It reached the point where some bosses felt confident enough to actually drive unions out of workplaces where they had been strong. This was particularly rife in the print industry following Rupert Murdoch's victory over the News International strikers in 1986. But it also occurred in the financial services sector and, famously, at GCHQ (where Labour has just restored the right to belong to an independent trade union).

Once again, the union leaders bear the responsibility for the decline that followed. They allowed the bosses to get away with it without waging a single significant fight. Today, the sacked Liverpool dockers are fighting against the transformation of their jobs into

After 18 years of decline, unions are discussing ways of stopping the rot. Recruitment conferences and campaigns are being organised throughout the labour movement. Labour's promise to enforce legal recognition for unions in workplaces where a majority vote for it has encouraged this unionisation drive. **Mark Harrison** outlines the case for waging this drive on a class struggle basis.

casual non-union labour. Their union, the TGWU, has not even offered them the protection of official support in a dispute that could determine the fate of unionisation in every port in the land.

When workers on the oil rigs of the North Sea built an organisation – the Offshore Industry Liaison Committee (OILC) – to tackle the oil giants who were refusing recognition, the leaders of the engineering union (AEEU) and others, with the backing of the TUC, deliberately knifed them in the back.

The OILC was too militant, was under too much rank and file control and was just too popular with the offshore workers for the time serving officials. As the latest *Blowout*, the OILC magazine, puts it:

At the moment those campaigns are too limited. They are mainly aimed at firms where unions are already recognised.

"All that is now left of the TUC's aspirations for a presence offshore are a few 'kid-on' agreements . . . which allow a few officials to quietly eke out a career in relative obscurity unhindered by unwelcome attention from their London-based executives."

Even though they helped to create the problem, the union leaders are worried by the loss of members. If it doesn't stop, more and more bosses could simply ignore them. The arrival of Labour in government, despite the

toning down of its trade union connections, has created a new mood among the officials about reversing the decline. Labour's promise to compel employers to grant union recognition in workplaces where a majority vote for it marks a real break with the Tories' attitudes and policies.

Typically, Blair chose not to make this new law a priority for the first 18 months of his government. Nevertheless, the union leaders are aiming to use the changed climate to push forward a limited unionisation drive. Prior to the election, the TUC sponsored an "Organising for Growth" conference, addressed by trade union leaders from the USA who had carried out successful recruitment campaigns. In particular, both the TUC and the affiliated unions, recognised that they have to divert resources towards recruitment. TUC leader John Monks announced:

"We must sharpen our appeal, be strategic in our efforts and – when it comes to resources for organising – put our money where our mouth is."

This has spurred a number of unions into action, with the two big general unions, the TGWU and the GMB, setting recruitment campaigns into motion. At the moment those campaigns are too limited. They are mainly aimed at firms where unions are already recognised. That is, they want to bring in those workers who benefit from union agreed deals but who are not in the union.

Of course, such workers should be unionised, but this is the soft option. A real breakthrough will only come in the non-unionised sectors. Victories here can change the whole balance of forces, opening the way to a real revival of the organised working class movement,



Celebrating the Labour victory at the Mayday celebrations in Finsbury Park

to militancy and to socialism.

Socialists need to be at the forefront of every unionisation drive. We welcome every campaign launched by the bureaucracy and every pro-union recognition move made by Labour. We seek to take them further, to use the organising drives to create militant, class struggle unions democratically controlled by their members and capable of winning

battles against the employers.

This is not, as the bureaucrats will claim, a "sectarian" intervention by "Trotskyites" for their own nefarious purposes. It is a recognition that only the socialists, the revolutionaries, have learnt the lessons from past defeats and decline and can provide answers and methods of organising that will avoid such defeats in the future. ■

1889: The lessons of history

The new unions



One of the great dockers' demonstrations in London 1889

IN BRITAIN, in the 1880s, the old craft unions were decomposing. Their top hatted officials had long since renounced strikes in favour of turning the unions into friendly societies more concerned with funeral funds than fighting funds. The great mass of workers were unorganised.

Then came New Unionism. The oppressed match girls, the desperately exploited gas workers, the ragged dockers hired like pack animals on a daily basis – suddenly it was these workers who came into the line of battle, who built fresh, militant and truly mass organisations and who radically reshaped British trade unionism as it prepared to enter the twentieth century. They were low paid, unskilled and had been kept out of the unions for decades.

Around the slogans of a minimum wage and an eight hour day, it was a small minority of socialists who identified with these workers, helped them build their organisations and gave

a coherent voice to their grievances. New realist John Edmonds, leader of today's GMB, might like to forget it, but it was the socialists Eleanor Marx, Karl Marx's daughter, and Edward Aveling, who played a major role in forming his union back in 1889.

The socialists Tom Mann and Ben Tillet organised and led the great dock strike of the same year. It was young socialist and syndicalist militants in the coal mines who paved the way to the first national union of miners, the union that has played such a decisive and glorious role in British working class history.

The methods used to build these unions were very different from those employed by the trade union bureaucrats, who, then as now, preferred to curry favour with "public opinion" rather than mould that opinion through a display of class strength and solidarity.

Today, the GMB of John Edmonds has a sweetheart deal with the lingerie manufacturer Playtex. Its agreement with management appeals to workers to "play a positive role in the continuing spirit of co-operation between Playtex and the GMB."

In the late 1880s, Tom Mann expressed a very different approach. Condemning the craft union bureaucrats of his day and pointing to the spirit

s from below

How to organise

SOME UNIONS, like the T&G, are already setting up recruitment campaigns. If you can, join one of these – they can provide leaflets and support. But, whether in a campaign or organising where you work:

Make the case for trade union organisation. A survey by Warwick University revealed that only one in three new members join a union on their own initiative. Most have to be convinced – but most can be won over when they see that the union is a weapon against the bosses. Seventy two per cent of the 11,000 new members surveyed said they joined to get support at work and 36% joined to get better pay and conditions. Only 4% gave financial services as their reason and these were mainly people from managerial grades.

Strength

Make the case for class struggle unions. Collective strength works:

- unionised manual workers, on average, get 9% higher pay than non-unionised workers;

- 63% of unionised workers get 25 days or more paid holidays; only 32% of the non-unionised workforce get this amount of time off;

- union health and safety reps ensure that there is a lower accident rate in unionised workplaces; non-unionised workplaces suffer twice the rate of accidents in unionised ones;

- job security, or, in the worst case, decent redundancy pay, is non-existent in the non-unionised workforce; 75% of the unionised workforce are governed by redundancy consultation procedures and 80% receive higher redundancy pay than their non-union counterparts;

- individual protection against management does not exist if you are not in a union; by contrast, last year the unions' legal departments won £5 million in compensation for workers unfairly dismissed and £304 million for workers who suffered accidents and injuries at work.

The arguments are clear – but using

them to build powerful campaigns aimed at the non-unionised workforce is another matter. Usually, the bureaucrats prefer to get management to let them talk to non-union members. This may work where some sort of recognition agreement already exists, but it is useless where there is an anti-union boss ruling over a non-unionised workforce.

If an agreement exists, use it to the full to get to the workforce. If it doesn't:

- demand that the union acts on John Monks' words and puts its money where its mouth is; get funds for a campaign, for publicity, posters, research resources; get officials – under the control of all members of the campaign team, not as "bosses" of that team – who can devote full time resources to the campaign;

- select a limited target for unionisation, but one that is important and could serve as a beacon for the entire sector if it is successfully organised; for example in catering a key hotel chain (or a part of such a chain) or branch outlets of one of the big brewery companies;

- start the campaign with publicity about the issues confronting the workers involved, not about general platitudes; it's no good calling for "solidarity" in an industry where nobody is organised. Find out about pay, contracts, working conditions, shift patterns, and the record of the management, about examples of its rotten practices; find out about the workforce, its gender, age and racial profile, this will help the union select the best people for the job of organising, guide you if you need leaflets produced in languages other than English etc.;

- once a target has been selected, carry out publicity stunts, leafletting campaigns etc., in the area; if this results in contacts discuss the issues with them only in a safe environment where they will not be seen talking to the union; try to recruit them; if they are on low wages demand reduced rates of subs for their union membership;

- if at all possible get union volunteers into the workplace; this is difficult but not impossible;

- once there are union members inside (or if you are organising in your own workplace) carry out careful (in the first stage undercover) recruitment activities; don't try to launch action straight away, you could easily be victimised; build up organisation first; fix meetings in a safe environment and at convenient times; make the organisation democratic, keeping members fully informed, participating as equals in union affairs and, above all, in control of their own organisation;

- the last survey of workplace and industrial relations (1990) found that the most important people for organising and recruiting to unions were shop stewards, but only 38% of all workplaces had stewards; use a unionisation drive to get new stewards; the TGWU did this at a brewery recently and two new stewards stepped forward as a result; ensure that the union provides full free assistance for the union members – training for stewards at appropriate times, legal advice, funds for activity etc.;

- once the union is in place, prepare for a campaign around recognition and the key issues in the workplace. Contact any other unionised sectors of the same or similar industries, the suppliers etc., to get support and information; contact the local Labour MP (nearly everywhere has one now!) to demand

support for recognition if the majority of the workforce want it;

- make sure you have the support of the majority of workers involved when you formulate your demands on the employer and that you have a cast iron pledge of official support from the unions when you decide to lodge those demands.

The course of struggle will doubtless throw up other tasks and new ideas for organising. But this last point – the formulation of demands and their presentation to the employer – is important. It distinguishes the class struggle union from the sweetheart deal. Our aim is not organisation for its own sake, but organisation in order to win an improvement in pay and conditions. This will mean a conflict with the bosses.

We know this will happen, and we say it openly in advance. The union leaders have a different approach. For them recruitment is its own reward – more members, more subscriptions, more status for the union. This won't bring in the unorganised millions, or hold them. Only union victories over the bosses will do this. The aim of organisation is organising for the inevitable struggle.

Hostile

Even where bosses are not openly anti-union they are hostile, always and everywhere, to the demands of the unions. Why? Because every demand that is in the real interests of the workers is a threatened deduction from the bosses' profits.

That is the inexorable logic of the class struggle. It is the reality behind the strikes today by Magnet and Hillingdon workers, by Liverpool dockers and Project Aerospace workers. It has been the reality behind every dispute over union recognition – from the 1880s to today. Even when a Labour government promises legally enforced recognition (as the last one did through its Schedule 11) the matter still has to be settled in struggle, as was proved by the Grunwick strike of 1977.

When the union leaders say otherwise, when they pretend that joining the union is really just like joining a social club, they are being deceitful. Unionisation means battles with the boss.

Unionisation campaigns conducted with that in mind can win, because they are prepared, they are ready for the battle. Unionisation drives aimed only at showing off growth statistics at the next TUC will end in defeats and discredit for the union.

Campaigns

There is every reason to believe that the unionisation campaigns now taking off, will be led – like all previous ones – by militants and activists; people for whom the 10.7 million in non-union firms are victims of capitalism who can be turned into fighters against it, not a stage army of subs payers to keep the officials in the plush conditions to which they have become accustomed.

Organise the unorganised and mobilise for action!■

Organising for Union Recruitment, £2.45 from LRD Publications, 78 Blackfriars Road, London SE1 8HF. This is packed with valuable information that has informed this article and is recommended reading for all union activists and militants who want to organise a union.

The A to Z of Marxism

is for

Value

BY KEITH HARVEY

"ADDDED VALUE" is one of the management buzzwords of the late 1990s.

Wherever you work you are constantly being told to make improvements that "add value" to the product or service to the customer. Education minister David Blunkett even talks about measuring "value added" during children's education.

All this is ironic, because one of the greatest truisms of bourgeois economics is that "value" does not exist. There is no intrinsic value to any product or service, according to the professional economists, only what it will fetch in the market place.

However, bourgeois economics did not always reject the concept of "value". Before Marx, the most clear sighted economic thinkers, including Adam Smith, believed that all commodities had intrinsic value and that what gave them that value was the fact that they were products of human labour.

It was when Karl Marx used this "labour theory of value" to give the first scientific explanation of exploitation that the professional economists started their vendetta against economic theories based on value.

So what do we mean by "value", and why is it important?

Capitalism is a system in which most things we consume – from "alco-pops" to zimmer frames – take the form of commodities. Commodities are things destined not for immediate consumption by the producers but to be bought and sold. Even our ability to work is a commodity: we sell ourselves into slavery, in eight hour slots, in return for wages.

Every commodity has two elements to it. On the one hand, it has "use-value" in that it satisfies someone's needs; on the other, it has "exchange-value" – that is, it is a product made for sale in the market place.

But what allows the vast range of goods on sale to be compared with each other and exchanged with each other in very definite ratios?

Unless all commodities share something in common regular exchange would be impossible. But as they all differ in shape, size, volume, colour, weight etc., it cannot be the physical quality or use value that allows them to be measured by a common standard.

Perhaps it is simply the "market" that decides – by "supply and demand". Marxists don't deny the operation of supply and demand: when things are in short supply the price goes up, and vice versa. But what happens if supply and demand are equal? Does the price become zero? It certainly does not. So what determines the general price, the average price when, over time, all the fluctuations of the market are taken into account.

Marx, like the bourgeois political economists before him, concluded that the key factor is human labour. All commodities possess a definite quantity of human labour.

In earlier societies it was obvious that the exchange of products or labour was governed by a rough calculation of working-hours. In Japanese villages in the Middle Ages the village accountant kept a great book in which he entered the number of hours of work done by villagers on each others' fields; at the

end of the year the exchanges had to balance.

This transparent operation of a system of values based on quantities of labour depended upon small communities, relatively similar forms of labour and the existence of an authority to balance society's books. But under capitalism this is impossible. A paper-mill worker buying a new car from Rover cannot know exactly whether the £10,000 embodied in the price of the car embodies the same amount of human labour as the £10,000 in wages he or she has earned.

So the system works "behind the backs" of all concerned: the workers, the car showrooms and the bosses of the car factory and the paper mill.

Instead of the actual hours spent on producing the commodities, capitalism – as it developed – began to measure the "average" amounts of labour needed to produce things.

Hence, what is important is not the number of hours spent on making an object but the number of hours of labour necessary to make it in average conditions of productivity in this society at that particular time; the "socially necessary labour time".

If one firm can produce a commodity to the same standards while undercutting the labour time involved in making it, they will gain a short term advantage over the others. Over a longer period, the innovations involved in making that time-cut will reduce the average amount of socially necessary labour time to make both this commodity and all commodities.

In this process some capitalists go bust and money and time is redirected to those activities that the market has decided are in demand and can be sold at a profit. This "law of value" acts like an objective regulator of the economy. While their hired economists in the universities constantly deny its existence, the capitalists' hired economists in the corporate head offices base every calculation on the fact that it does exist.

So why the generalised hostility to the labour theory of value?

The short answer is that it explains exploitation and points the way forward beyond the capitalist system.

Marx used the labour theory of value to show that profits come from workers' labour and workers' labour alone (see *"E is for Exploitation"*, WP 193). He also used it to show how economic crises are rooted in the split between an object's usefulness and its ability to be sold or made for profit (see *"C is for Capital"*, WP 191).

If labour is the sole source of profit the next question is: why do only the capitalists benefit?

If the process of production inevitably produces a bit of extra value, and that extra bit comes only from what the workers contribute, why should the profits go into the pockets of the businessmen? Why shouldn't we use the extra bit – the surplus – to enrich the mass of people? Why don't we calculate human need directly, through democratic planning, instead of meeting it through the market mechanism, where need is only met if you've got the money to pay for it?

The answer is, of course, we should!■

personal view

G.R. McCOLL

The legacy of US racism

BILL CLINTON'S been at it again - crying on television that is. The President of the United States is a master at shedding crocodile tears on autocue. This time he should have been weeping in the bitterest shame.

At a White House ceremony on 16 May Clinton issued a public apology on behalf of the US government to the families of 600 black men. They had been victims of a racist "medical" experiment more sinister than any X-files plot and worthy of a Nazi death camp.

In 1932 the US Public Health Service launched a 40 year programme to chart the course of syphilis up to the death of the sufferer. Hundreds of African-American men, who were already infected, were never told that they had the sexually transmitted disease and went on to infect others. Some of the victims believe that they were actually infected by the doctors involved.

Instead of receiving appropriate treatments, these human "guinea-pigs" endured a useless diet of placebo pills, liquids and

creams. The families of those who died received falsified death certificates. This programme only came to an end when a newspaper revealed in 1972 that men with syphilis were not receiving treatment for the disease, but were instead getting free transport, medical examinations and food stamps. Eventually, the federal government paid compensation to victims' families, which averaged a mere \$52,000 (£21,000) per household.

This grotesque display of racism masquerading as science took place in and around Tuskegee, Alabama. The town is in the deep south; it was a bastion of racial segregation and "Jim Crow" lynch law in the 1930s and for decades after.

Reading reports of the White House ceremony and the Tuskegee experiment led me to reflect on what has really changed. Clearly the Civil Rights Movement of the late 1950s and 1960s did make a difference. Undoubtedly, a substantial black middle class and even bourgeoisie has emerged in the past 30 years, but race remains as central as ever to US politics.

I decided to look beyond the damning statistics about the numbers of black men in the US penal system, the figures for infant mortality in Washington DC and life expectancy for African-American males in Harlem, New York City. Instead, a number of memories from my white middle class background in the north eastern US came flooding back.

I remembered that my parents' house in Buffalo, New York (a former manufacturing centre in long-term decline) seemed to be the only one on our road where black people came through the front door. Admittedly, that wasn't very often. At several other houses, however, black women would arrive in the morning and wait to be let in by a side door. White professionals, many of them good "liberals" in

their own minds, left their black domestic help standing in the cold. And it can get very, very cold in Buffalo.

One incident in 1974, when I was 14, spoke volumes about how my schoolmates saw their parents' servants. One lad, whom I'd always thought clever and likeable, suddenly let loose with a diatribe against his mother's "lazy nigger maid". I suddenly began to appreciate why the black kids at the school distrusted white kids and generally shunned our company.

A few years later I was at university in Boston, a city with a carefully cultivated liberal intellectual image which had been rocked by the so-called busing crisis in the mid-1970s when a judge ordered the desegregation of the inner city's schools.

Right wing vigilante groups sprang up. Racist demagogues won seats on the City Council and young thugs hurled bricks and bottles at buses carrying black kids onto their turf.

The response from sections of the white working class population, especially in mainly Irish south Boston was vicious. Right wing vigilante groups sprang up. Racist demagogues won seats on the City Council and young thugs hurled bricks and bottles at buses carrying black kids onto their turf. One evening a

group of us had decided to go to a party/gig at a disused warehouse in south Boston. The scene was post-punk so most of us stuck out from the local population. A small group of youths aged 10-12 showed a healthy suspicion of these "college weirdos", though this didn't stop them from cadging Marlboros off us and eventually striking up a conversation.

We waited for a couple more friends to arrive from the subway station. One of them was black. The atmosphere changed as soon as he arrived. There was an uneasy silence until one of the kids spat it out: "What's that fuckin' nigger doin' with ya?" The situation turned nasty and we never did hear any bands that night.

When this black friend attempted suicide about 18 months later, I could only think that all too many incidents like that had driven him into despair.

I left the States some 15 years ago and in my time in Britain I've personally witnessed racist incidents far more brutal than what I've just described, but I've never experienced the same kind of palpable fear and pervasive distrust born of racism, that dominates everyday life in the US.

There may be no more Tuskegee-type experiments. But those psychological barriers that arise from the historical legacy of slavery and lynch law, and the continuing reality of segregation in housing and education, mark an important division within the US working class.

Breaking down these barriers demands action in the here and now: to defend what remains of affirmative action, to fight back against police brutality and the criminalisation of black youth - and much more. But ultimately it will require the working class to write a final and very different chapter of the American Revolution. ■

EUROMARCH: Amsterdam 14 June

Build a cross-border fight against austerity

BY DAVID ELLIS

AS THE European ministers make their way to Amsterdam for the Inter Governmental Conference (IGC) their problems are piling up.

Already the French elections have placed a question mark over the single currency: the first round vote against Juppé was a clear signal that workers would refuse to pay the price of monetary union.

Now Germany is in political crisis: the Bundesbank has tried to block finance minister Waigel's decision to revalue gold reserves to meet the Euro-currency convergence criteria. The world's stock markets fear that the harsh convergence criteria, which have foisted four years of austerity on the workers of western Europe, will be fudged at the last minute, creating a monetary system that is doomed to chaos and speedy collapse.

As the politicians ponder these problems they will be faced with another convergence. Tens of thousands of workers and young people will converge on Amsterdam for a massive demo, followed by a huge street party and an alternative IGC. All this will take place only a stone's throw away from the assembled European leaders.

The Euromarch on Saturday 14 June will be the culmination of feeder marches of the unemployed from nearly every country in Europe. The feeder marches have been bringing the issue of a workers' answer to Euro-austerity to the fore among unemployed groups, trade unions, workers' political parties and anti-racist movements.

We need to use the final run-up to 14 June to make sure that everyone involved in the Euromarch goes forward to build on the contacts made, aiming to turn them into the nucleus of real cross-border workers' solidarity in the EU. It is vital that organisational links are made but it is also crucial that fighting policies for the working class are put forward against the austerity plans of the capitalists.

Maastricht

Not least, we must fight against any idea that somehow the failure of the Maastricht Treaty or a collapse of the single currency preparations will, in and of itself, mean a respite in the attacks on our living standards.

The Euromarch in Britain has seen some of its backers present a one-sided anti-Maastricht policy. Glen Voris, a key organiser for the march, was quoted in a Euromarch press release saying:

"We welcome the election of a Labour government but we will oppose any steps it takes towards a single currency and any cuts in health, education, or welfare provision designed to facilitate its introduction."

But why should we oppose a single currency? What good reason do we have to defend the pound, franc or mark? "Europe will be under the control of central bankers" says the anti-Maastricht left. But Britain is already dominated by bankers and capitalists. So is every other country in the EU.

The defeat of the convergence criteria must come about as a result of united working class opposition - not the European capitalists falling out along national lines.

Similarly, on the front page of the latest *Euromarch News*, Geoff Martin, Unison's London convenor but speaking on behalf of Trade Unions Against the Single Currency, makes out that Maastricht is the root cause of the "monetarist strait-jacket". But all the countries that



German workers resist austerity.

signed the agreement were pursuing monetarist policies long before Maastricht. Thatcher - the anti-Maastricht Eurosceptic - was the architect of monetarism and austerity.

Voris is right when he says we should fight against any cuts in health, education or welfare provision that are introduced to create a single currency. But we should not argue within the workers' movement for opposition to a single currency per se; the same goes for European integration in general.

On the contrary, we are fighting for a united socialist Europe.

We want the workers of Europe to unite in a common struggle not to be divided, fighting their national battles separately. Every issue - from unemployment to racism - has to be opposed by a united struggle across the borders.

Getting into an argument about whether sterling is better than a European currency is dangerous. Instead, we need to raise clear working class demands for a European-wide minimum wage, a shorter working week with no loss of pay, for the lifting of all welfare standards to the level of the best in Europe. This, coupled with a fight to prevent European racism against workers in the rest of the world, and fighting against racism and immigration controls, is the best way forward.

Spineless

The TUC bureaucrats - who rejected the class struggle as the means to win significant reforms - have placed their faith in Europe. The danger is that the left will respond with an anti-European position.

Of course the TUC bureaucrats want to hide behind the European Social Charter because they have done nothing to fight around working hours, minimum wages, working rights and against anti-trade union laws themselves. They hope that they are given a place at the bargaining table. We can guarantee they will use this to bargain away our pay, jobs and working conditions.

The TUC refused to back the Euromarch on the grounds that it was supporting the European TUC's "Day of Action" on 28 May. Did we see mass demonstrations of TUC-affiliated unions marching, or lobbies or pickets? Did we see any action whatsoever on that day? No.

Not that the ETUC was any better. It decided that the brilliant united demonstration of Belgian Renault and other car workers and the solidarity action organised by rank and file French, German, Spanish and Slovenian workers - without any support from the ETUC - had

been the day of action! The leaders of the British trade union movement managed to wriggle out of giving any support at all to what is set to be the biggest show of international solidarity for years.

Agenda

The Euromarch has certainly been important in putting Europe on the agenda of the labour movement. The march through Britain has taken the debate into trade unions, onto picket lines and among unemployed and anti-racist organisations.

The North East leg was given a send off from an original Jarrow marcher, Jimmy McAuley, now 85 years old, who said:

"Many of the issues are the same as with our march but this march is international, right across Europe, this is a very important thing today."

In Darlington the marchers joined the Magnet strikers on their picket line. Meanwhile the North West leg occupied and picketed a Magnet showroom in Ellesmere Port. When the North East leg reached Middlesbrough another Jarrow marcher lent his support. Harry Clarke had been a schoolboy of 13 and joined the first day of the Jarrow march in 1936. He stayed with the Euromarch for two days and plans to travel to Amsterdam for the final demonstration.

In Greater Manchester, dole offices were occupied in protest against unemployment and a goat was brought on the march with a placard saying "Don't scapegoat the unemployed!" International solidarity is a lesson to be learnt from this march. The Liverpool dockers once again showed their internationalist spirit backing the 500-strong demonstration through Liverpool which greeted the marchers.

The Amsterdam Euromarch will be a massive demonstration of international solidarity but it is only the beginning. ■

London Demonstration

Saturday 7 June 1pm
Speakers Corner, Hyde Park.

Rally

Westminster Central Hall
For transport to Amsterdam on
14 June:

Ring 0181 800 7460

HONG KONG: China takes over

One country, one struggle!

WHILE THE new Hong Kong executive and provisional legislature look set to maintain the low taxes and minimal regulation that attract international capitalists, economic uncertainties and the curtailment of democratic rights lie ahead for Hong Kong's workers.

On the face of it, economic confidence is high. The stock exchange remains buoyant and even the arrival of the People's Liberation Army (PLA) in April did not cause a blip on financial screens. There has even been a mad rush to purchase "red chips" — shares in Chinese companies about to be quoted on Hong Kong's stock market.

Local bank deposits continue a long-term climb. Emigration is at its lowest since 1989 and the upbeat mood is maintained by the completion of prestigious projects and the announcement of new ones — bridges, tunnels, airports and a mass transit system. Extravagant celebrations are planned for 1 July.

Since "modernisation" began in China in 1978, Hong Kong has become the channel for international capital moving into China and a haven for Chinese investment abroad. In the past 15 years some US\$150 billion of foreign direct investment has been made through Hong Kong, while Chinese companies are falling over themselves to buy into Hong Kong businesses such as HK Telecom, HK Airlines.

Hong Kong has reinvented itself since 1978. Manufacturers decamped with their plants, lock, stock and barrel across the border to the Special Economic Zones (SEZs), enticed by cheap land and even cheaper labour. Only 9% of Hong Kong's GDP now comes from manufacturing compared to 83% from services (26% from financial services alone).

Hong Kong's future as a financial centre is tied more and more to China's as the stock market moves from listing mainly local property interests to large manufacturing companies from China's industrial heartland further north, as well as the "red chips" of reformed Chi-

nese conglomerates.

While Chinese influence continues to grow, international capitalism is reducing its post-1997 risk. Hong Kong and Shanghai Bank recently made an historic move by announcing the creation of a British-based parent company. Jardine, the oldest British firm in Hong Kong, moved its trading from the Hong Kong Stock Exchange, blaming unease about regulations in the territory post-1997. Furthermore, rising rents, shortages of skilled labour and the flight of industry are making Hong Kong a less profitable place for western investment.

As Hong Kong's economy becomes more integrated with China's, it will face increasing competition as a financial centre from Shanghai and Pudong, where

The Sino-British agreement signed between Deng Xiaoping and Margaret Thatcher declared that China would be "one country, two systems" and promised that the Special Administrative Region of Hong Kong would remain capitalist with a high degree of autonomy, except for defence and foreign affairs. As the handover on 31 June 1997 draws nearer, Kim Wong reports that there are no signs of the predicted panic and fall of Hong Kong.

many members of the powerful Chinese bureaucracy and the new Hong Kong elite (including Tung and Fan — see below) come from.

For workers in Hong Kong, there is a prospect of rising unemployment as unskilled and semi-skilled jobs disappear. There are few opportunities to retrain and move into the financial or servicing sector. Property speculation forces up rents and the cost of living. Social welfare is minimal, even though the government surplus for the year to June 1997 will be over US\$4 billion. Instead, Hong Kong will be handing over a reserve of US\$42.5 billion to China — which has publicly opposed spending on social welfare.

There are many in Hong Kong who

will resist repression from the Stalinist bureaucracy in Beijing and fight for workers' rights. The return of Hong Kong to China offers the best opportunity to link up such battles with the wave of workers' struggles against unemployment sweeping through China at the moment. "One country, one struggle" is not only the best immediate defence but also the best way to rid the whole of China of the bureaucratic dictatorship of the Chinese Communist Party.

In that struggle it is imperative that the workers of Hong Kong and the rest of China are united in a combined anti-capitalist and anti-restorationist struggle. Chinese Trotskyists must fight to build a party based on the programme of political revolution — combined with

a fight against Hong Kong capitalism — aimed at overthrowing the Stalinist bureaucracy and reconstructing the economy of China on the basis of a democratic workers' plan. This party will fight to establish the rule of new, genuinely democratic workers' and peasants councils throughout China, protected not by the PLA butchers of Tiananmen Square, but by a workers' and peasants militia controlled by those councils.

Only such a programme can halt the drive towards capitalist restoration, that will otherwise be boosted by the takeover of Hong Kong, and save the Chinese masses from the poverty, famine and misery that such a restoration would bring. ■



British troops keep Hong Kong pro-democracy demonstrators in check on behalf of Beijing

Hong Kong's new masters plan crackdown

"HONG KONG has been a colony," said Tung Chee-hwa, the next leader of Hong Kong. "Now we are our own masters." Just who really are the masters in this "One country, two systems"?

One thing is clear, everyone knows who Tung's masters are. He was "elected" to be the next Chief Executive by a committee of 400 Hong Kong locals, hand-picked by the Chinese Communist Party, at a conference in Beijing in December 1996. Tung is a shipping magnate whose bankrupt business was bailed out by the Chinese a decade ago.

The Beijing committee also "elected" a provisional legislature of 60 to replace the sitting legislature in Hong Kong. China says the sitting legislature, elected in 1995 for four years, cannot continue because Governor Chris Patten's "sprint for democracy", after a century and a half of colonial autocracy, did not have Beijing's approval.

In 1995, most pro-China candidates lost. In fact, in the six elections since 1991, Hong Kong's electorate overwhelmingly voted for the Democratic Party and its allies in the face of Chinese opposition.

Now, 11 of the pro-Chinese candidates who failed to win a seat in 1995 are among the 60 new "provisional" legislators.

In the war of words between Patten and China before the 1995 elections, China justified its decision to dismiss the sitting legislature by claiming that HK people had relied on Britain for too long, they had not shown any desire for self government and were not ready for democracy. The bourgeoisie in Hong

Kong therefore needed time to develop their own parties and learn democratic ways!

Tung's new 11 member Executive Council is made up mostly of "forty-something" professionals and technocrats. His closest cabinet members include the banker, Anthony "I firmly believe in elitism" Leung, managing director of Chase Manhattan Bank in Hong Kong, and Leung Chun-Ying, who criticised the sitting legislature because:

"there has been too much pandering to public opinion by the legislature, in future, it will be an advice and consultation body only."

Leung Chun-Ying has been put in charge of a special task force on housing but he insists there is no conflict of interest between this and the six businesses registered in his name — which include a property surveying company, a property development and management consultant company and a land valuation company — all of which have close business links with large Hong Kong and Chinese land and property consortiums. Furthermore, he held directorships in at least 15 other companies in Hong Kong and China.

While the capitalists are given a free run of Hong Kong, the democratic rights of the citizens will be curtailed. Rita Fan, once a pillar of the pro-British establishment but then a defector from Chris Patten's legislative and executive council, is now the chair of the provisional legislature. She is best known for her racist stand against Vietnamese refugees in Hong Kong when she even blocked funding for extra toilets in the detention camps.

Rita Fan has rushed through new legislation governing public order and "community groups", to be effective from 1 July 1997 and designed to reverse rights granted under Patten's Bill of Rights — freedom of assembly and freedom of speech. All "community" groups, including political parties, have to re-register

after the handover. Any groups wishing to hold rallies and demonstrations must have prior approval from the police (as opposed to just informing the police).

Laws will also be tightened to prohibit any act of treason, secession, sedition or subversion against the Central People's Government. There will be penalties of

up to three years imprisonment for defiling China's flag. She has also banned all future 4 June (Tiananmen Square massacre) commemoration rallies organised by University Students' Unions.

A ban will be imposed on Hong Kong political groups seeking funds abroad or receiving support from foreign organisations. This is aimed specifically at preventing the Democratic Party raising funds from overseas Chinese supporters in the US and Taiwan.

"We are too small and we are very vulnerable", said Tung, a man who certainly knows that money can buy influence. He donated £50,000 to the British Conservative Party when he was the chairman and chief executive of a large international concern with very large investments in UK!

Tung is also making changes to the electoral college and franchise for the promised legislature election in 1998. These changes are aimed at narrowing the franchise and reducing votes for the Democratic Party.

Hong Kong's media have been cowed by public warning and harsh treatment not to criticise the provisional legislature. A Hong Kong journalist was arrested and sentenced to 12 years imprisonment for stealing a state secret — financial news about the exchange rate!

Corruption, censorship, political repression and racism are all too clearly going to be part of the colonial legacy that will flourish under the "second system" imposed by Beijing. Yet more conclusive proof that Stalinism, for all its rhetoric, not only cannot defend workers' rights but is anti-working class to the core. ■

Britain's shifting policy

FOR 150 years, Britain ruled Hong Kong through the autocratic Governor. By 1984, when the agreement to return sovereignty was signed, the only concessions to democracy were indirect elections to a minority of seats on the almost powerless Legislative Council (Legco).

Why then did Chris Patten introduce universal suffrage for the elected members of Legco and extend its powers? And why have Geoffrey Howe (Foreign Secretary in 1984) and Percy Craddock (senior adviser on Chinese affairs to Thatcher) now come out in public against his reforms?

Recently, a senior Chinese diplomat revealed that there had been no plans for a formal return of sovereignty before Thatcher raised the issue. Beijing did not recognise the legality of the treaties which gave Britain Hong Kong and Kowloon, but was happy to maintain the status quo.

For Thatcher, the 1984 agreement was a means of implementing the "constructive engagement" policy

that Reagan was pursuing in Eastern Europe, encouraging trade in the hope that, in the long term, this would undermine the planned economy and the Stalinist regime. Deng's agreement to maintain capitalism for fifty years in Hong Kong was a significant step towards this objective.

However, when Patten arrived in 1992, the situation had been changed by the Tiananmen Square massacre. It looked like the conservative wing was firmly in control in Beijing. Patten's plan was to create the nucleus of a bourgeois political leadership to leave in place after the British withdrew.

Now that it is increasingly clear that Beijing is pursuing its own course of state-capitalist restoration, the British are, again, more inclined to collaborate with them. However, a growing capitalist class, especially in Southern China, could still provide a social base for the bourgeois politicians nurtured in Hong Kong. ■

IRELAND: Elections

Break the coalition with the bosses' parties

IRISH PRIME Minister John Bruton has called a general election for 6 June. His party, Fine Gael, has been the senior partner in a coalition with two reformist workers' parties - Dick Spring's Labour and Proinsias DeRosca's Democratic Left. The party leaders will contest the election as a coalition against the combined forces of Fianna Fail and the Progressive Democrats.

Since the foundation of the Republic, Fianna Fail and Fine Gael have dominated its electoral politics, holding over 80% of the seats in the Dail (Parliament). Recently, however, the mould of Irish politics has begun to crack and Labour has held the balance of power since 1992. Between them, Labour and the Democratic Left had 38 of the 166 seats in the last Dail.

Despite the image of Ireland as the "Celtic Tiger", with the highest growth rates in the European Union (EU), victory for Bruton on 6 June is far from certain. Having replaced Albert Reynolds' scandal-racked Fianna Fail administration, Bruton has lost three of his own ministers because of corruption charges.

Beneath the hype of the "economic miracle" lies a widening gap between Ireland's rich and poor. Charges for essential public services are eroding living standards in many working class communities. Some 60,000 Dubliners are in arrears, with 2,000 facing court orders. The "Partnership 2000" deal between the government, major bosses and the trade union bureaucracy has meant real pay cuts while corporate profits soar.

The spectacular growth relied heavily on subsidies from the EU, which cannot go on for much longer against the background of governments pushing austerity drives across the continent.

For the Irish Workers Group (IWG), Workers Power's sister organisation, the key issue in the election is the political independence of the working class. With three exceptions, the IWG is calling for support for Labour and Democratic Left candidates, combined with a fight against coalition with any of the three explicitly pro-capitalist parties after 6 June.

Despite the commitment of their leaderships to maintaining a capitalist Ireland, both the Democratic Left and Labour rely on working class votes and money. Several trade unions are affiliated to the Labour Party. Supporters of these parties must use these links to call for special delegate conferences to force Labour and the Democratic Left into becoming a fighting opposition in the Dail.

Such a fight needs to be around the IWG's action programme which links immediate questions confronting the working class to the struggle for a socialist society. Key demands include

- immediate scrapping of water charges and other fees on public services and an amnesty for those who refused to pay;
- a national minimum wage of £6 an hour and a 35-hour week with no loss of pay and a steeply progressive wealth tax to pay for a programme of public works under workers' control to combat the scourge of mass unemployment;

IRELAND HAS a transferable vote system of proportional representation. In the event of an inconclusive result in the 6 June election leading to another poll, the IWG will be calling for "workers' primaries" of labour movement activists in all constituencies. Their purpose would be to assess support for different labour movement candidates and then co-ordinate preference voting to maximise their votes.

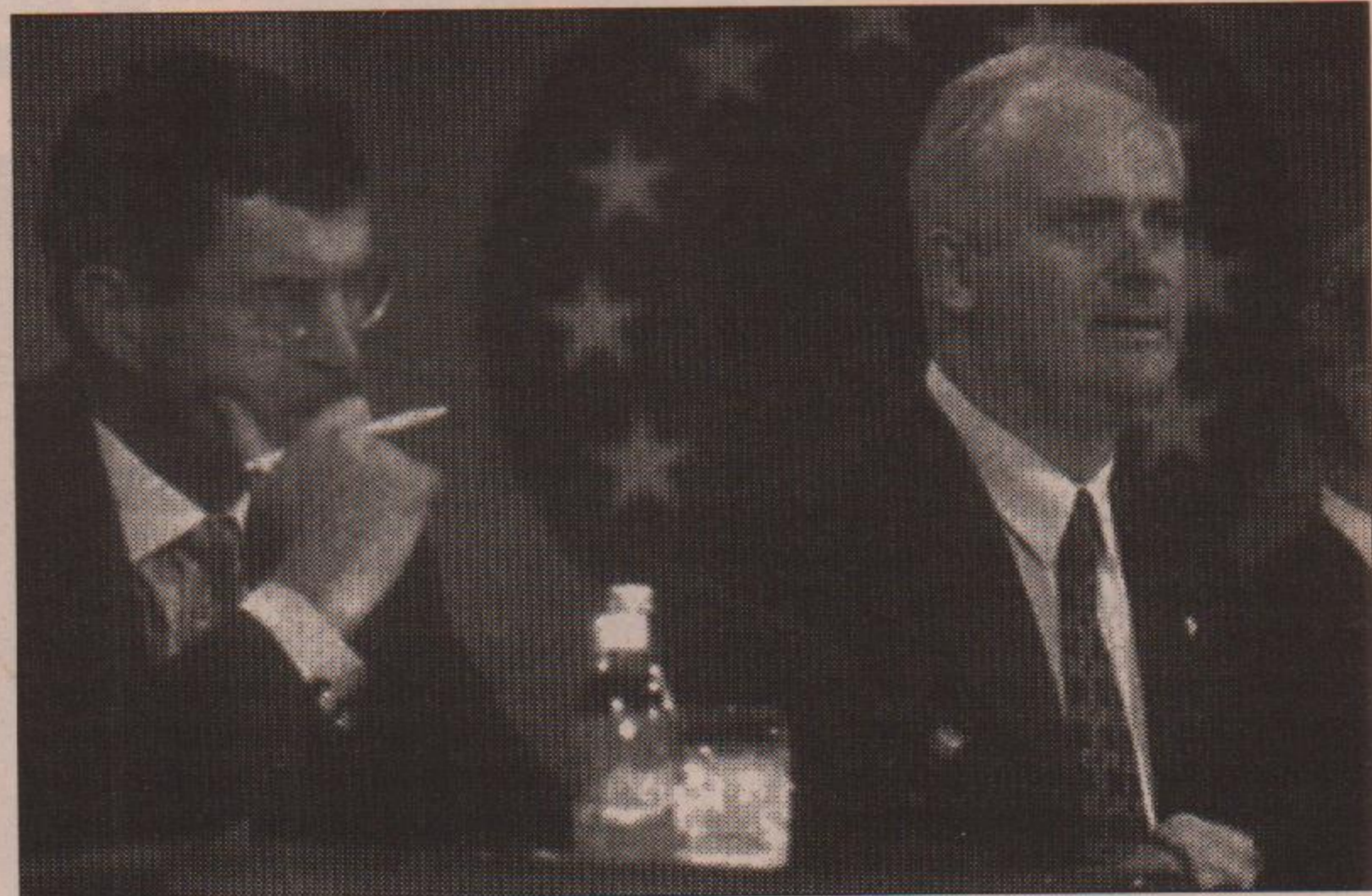
Meanwhile, working class voters must decide for themselves how best to place their votes for Labour and the Democratic Left. The IWG rejects critical support for either the Socialist Workers Party or Socialist Party. Their influence within the working class is

minimal and their programmes stop short of any call for the revolutionary overthrow of the capitalist state.

There are, however, three exceptions to this. In the Dublin West constituency, Joe Higgins, a leading campaigner against water charges who nearly captured the seat in a by-election last year, is standing with Socialist Party backing. Along with Claire Daly in Dublin North and Mick Murphy in Tallaght constituency, Higgins is a candidate of struggle who has mobilised mass action to defend non-payers and agitated among engineering workers to restore services to those cut off. The IWG calls for critical support for these candidates. ■

- free, safe and legal abortion at the woman's request, provided by the national health services;
- no more repressive laws and policing against recreational drug use, for legalised production and distribution under state monopoly, combined with a scientifically based national programme of education about drugs;
- complete rejection of both NATO and the WEU - its military pillar in western Europe - and for the immediate withdrawal of Irish troops sent to Bosnia to enforce the Dayton Accords, which have only sanctioned the carve-up of the country.

The IWG does not call for a vote for Sinn Fein in the general election in the Republic since the party lacks any significant base in the southern working class, and its programme is backward-looking, petit bourgeois nationalism. However, the IWG remains implacable in its opposition to the continued British presence in the six counties and voices its solidarity with all republican prisoners, calling for their immediate, unconditional release as



Labour's Dick Spring and Fine Gael's John Bruton

well as freedom for Roisin McAliskey.

The fight around such a programme is not in the vain hope that the leaders of either Labour or the Democratic Left can be persuaded to struggle around its demands. It is, however, the best way

to relate to the hundreds of thousands of workers who will vote for these parties in the belief that it will make a difference for the better at a time when the ruling coalition is deeply discredited. ■

On bail for birth

Now free Roisin!

ON FRIDAY 23 May a judge finally granted bail to Roisin McAliskey, allowing her transfer from the notorious squalor of Holloway Prison to north London's Whittington Hospital. She gave birth to a girl three days later. She had been too weak to attend the hearing which freed her from jail.

Roisin, who suffers from severe asthma, has spent most of a difficult pregnancy in British jails, awaiting extradition to Germany in connection with an IRA bombing of the Osnabruck military base last June.

Her initial detention by the Royal Ulster Constabulary (RUC) began on 20 November, before the German courts had even issued any warrant for her arrest. She faced six days of interrogation at the Castlereagh holding centre, followed by a transfer to Belmarsh Prison in south east London - a purpose-built facility

for male IRA suspects in particular. The British authorities only agreed to her transfer to Holloway after doctors had expressed grave concerns about her deteriorating health.

The German state's legal case against Roisin - always flimsy - is now in tatters as witnesses have recanted earlier statements, while the forensic evidence is extremely dubious. From the time of her initial arrest, there has been a very good reason to believe that Roisin has been the victim of a frame-up by the British state.

Roisin has merely been "guilty" of being an Irish republican and the daughter of the courageous left nationalist, Bernadette Devlin McAliskey, MP for mid-Ulster from 1969-74 and a severe critic of the so-called peace process, which has brought neither peace nor justice for the nationalist population

in the six counties.

Thankfully, Roisin is out of prison for the time being, but only after a determined campaign. Her harrowing experience has highlighted the continuing maltreatment of women prisoners by the British state and its determination to criminalise republicans.

We urge our readers to redouble their efforts to secure unconditional freedom for her and her baby.

Send letters to the German Ambassador, Dr Oesterhelt, 25 Belgrave Square, London SW1 (fax: 0171 824 1435) demanding a halt to the extradition proceedings and the dropping of all charges. Success will also send a powerful message to Home Secretary Jack Straw and Northern Ireland Secretary Mo Mowlam that the British state's crimes against the Irish people will not be tolerated. ■

Orange marching season begins

Stop the parades of hate

MAY HAS been an exceptional month in Northern Ireland. First, Sinn Fein won two Westminster parliamentary seats. Then, in the local council elections on 21 May, it captured 16.9% of the popular vote and 74 seats. For the first time in its history, Belfast City Council is not under the control of Unionist politicians and a Catholic Mayor is a distinct possibility. Ian Paisley's Democratic Unionists were relegated to fourth place.

At the same time, the Commons' Speaker, Betty Boothroyd, refused Gerry Adams and Martin McGuinness access to any parliamentary facilities on the grounds that they would not read out an oath of loyalty to the British monarch. So much for parliamentary democracy.

To top it all republicans, other nationalists and unionists have gone on a trip to South Africa, at the invitation of the

ANC, where they will hold talks on how South Africa achieved peace (not talks with each other, however - great care has been taken to ensure that the unionists and republicans don't even meet each other in the toilet!).

Tony Blair, on his first Prime Ministerial visit, chose the occasion of the Royal Ulster Agricultural Show to affirm support for maintaining the Loyalist veto over any real change. Blair declared that "none of us in this hall ... even the youngest, is likely to see Northern Ireland as anything but a part of the United Kingdom."

But Blair did offer a glimmer of hope to the Sinn Fein strategists keen on entry to all-party talks. He reopened a channel of communication between the republican leadership and British civil servants. Blair's Northern Ireland secretary, Mo Mowlam, has been busy sharing cups of tea with members of both

communities. She has also won endorsements for her "new, constructive" approach from the Clinton administration in the USA.

Drumcree

Mowlam, however, is about to face the first real challenge of her new career. The Loyalist marching season will soon be in full swing and leading figures in the Orange Order have given every indication that they are preparing for a repetition of last summer's bloody triumphalism at Drumcree.

After SDLP leader John Hume announced that talks would take place between the Orangemen and the Garvaghy Road residents' association, the Reverend Robert Saulters - an Orange Order supremo - issued a terse statement that torpedoed any negotiations. Even more reactionary bigots around the "Spir-

it of Drumcree" organisation have been demanding Saulters' resignation for being soft on the nationalists.

Confronted by the spectre of Loyalist reaction on the march which way will Mowlam jump? The supposedly independent Parades Commission, announced in the Queen's Speech, will not be in place this summer. So it looks likely that nationalist opponents of the bigots' processions will once more face the batons and plastic bullets of the RUC. The RUC is the sectarian police force that went on to terrorise nationalist areas in the wake of Drumcree last July and stands accused of standing by and watching as a gang of Loyalist thugs beat 25-year-old Robert Hamill to death for the "crime" of being a Catholic.

The task facing the anti-unionist population is to develop the residents' committees into organisations for the self-

defence of nationalist communities against both Orange parades and the "ethnic cleansing" policies of the Loyalist paramilitaries and their RUC friends. These committees must be backed by mass mobilisations against the parades when they try to march through the nationalist areas.

Meanwhile, in Britain, socialists in the labour movement must fight to scrap any preconditions to Sinn Fein's entry into talks and, more importantly, force the British government to immediately withdraw its troops from Ireland as the essential precondition for any just peace.

Mowlam can drink as much tea as she likes in the Six Counties, but she won't get any sympathy from the nationalists oppressed by British imperialism and its Loyalist agents until and unless Ireland as a whole wins the right to determine its own future. ■

Oil worker speaks out

Fighting BP in Colombia

What was your motive for coming to Europe?

They were killing and imprisoning people. I had to get out quickly to save my life and we decided to make use of the opportunity to do solidarity work with the labour movement here.

● Tell us about recent developments.

At the moment BP is the most aggressive multinational in Colombia. It even has influence over the state petrol company, Ecopetrol. But there is another aspect which is even worse – the formation of paramilitary groups and private security forces. BP's mercenaries have thrown the Casanare zone into complete turmoil.

● Can this be proved, BP has always denied that they have paid death squads?

European investigation committees have gone to Colombia, members of the European Parliament, have observed this situation. Friends from the Norwegian press have just finished a visit. They spoke to the widows of assassinated comrades: employees of BP, who had given notice of their intention to form a workers' union, and who paid for this with their lives; peasants who had opposed the violent methods BP used to oust them from their homes – men and women who had owned the land for many years – BP wants to remove these people from their environment.

● How has the union tried to deal with BP?

We have attempted to organise unions there with the workers. I personally had an opportunity. I had to go in very carefully and leave even more carefully because it was clear that BP had control of the area and death was a very real possibility. In practice, members of the USO's executive committee cannot go to Casanare because we would run the risk of being assassinated. We plan to go with an international commission of trade unionists, human rights and environmental activists to see if they will let us in.

● Does the USO have evidence that these armed groups exist?

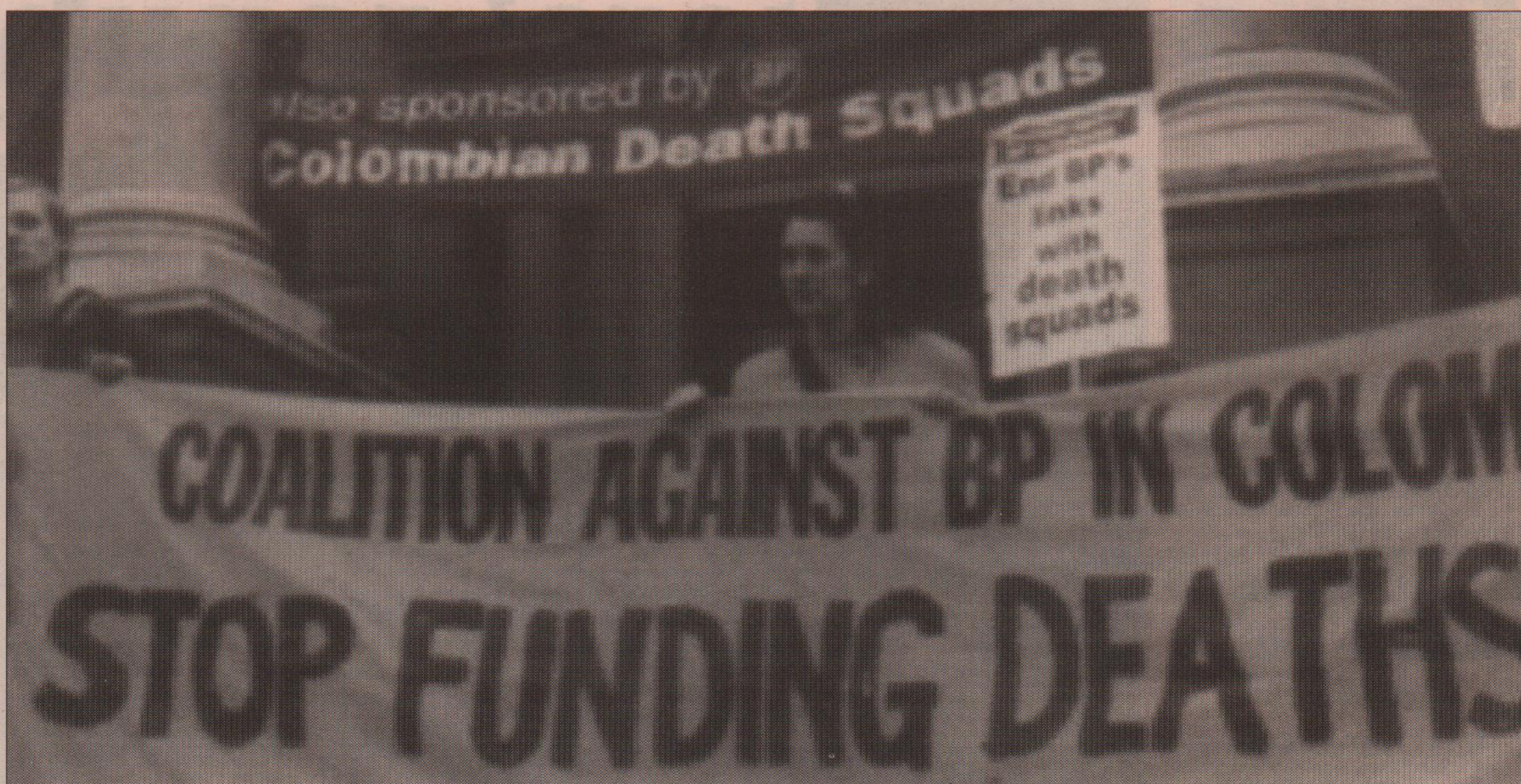
Yes. In Colombia, for every barrel of oil which is produced there is a war tax of \$1.25 which goes to the Colombian army. In addition to this, Ecopetrol has a 10,000 strong security force which is made up of 507 special security groups, legalised paramilitaries. In addition, BP has its own army. It is so obvious they can't hide it. At least in Colombia, they can't hide it. I think it's going to be very difficult for them to deny it in future when a lot of journalists and human rights organisations are now visiting the area and have seen clear evidence of what exists there.

● The petrol companies say they are threatened by armed groups and sabotage.

It is very painful for a country to see its natural resources being pitilessly exploited, and we end up paying to be supplied with these resources! Because the country is so dominated by the military, some people respond in a military way. The USO is against this. Instead we have tried to involve the people in a discussion over the politics of petrol. We formulated a legal proposal at the end of 1994, which would put obligations on both the Colombian state petrol company and the union.

● What would be the object of this proposal?

Firstly, the rational exploitation of oil resources to create self-sufficiency in petrol and other petrochemicals. We recognise the need for foreign investments and technology but we want to see mechanisms for transfers of technology, so that the state oil company has access to advanced technology. We think there should be a different relationship to the multinationals so that the country would benefit more.



Solidarity in Britain can help Colombian workers win

COLOMBIAN TRADE unionist **Freddy Puleicio**, of Union Sindical Obrero (USO), recently addressed trade unionists and activists around Europe, his trip paid for by the OILC, the union for offshore oil workers in the North Sea's UK sector.

Freddy addressed the OILC's Aberdeen conference on 10 May, then flew down to London with the union's outgoing General Secretary Ronnie McDonald, to address a packed London rally the next day, hosted by Workers Power and the youth group REVOLUTION.

He gave a gripping account of British Petroleum's (BP's) horrific role in Colombia and the resistance of workers against tremendous repression. While he was over here, Freddy spoke about the fightback in the Casanare region.

● What was the government's response to this?

Blood and fire. About a hundred of our comrades in the USO have been assassinated across the country. Over a hundred more have been driven out of Barrancabermeja where the biggest Ecopetrol refinery is. At this moment, 27 more have been deprived of their liberty, including comrade Cesar Carillo, who was the union's president for eight years. I was imprisoned for eighteen months.

The same people who appear in company lists of those sanctioned for trade union activity, also appear in the home office lists to be arrested. And we also appear in the lists of those to be assassinated. They even assassinate us in prison. . . they use the system set up to combat narcoterrorism – masked judges, masked witnesses and secret proofs which denies a fair trial and the right to a defence.

● If this type of masked justice was set up for narcoterrorism, why would trade union leaders be prosecuted under this system?

Because this form of masked justice is being applied against society as a whole, especially the civic and popular leaders. Political assassinations in Colombia in one year equal the total of all the deaths during the Pinochet dictatorship. The number of displaced people is twice as big as all those made homeless in Yugoslavia.

When society rises up to fight against this, they apply against us this masked justice which was intended for narcoterrorism. They are now trying to institutionalise this through constitutional reform giving total authority to the military.

● According to an article in El Tiempo of 11 May, for every 100 barrels pumped into the pipelines less than

30 reach the other end, which leads us to the question of the guerrillas and the environment. What is the position of the USO on the oil spills resulting from the blowing up of pipelines?

We do not support sabotage: firstly because of the pollution and secondly because we think that the problems in the petrochemical industry need a social solution. Ecopetrol has been blocked by the ministry of the environment from carrying out exploration work, supposedly because of pollution, even though it is the company which takes most care of the environment because the trade union demands this.

Compare that to what happened with Occidental in one region. They registered all the birds, the fish, all the natural beauty, they printed it with extraordinary photographs, all in full colour – and then they wiped it off the map. It remains only in the memories of the people and in the pages of a few books. And nothing is done about Occidental.

There is also the case of BP in Casanare. For BP the principal enemies are nature's finest achievement – human beings. The peasants there are considered to be highly dangerous to their plans and they are barred from the area. They have no alternative but to sell their land. It is quite clear from this that the exploitation of the oil reserves is totally tied up with the voracity of the multinationals.

● Can we turn now to what you are looking for in London?

We want to congratulate the people of Great Britain for their colossal blow against Thatcherism, a politics of hunger and misery. The fact that it happened in her own home has doubled its significance. But there is a great responsibility for the new government. We are asking the new government to order the

head of BP to stop the bloodshed and corruption it is causing in Colombia.

Equally, we say to our Latin, Colombian and British friends, we need to mobilise, at this moment when we are about to go on strike to help us to avoid a massacre. And the way to avoid this is to stand in front of the embassy and in front of BP's offices to tell them that the Colombian workers are not alone, that there are people here who understand the situation and are prepared to support us.

● Can you explain the background to this strike?

We have been in negotiation for four months. There are two main issues. Firstly, the future of the Colombian petrochemical company and secondly the release from prison of all the comrades. They have broken up the discussions a number of times. But now we have reached the limit. The workers are prepared.

For example, shipments from the refinery are down 40%. Bogotá, the capital has only four days of supplies, and Cali and Medellin have only two days each. Things are getting hot.

Today we need the international community to protest because there are two battalions inside the refinery at Barrancabermeja, and they have said they will kill us if we rock the boat. And we know they always keep their promises. We need to prevent this blood from being spilt.

● How many workers are there in this company?

There are about 10,000 workers in Ecopetrol. About 4,500 are unionised but that is 80% of all those legally allowed to join. Last December we took a step towards becoming an industrial union not simply the union of the state company, we gained over 1,000 members in less than three months. There are 40,000 workers in the industry. In BP, when we attempted to organise, our people have been killed. It is a very difficult process because there you pay with your life for the right to do this.

● Have you got support from other workers' unions or is it simply a lone fight by the USO against the multinationals?

On 11 February the USO along with the CUT (a major trade union federation), to which we are affiliated, declared a national strike of the all state sector workers – 800,000. It was a successful strike. In Colombia the workers' and social movements see the USO as a bastion for their defence. ■

a world to win

ARGENTINA

ON 20 MAY, sacked plantation workers and unemployed youth blockaded streets in Ledesma in Argentina's north west province of Jujuy, demanding jobs, unemployment pay and exemption from taxes. After four days of street fighting in which 500 pickets were injured, the police were forced to withdraw.

Picketing spread and a co-ordinating committee of 60 delegates from across the province was set up. The provincial government was forced to negotiate and after two days promised a programme of 12,000 jobs.

The pickets agreed to call off the blockades, but have not dissolved their organisations. In mid-June they will meet to see what action the government has actually taken.

These events are very important for the whole Argentinian workers' movement. Even the bourgeois press has called the committee, "an organisation of direct democracy". Such independent workers' organisations have not been seen in living memory.

The danger is that this movement could be diverted and limited to electoral manoeuvring. This is the line being taken by groups like the Movimiento Socialista de Trabajadores (MST) and the state workers' union, led by Carlos Santillan.

The Partido de Trabajadores por el Socialismo (PTS) recognises the importance of reforms but sees the key question now as spreading such self-organisation to other sectors and regions. It is calling for a national meeting of the pickets' organisation and rank and file representatives of the organised working class. It argues that, although the movement still has political limitations, a higher form of organisation has been created which has profound revolutionary potential. ■

ZAIRE/CONGO: After Mobutu

Don't trust Kabila - fight for a workers' republic

On Saturday, 17 May, President Mobutu's regime in Zaire finally fell. With scarcely any resistance, the troops of the Alliance of Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Congo Zaire (ADFL) marched into the capital, Kinshasa. **Jeremy Dewar** looks at the consequences of Mobutu's fall.



Laurent Kabila - a new dictator in the making

WHEN LAURENT Kabila, leader of the ADFL, announced that Zaire no longer existed and the Democratic Republic of Congo was born, thousands of enthusiastic workers and youth took this symbolic decree to heart, destroying road signs, portraits of Mobutu and even bank notes bearing the dictator's head.

The question now is whether these same workers and youth can take advantage of Mobutu's defeat, to build organisations which can fight for control over the country and its resources. Such a fight will undoubtedly bring them up against Kabila and his allies.

In the seven month civil war, the ADFL's strategy was a classic guerrillaist one. As towns and cities fell to the rebels, they recruited more troops and installed their own administrations.

But as they drew nearer to Kinshasa, another, truly popular element came into play. A series of "dead city" general strikes ground the capital to a halt. The strikes were called by the Union of Democracy and Social Progress (UDSP). They were, in part, a ploy by this tame capitalist party to force its way into the Alliance's good books. But, in a more important sense, they were the spontaneous uprising of the Zairean workers seizing their chance to bring down Mobutu.

This explains why the ADFL were so keen to see Kinshasa taken peacefully. The ADFL is almost unknown in Kinshasa and has virtually no support outside of the anti-Mobutu struggle. The Alliance did not want ordinary workers taking an active role; on 14 May, the rebel radio station even broadcast an appeal to workers to call off their strikes because they were delaying the military capture of Kinshasa!

As it was, the fall of Kinshasa was nearly bloodless, the ADFL having done a deal with the army for an "orderly" takeover that ensured the workers remained by-standers. One ex-soldier recounted his own surrender:

"The rebel walked up to me and told me to pick up my gun and bring it with me. Then he took me to a house where I had to hand it in and give my name. They told me to go home and find another job."

So much for the western media's scare stories of frenzied revenge and butchery!

Typically, the imperialists ensured that their former allies, Mobutu, his extended family and cronies, were all whisked away in the nick of time. Mobutu, him-

self, was flown to Morocco, an old ally from 1977 when Moroccan troops were used to massacre secessionist rebels in the Shaba province. His son, Mobutu Kongolo, stayed on to personally oversee the execution of a few "traitors" before being rescued with the aid of the French - after his own cabin crew refused to fly him out.

Tracking down and expropriating Mobutu's wealth, stolen from the Congolese masses over decades, is not just a matter of justice but a vital step to rebuilding the country. His personal assets are estimated at between \$5 and 8 billion! The average Zairean income last year was \$160 - and that was for those who were paid; many thousands were not. This is a truly obscene picture, and one the west openly endorsed. As late as 1989, US President Bush called Mobutu "one of our most valued friends in Africa."

Economic recovery

The economic reconstruction of the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) certainly cannot be done with "friends" like Bush or Clinton. Their primary interest is ensuring that their multinationals can continue to exploit the country's riches. As Chester Crocker, Reagan's man in Africa in the 1980s, said:

"We and our friends control the clubs and the treasuries that Kabila will need to tap if he is going to rebuild the country."

And this is precisely what the ADFL finance minister, Mwana Nanga Mawampanga, proposes.

The DRC has abundant natural wealth. Cobalt, copper, gold, diamonds, uranium, manganese and other minerals make it naturally richer than even South Africa. In addition, the rivers and lakes have potential for hydroelectric power, its virgin forests are an untapped source for timber, its oil fields remain unopened and with modern farming methods its land could be the breadbasket for the whole of central Africa.

However, even the traditional mining sector is in ruins, stripped by the "kleptocracy" of the Mobutu years. Copper production has sunk from 500,000 tonnes a year in the 1980s to 30,000 last year. Cobalt production has shrunk from 17,000 tonnes to 3,000. The giant nationalised mining companies, MIBA and Gecamines, have not made a profit for 10 years. To bring copper production back up to 500,000 tonnes would cost \$1 billion in investment and would require the

writing off of \$2 billion debts, according to the World Bank. That is the only reason the state concerns have not been privatised - a buyer could not be found!

World Bank figures show that by 1994 Zaire's economy had shrunk to 1958 levels while its population had tripled to 45 million. According to the *Financial Times*: "If the country had simply sustained pre-independence growth rates, gross national product today would be \$1,400 per head. Instead it has fallen to \$100."

What the imperialist economists refuse to acknowledge is the role of their structural adjustment programmes in bringing about this nightmare scenario.

Kabila's immediate economic problems are equally daunting. Inflation stands at around 9,800%, which is the other reason why Zairean bank notes were burnt so enthusiastically on 17 May! The infrastructure - roads, rail, telephones - needs \$3 billion a year to repair and maintain. Without them the economy cannot function. And most importantly, millions of workers, including 600,000 civil servants, need to be paid.

Kabila the unknown

In general, the imperialist powers have realigned themselves and given a cautious welcome to the Alliance. Even Britain recognised Congo within days of the fall of Kinshasa. Their doubts centre on the figure of Laurent Kabila: who is he? what are his politics? what will he do? Publicising these doubts is partly a way of pressurising the ADFL, but there are also lingering doubts about his Stalinist past.

Kabila's political career stretches back to Patrice Lumumba's liberation movement in the 1960s. After the failed Simba revolution of 1964, Kabila turned towards Stalinism and formed the Popular Revolutionary Party (PRP) which remains the mainstay of the ADFL. Strongly influenced by the guerrillaism of Che Guevara, who visited Kabila in the 1960s, the PRP set up liberated zones in the east among the Bembe and later the Banyamulenge (Tutsi) people. Part of the justified fear of Congolese peasants and workers stems from this period when the PRP - like other Stalinist guerrilla movements such as Sendero Luminoso in Peru - ruled by terror and drug trafficking.

The PRP's "right-turn" in the late 1970s coincided with Kabila's collaboration with Yoweri Museveni, now the

President of Uganda. The PRP now combines pro-imperialist free market economics with a strong state repressive machine.

Kabila still uses populist phrases in his speeches, talking about "changing the face of Africa" and how his "long years of struggle were like spreading fertiliser on a field - now it is time to harvest". The PRP even promote political education circles amongst peasants and workers and the setting up of neighbourhood and village committees, but with one proviso: that the PRP/ADFL maintain a political monopoly.

Tension

For a political force, which in seven months has gone from obscurity to state power, this is essential if they are to keep control of Congo. This is why they have put off elections for two years, why all other political parties have been banned, why demonstrations and political activity have been outlawed and activists beaten up and incarcerated.

In fact, there are even tensions within the ADFL. Like the RPA in Rwanda, the Alliance's push for power involved massive recruitment along the way; 30,000 youths joined the rebels. Many of them resent the power of the Tutsi-dominated hardcore of the PRP.

The appointment of Kabila's nephew as governor of the mineral-rich province of Shaba stoked a rebellion within the ADFL. Ominously, this and other demonstrations in Kinshasa, led by Etienne Tshisekedi's UDSP, have begun to take on a poisonous anti-Tutsi sentiment. Congolese workers and peasants must not be drawn into the dead-end of inter-ethnic rivalries in the coming months.

On the contrary, now is the time for the Congolese masses to press for their own solution to the crisis inflicted on the country by Mobutu and his imperialist backers.

Kabila's repression is a sign of weakness, not strength. That's why all the imperialist powers, even France, are downplaying the democratic questions and backing him as the man most likely to stabilise Congo for capitalism. If they and Kabila succeed, workers and peasants will find that they have simply traded one dictatorship for another.

Congo's bosses, as well as the imperialist economists, are all urging the new government to raise taxes on the poor, to sack hundreds of thousands of state

employees as an immediate solution to the budgetary crisis. How dare they? They are the ones who have ruined this naturally rich country. They should pay for the crisis.

Already, some workers have begun to use the popular committees, set up by the ADFL, to press for their demands. Oki-taloma Pena-Ngongo, an official of the public services union who was imprisoned by Mobutu, has successfully fought for some committees to seek the payment of wages withheld from civil servants.

This is good. The committees should go on to demand an immediate election to a sovereign constituent assembly counterposed to the undemocratic assembly that the ADFL have promised will be convened within two months, but without elections! They must demand that the ban on political parties and activities be lifted and for the massive wealth of Congo, particularly the mines, to be taken from the multinationals and corrupt businessmen and managers of the state industries and placed under the control of the workers.

Such a course would see the PRP Stalinist clique at the heart of the ADFL move swiftly against the committees. In this, Kabila would be backed by Mobutu's sworn enemies - Uganda, Rwanda, Angola and Burundi - as well as Mobutu's old allies - the USA, France, Belgium and the UK.

Even so, the success of the PRP's counter-revolution is not a foregone conclusion. The 30,000 armed peasants and workers in the Alliance army are not wedded to Kabila's project. Indeed, they are increasingly alienated from it.

Permanent revolution

But the Congolese masses need to build their own, truly democratic workers and peasants committees, and their own militia under the control of these committees. They urgently need to forge a revolutionary party to win these soldiers and the mass of the population to the strategy of permanent revolution - to pressing on from the victory over Mobutu to the victory of a socialist revolution.

The alternative, be it Kabila's pro-imperialist, but Stalinist-style dictatorship or some compromise with the rotten bourgeois and semi-racist UDSP of Tshisekedi, will replace the prison-house of Zaire with a renamed prison-house of Congo which will not be in the slightest bit democratic, despite its new name. ■

FRANCE: Left election victory

Workers vote to end austerity

AS WE go to press the first exit polls from France indicate a huge election victory for the combined forces of the left. An electoral bloc of the Socialist, Communist and Green parties has overturned the right wing majority in parliament and decisively weakened president Chirac.

Socialist Party leader Jospin fought the campaign on the basis of rejecting the harsh austerity demanded by the right under the Maastricht convergence criteria. The left's victory creates a platform not just to roll back the anti-working class attacks of the discredited Juppé government, but for a new workers' offensive to smash Euro-austerity.

Unlike the Labour victory in Britain this was no landslide. But it was the result of huge class struggles that

have rocked French capitalism to its foundations since 1995.

French workers struck in their millions in December 1995. Truck drivers brought the country to a halt to demand an end to attacks on wages and conditions. Immigrants facing deportation have rallied massive working class support. And just two months ago tens of thousands marched through Strasbourg to protest the growth of the Le Pen's National Front.

The signs are that French society is polarising, with Le Pen's vote reaching 15% in the first round and the threatened gain of a FN MP in the new assembly. Jospin, despite his promises to fight for a "social Europe" will be called upon to attack the workers.

The French workers were absolute-

ly right to vote for the Socialist and Communist parties. Pouvoir Ouvrier, the LRCI's French section, fought for a critical vote for the SP/CP while many on the left said that the election would mean nothing.

What the election means is this: the workers of Europe are weary of austerity, weary of neo-liberalism and - as the new Millennium approaches - weary of the past.

As the illusions are shattered, as the Socialists inevitably do the bidding of the French bosses, the chance is there to forge a new leadership of the French working class, to seize hold of the new mood across Europe and launch a working class struggle in the factories and estates to decisively defeat Austerity. ■

RALLY SUCCESS

TEN DAYS after the crushing defeat of the Tories more than 100 people, in high morale, came to a post-election rally organised by Workers Power and the youth group REVOLUTION in Central London's Conway Hall.

The audience included a large number of young workers and school students and a big contingent of Latin American exiles, as well as British trade unionists and students. Even the bosses' media turned up, with a Reuters journalist doubtless sniffing for a "red scare" story to present to Peter Mandelson.

The rally was addressed by a Colombian trade unionist who gave a riveting eyewitness account of state repression, financed by BP (see interview on page 13).

He had come to London on an early morning flight from Aberdeen, accompanied by the outgoing General Secretary of the OILC, Ronnie McDonald. Ronnie outlined the progress the offshore workers' union has been making and the international links it has established.

North Sea workers find themselves pitted against BP and its subcontractors. Ronnie explained the significance of the

Colombian oil field to the corporation's global strategy, developed by Sir David Simon prior to his appointment as a government minister.

The focus shifted to Britain in the wake of the Labour landslide. *Workers Power* editor Mark Harrison hammered home the argument that socialists were now fighting on a different and much more promising terrain as a result of the Labour victory.

At the same time, those on the left who thought that significant sections of workers had already begun to break from Labour had experienced a rude awakening.

He stressed the importance of intersecting with workers' struggles, both as active supporters and as guides making the links between today's immediate fights and the struggle to overthrow capitalism.

The rally also heard powerful speeches from Hillingdon Hospital shop steward, Malkiat Bilku, and Liverpool dockers, Frank Carberry, who both detailed the difficulties of waging unofficial struggles in the teeth of opposition from grossly privileged trade union bureaucrats. They

also stressed their absolute determination to win. The bottom line in both disputes was reinstatement for all the sacked workers. Both received a tremendous reception for their courage and determination against the odds.

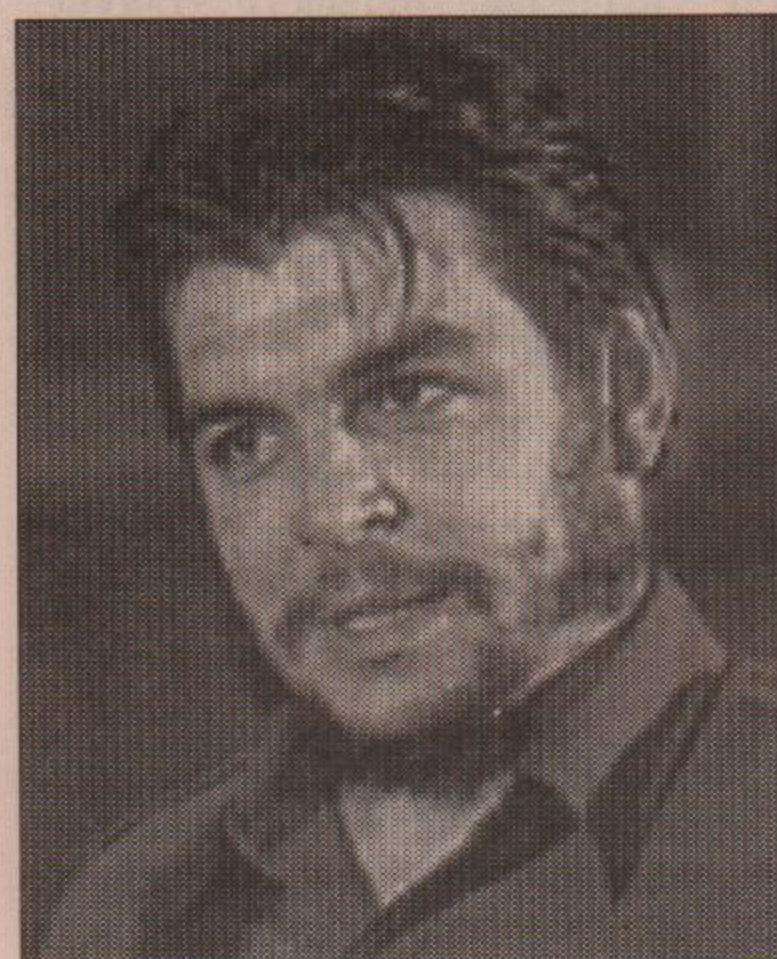
Tom, a school student, spoke for REVOLUTION. He voiced the anger and the aspirations of many young people today when he said "if this is really going to be a 'younger' country, we'd better get out of old habits, like just waiting to see what the government does to us."

We should take a look at what New Labour is planning for young people and we should get ready so young people can start taking control of our lives."

A collection at the rally raised £758.81, which was evenly split between the Hillingdon and Liverpool strikers and the Workers Power fighting fund. As we walked out of Conway Hall into the brilliant May sunshine, the world as Tom explained was indeed "younger, more connected, more global. The possibility of real socialism, a real democratic planned economy, real freedom, is greater than ever before."

But only if we fight for it. ■

COMING SOON: Trotskyist International 22



This month sees the publication of the latest issue of Trotskyist International, the LRCI's English language magazine.

TI22 is themed around the question of capitalist restoration in Russia and China and breaks new ground in Marxist theory and analysis of the restoration process.

The magazine also contains analysis of the political situation in France following the left's election victory, developments in the German class struggle, and the rise of the racist right in Australia.

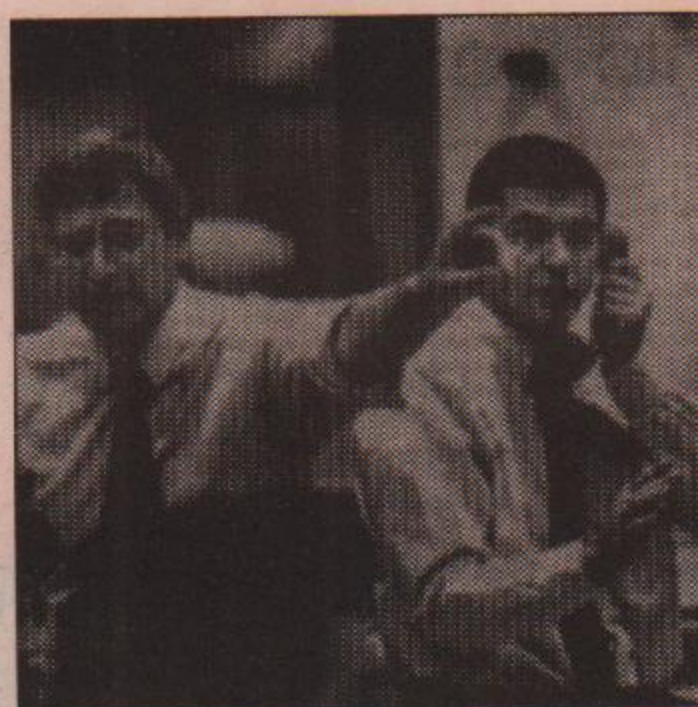
TI22 also contains an extended review of a recent biography of Cuban

guerrilla leader Ché Guevara and lots more. Available from mid-June, TI22 costs just £1.50. Order your copy now.

WORKERS POWER

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WHERE WE STAND



Capitalism

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



The Labour Party

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



The Trade Unions

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



October 1917

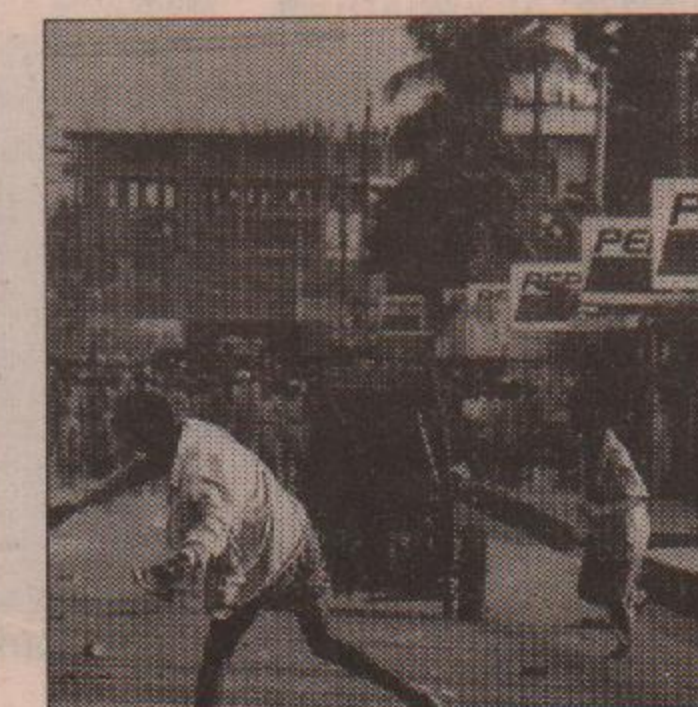
The Russian revolution established a workers' state. But Stalin destroyed workers' democracy and set about the reactionary and utopian project of building "socialism in one country". In the USSR, and the other degenerate workers' states that were established from above, capitalism was destroyed but the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

recognise that only workers' revolution can defend the post-capitalist property relations. In times of war we unconditionally defend workers' states against imperialism. Stalinism has consistently betrayed the working class. The Stalinist Communist Parties' strategy of alliances with the bourgeoisie (popular fronts) and their stages theory of revolution have inflicted terrible defeats on the working class world-wide. These parties are reformist.



Social Oppression

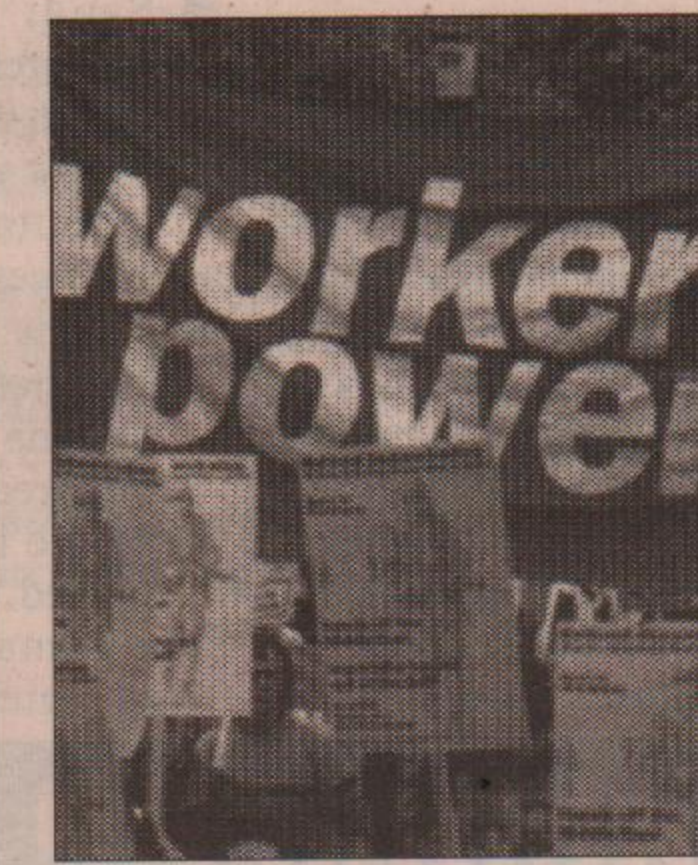
is an integral feature of capitalism systematically oppressing people on the basis of race, age, sex, or sexual orientation. We are for the liberation of women and for the building of a working class women's movement, not an "all class" autonomous movement. We are for the liberation of all of the oppressed.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



Imperialism

is a world system which oppresses nations and prevents economic development in the vast majority of third world countries. We support the struggles of oppressed nationalities or countries against imperialism. We unconditionally support the Irish Republicans fighting to drive British troops out of Ireland. But against the politics of the bourgeois and petit-bourgeois nationalists, we fight for permanent revolution—working class leadership of the anti-imperialist struggle under the banner of socialism and internationalism. In conflicts between imperialist countries and semi-colonial countries, we are for the defeat of the imperialist army and the victory of the country oppressed and

exploited by imperialism. We are for the immediate and unconditional withdrawal of British troops from Ireland. We fight imperialist war not with pacifist pleas but with militant class struggle methods including the forcible disarmament of "our own" bosses.



Workers Power

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

Workers power

Socialism, Internationalism, Revolution

British Section of the League for a Revolutionary Communist International

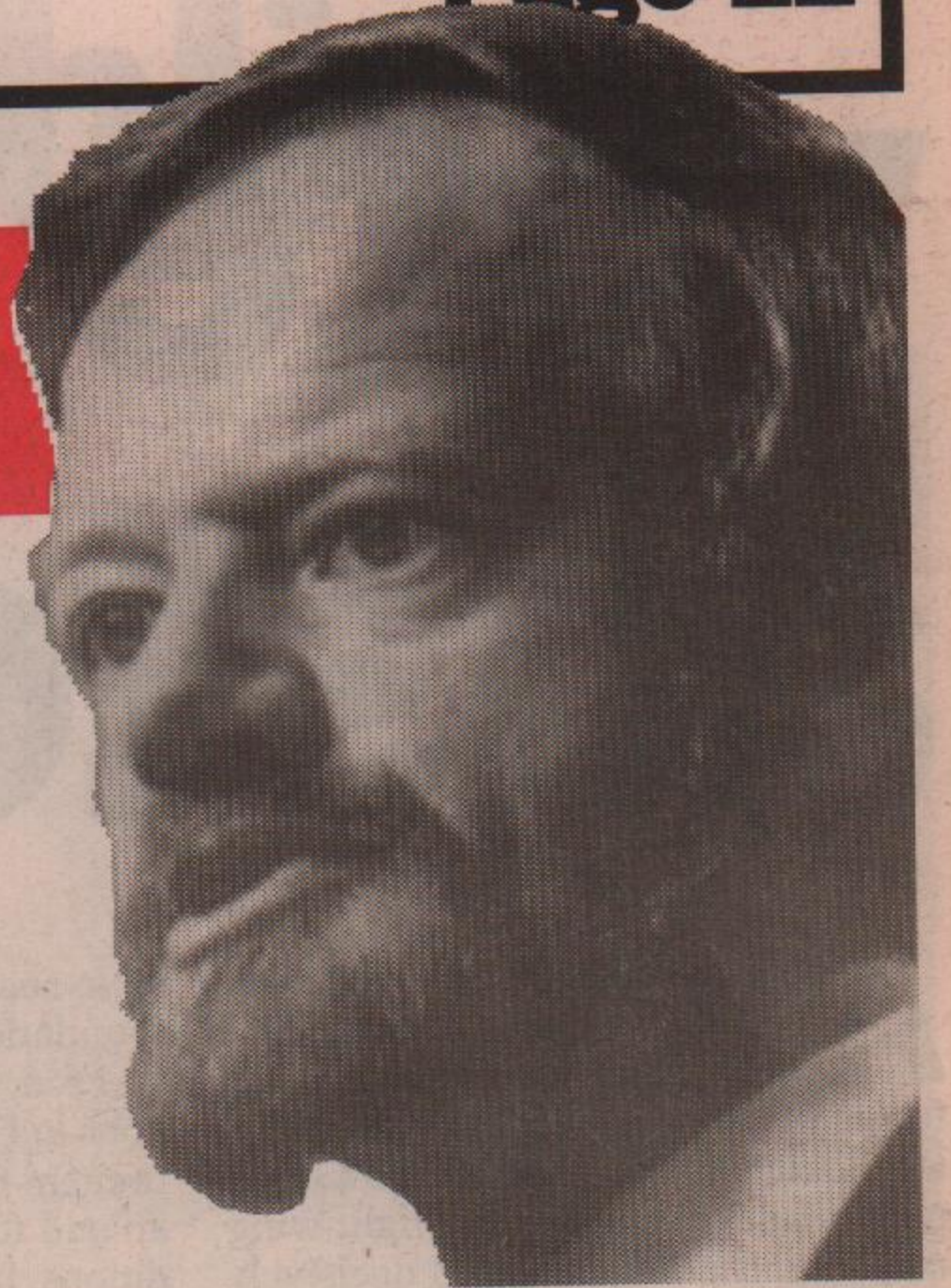
IRELAND

Stop Loyalist hate parades

- Page 12

Labour review of arms exports

Stop this trade in death



ROBIN COOK, Labour's Foreign Secretary, announced his mission statement on 12 May. British foreign policy will have an "ethical dimension". It will "support the demands of other peoples for the democratic rights on which we insist for ourselves".

The same week in Algeria 32 people, including 17 children, were massacred at Chebli, south of Algiers in a single day. The Algerian military dictatorship has the worst human rights record in the world.

Britain supplies arms to the Algerian government.

Two weeks later Indonesia held elections. These elections were totally rigged in favour of the ruling dictatorship. That dictatorship conducted the elections under the protection of a massive police and army operation.

Clubbed

In May, 131 Indonesian protesters were killed in one incident. On election day thousands of protesters were clubbed and gassed. This was just the latest evidence of the regime's repression. Trade unionists are jailed, hundreds of democracy activists have been killed, tortured or imprisoned. The dictatorship wages a savage war against the people of East Timor.

Britain supplies arms to Indonesia.

Will New Labour stop the arms trade with these dictators? Cook's mission statement may include some fine words, but we have seen very little action. Cook has said that he stands by the eight-point foreign policy programme announced by Labour prior to the election. This includes a commitment to:

"stopping export licences for

arms to regimes that might use them for internal repression or international aggression."

But there is no commitment to taking such action unilaterally. That leaves the escape clause argument that there is no point in Britain going it alone, since others will simply continue the trade.

When asked why individual countries with long-standing, proven records of appalling abuses of human rights were being "reviewed" rather than immediately targeted, a Foreign Office spokesman said:

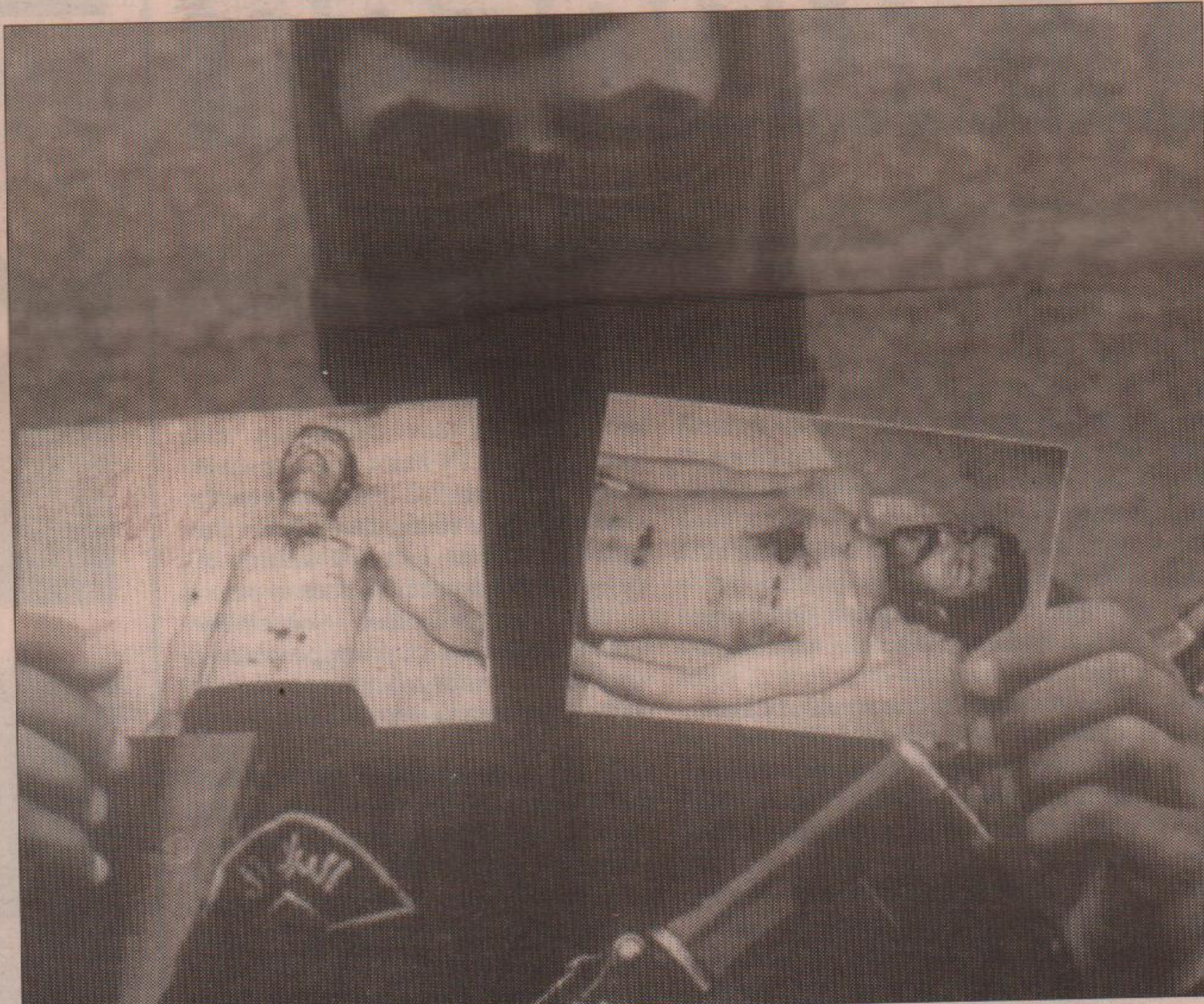
"Mr Cook has made it very clear that he has made no decision to revoke or not to revoke any arms sales. It was only last week that it was decided that there will be a review of arms sales. A comprehensive review."

And in the meantime the killing will continue. Since 1992, 60,000 have been killed in Algeria alone. Government paramilitaries are thought to be responsible for the majority of the killings.

Killing

Their preferred method of killing is to slit the throats of entire families or even the population of entire villages. They concentrate particularly in the region south of Algiers where the Islamic opposition forces are strongest. Their preferred method of torture is using a blowtorch on their victims.

And the other regimes to which Britain, under New



Paramilitaries in repressive regimes across the world are supplied by the British arms trade

Labour, still supplies arms?

- Turkey: thousands of "disappeared"; tortures school children; murders Kurdish activists.
- Saudi Arabia: absolute monarchy, no political opposition allowed, shura law forces women to be veiled, amputates limbs for petty offences.
- Nigeria: military dictatorship, executed Ken Saro-Wiwa and dozens of Ogoni activists, hundreds of other opponents of the regime have disappeared.

The human rights record of these countries is well docu-

mented by Amnesty International and is not disputed by the Foreign Office, so why simply a review?

Robin Cook did announce an immediate ban on landmines being supplied by Britain. Why the difference? Profit.

Profit

Britain does not export landmines. But the arms trade as a whole makes billions of pounds for British bosses. One company, British Aerospace, made £450 million profit last year. The arms trade with Saudi Arabia is worth over £2 billion every year.

Countries like Algeria are also exploited by British capitalism. It is estimated that Algeria contains the world's largest reserves of oil and gas. British Petroleum has a £1.85 billion pipeline there. Just as in Colombia (see page 2), they have no desire to see the back of the military, who are willing to protect their investment. And with Sir David Simon, BP's chairman, in the Labour government, no doubt Cook will be "persuaded" to turn a blind eye.

We are sold the lie that if we stop supplying arms to these regimes then British workers will suffer, thousands of jobs

will be lost, the economy as a whole will suffer. Yet the British government actually subsidises the arms industry by more than £1 billion every year. This money, as part of a massive programme of public works, could be used to employ thousands if the arms industry tried to sack workers.

In the arms industry itself, nationalisation and workers' control can ensure that there is a workers' embargo on exports to murderous dictatorships.

Era

Cook talks of a "new radical era", of "putting human rights at the heart of our foreign policy". The Kurds in Turkey, workers in Indonesia, the Ogoni of Nigeria, women in Saudi Arabia do not need words, they have the right to demand immediate action. Workers in Britain must support them.

Labour must act now. We cannot wait for the foot-dragging civil servants in the Foreign Office, who have consistently argued that the paramount principle in foreign policy is Britain's national interest, that is the British capitalists' interest. It is a principle which means that you can trade with any regime, no matter how appalling its record on human rights, if there appears to be some strategic or economic benefit for Britain involved.

Repressive

Labour should immediately ban all arms exports to these repressive, anti-democratic regimes.

And workers in the arms industry, in transport and the docks should start imposing this ban directly on crates of arms marked Indonesia, Algeria and the rest. ■

Fighting BP in Colombia - see pg 13