

# workers POWER

**INSIDE**

**1989: the year the Berlin wall fell and Stalinism crumbled**

THEORY & PRACTICE PAGE 12-14

*No delays – Labour must stand up to the bigots*

# SCRAP SECTION 28 NOW!



OCTOBER SAW two victories in the fight for gay and lesbian rights. Martin Fitzpatrick, a London Housing Association tenant, won his battle against eviction from the flat he had occupied since 1976 after three Law Lords decided that he should be considered a member of his late partner's family - they'd been living together for 25 years!

The day before, Barrie Drewitt and Tony Barlow, soon to be fathers to twins with the help of an American surrogate mother, won the right in a US court to have both their names on the birth certificates. The ruling will be binding in British courts.

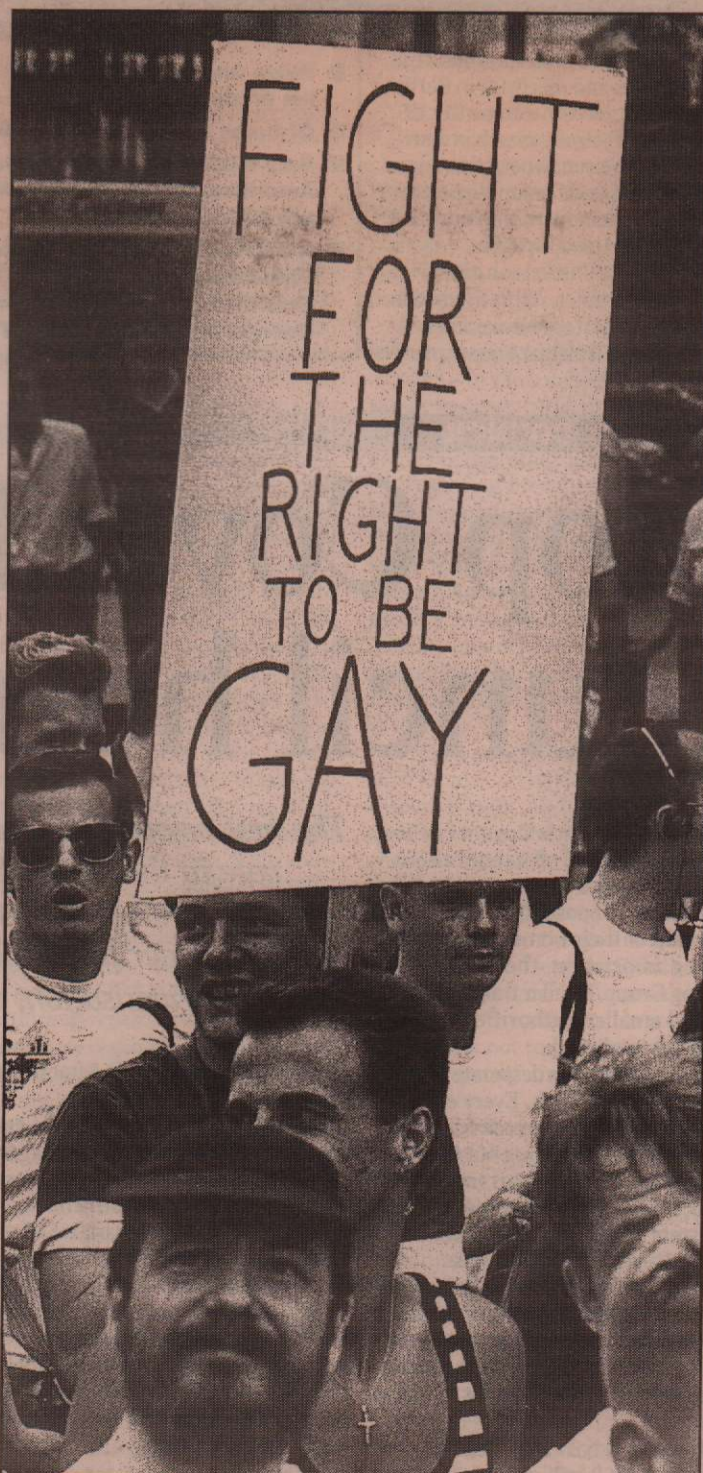
It has taken until the end of the century to gain this basic recognition of equality in a liberal democracy such as Britain. That shows the depth of homophobic prejudice fostered by capitalism.

Lesbians and gay men exist in every social class and occupation, in every type of community, and every type of family – they are lone parents, they are in couples with 2.2 children, they are grandparents, brothers, sisters, aunts, uncles. The only difference is their sexuality – and this sexuality makes them the target for oppression, discrimination, abuse, violence and even death at the hands of “queer bashers”.

Homophobia pervades British society – from the likes of David Blunkett who wants heterosexual marriage promoted in schools as “normal and desirable”, to the Law Lords who rejected Fitzpatrick's argument that he and his deceased partner's relationship should be viewed in the same way as co-habiting straight couples, to the despicable scum who bombed Soho's Admiral Duncan bar in April.

Any recent progress has been despite New Labour, not because of it. Thanks to devolution we may even see the Scottish Parliament scrapping Section 28 next year while Westminster prevaricates for who knows how long.

The moralistic Blair must stop dithering and show some backbone to the bigots – Labour should immediately honour its manifesto commitment to scrap Section 28 now; equalise the age of consent with no criminalising of sex between “responsible adults” and 16 and 17-year-olds; give equal pension rights to same sex and unmarried partners, and make discrimination at work and against service users illegal. These would be real steps towards ending lesbian and gay oppression.



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## IN BRIEF

The United Families and Friends Campaign marched to Downing Street on 30 October to demand that Tony Blair authorise an independent public inquiry into the staggering number of deaths of people in the custody of the police, Prison Service and secure psychiatric hospitals. Over 200 friends and relatives of some of the 1,500 people who have died in custody since 1990, a disproportionate number of whom were black, joined campaigners from Inquest and the Newham Monitoring Project in seeking to highlight the brutal racism that still lies at the heart of the British state. In the last year alone at least 28 of those who died in custody were black. The demonstration also had the support of a number of white families who have lost loved ones in custody, including those of Richard O'Brien, a victim of unlawful killing by Metropolitan Police officers, and the unarmed Harry Stanley, gunned down by Hackney police in late September.

Peter Tatchell, the leading campaigner in the gay rights group, OUTRAGE!, was among three activists arrested on 30 October as they attempted to stage a "citizen's arrest" of Zimbabwean president, Robert Mugabe. The incident, outside an exclusive west London hotel, took place while Mugabe, infamous for his crude homophobia, was in town on a shopping spree. The Zimbabwean leader has branded homosexuals as "worse than pigs and dogs". No doubt he had come to London hoping to escape from the political realities of Harare, where he has resorted to increasingly brutal repression to stifle mass opposition to his corrupt regime as it tries to impose an economic austerity package. Meanwhile, Tatchell is out on police bail, but may still face a day in court. Drop the charges now!

Textile workers in Earl Shilton, near Leicester, mounted a blockade of the Pex sock manufacturing plant after they turned up to work on 26 October to find their workplace shut. Pex, a company controlled by an Italian aristocrat, shut the factory "totally out of the blue", according to a district union official. The firm owed up to 12 weeks in back wages to the majority of the workforce and some £17,000 in subs, collected through the check-off system, to the KFAT union. Since the blockade the owner has agreed to pay the outstanding wages but is pursuing his plan to transfer sock production out of Britain to Sri Lanka. The Pex closure came within days of another clothing manufacturer, Bairds, declaring 2,000 redundancies after Marks & Spencer cancelled its supply contract.

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## DEATH ROW PRISONER

# Free Mumia Abu-Jamal

LONG-TERM death row inmate, Mumia Abu-Jamal, has won the latest round in his fight for life. He has been granted a temporary stay of execution by federal court judge William Yohn. The stay allows his lawyers to prepare the Writ of Habeas Corpus, originally filed on 16 October. It will remain in force into the new year.

Pennsylvania state governor, Thomas Ridge, had attempted to pre-empt Mumia and his legal team by signing a new warrant authorising his execution and setting a 2 December date (an earlier warrant had been revoked in 1995).

Mumia, a former member of the Black Panthers and an eloquent radical political journalist, was convicted and sentenced to death in 1982 for the fatal shooting of Philadelphia policeman Daniel Faulkner in December 1981. The trial proceedings violated Mumia's basic rights and amounted to a racist frame-up.

He is a man of considerable courage and principle. Mumia declined an opportunity to put his case to a national television audience last autumn because union members had been locked out by the broadcasting giant, ABC.

Even the far from radical American Lawyer magazine stated that the conviction was secured through fabricated evidence. A subsequent appeal of his conviction was heard by the very same judge who had presided over the original trial in 1982.

The news of Governor Ridge's latest warrant sparked protests around the world: marches and meetings in Berlin and Hamburg; action across the US, including a 1,000-strong march in downtown San Francisco, where there has been significant trade union support for Mumia, and a demonstration attacked by police in Portland, Oregon.

In Paris a 10,000-strong rally in defence of trade union rights listened to speeches in support of Mumia; and London witnessed a Trafalgar Square meet-

ing. Even the French foreign minister, Hubert Vedrine, has voiced his opposition to the death penalty and supported the call for a new trial for Mumia.

The warrant, however, now puts Jamal on "Phase 2 death watch." His prison "privileges" have been drastically curtailed. He was originally allowed two 15-minute conversations a week. Since the warrant, the prison authorities have interfered with his phone conversations - including a live radio broadcast. Further restrictions on visitors and reading material have been implemented.

The aim of Mumia's lawyers in filing a Writ of Habeas Corpus is to force the state court to mount a defence of its decision to execute Mumia before a federal court judge. Between 1977 and 1996 federal courts have overturned death sentences in more than one in three appeals. But, since the passage of the Effective Death Penalty Act 1996, introduced after the Oklahoma City bombing, the power of the writ has been severely restricted.

The writ lists 29 violations of his civil rights in the original trial such as: coercion of a witness by the prosecution - who later recanted her testimony; suppression of documents by the police; illegal surveillance of Mumia; racial bias in the selection of jurors; an ineffective defence lawyer (he had not read many of the documents) appointed by



the state despite Mumia's expressed wish to defend himself.

Ridge's latest move came after the US Supreme Court had rejected a request to review the case in early October. This would have given it the discretion to deal with any issues of Habeas Corpus without waiting for the federal court's decision.

Since August in particular, Mumia has been subjected to an intensified press campaign claiming he actually killed Faulkner. In the August edition of Vanity Fair, Philip Bloch, a one-time member of the Pennsylvania Prison Society, claimed that Mumia had admitted to the murder during a prison visit in 1992. This claim was taken up enthusiastically by the mainstream press including the Philadelphia Daily News,

helping pave the way for Ridge's new death warrant.

In response to the claim Mumia released a letter in which Philip Bloch wrote of the possibility of a new trial: "So when you get a new trial - I think there is a good chance of acquittal." The letter, dated 17 July 1993, was composed a year after Bloch allegedly heard Mumia's "confession of guilt". Further evidence exposed Bloch's claim as a lie. The visiting area, where the conversation supposedly took place, was known by the inmates to be bugged and so they avoided any personal conversations when there. Meanwhile, the Pennsylvania Prison Society released information that Bloch was expelled in 1991 for violation of procedures - he taped conversations with inmates and then went to the local press.

A campaign was launched throughout the USA to counteract this lie with meetings, campus teach-ins, demonstrations and radio talk shows. But, however successful Abu-Jamal and his supporters were in discrediting Bloch's claim, the lie was already in the mainstream media doing its work.

In addition to Governor Ridge, a powerful array of forces has lined up against Mumia including the Philadelphia Fraternal Order of Police, which in 1998 purchased a full-page ad in the New York Times demanding Mumia's swift execution, and much of the mass media. But Mumia has become the only prisoner among more than 3,000 overwhelmingly African-American and Latino inmates on America's death rows to garner the support of a national campaign. All those who oppose his death sentence and want to see him free must take to the streets and make their voices heard loud and strong.

**Demonstrate - Saturday 6 November. Assemble Trafalgar Square, 2.00 pm. Nearest tubes: Charing Cross, Embankment and Leicester Square. Called by "Mumia Must Live!" campaign.**

## RACIST JUSTICE, GOVERNOR RIDGE STYLE

- Ridge has signed 176 death warrants - five times more than his predecessors combined in 25 years.
- Of these 176 more than 100 are African-Americans.
- Only 9 per cent of Pennsylvania's population is African-American, but 62 per cent of the state's death row inmates are African-American.
- A University Of Iowa study found that African-Americans in Philadelphia are 11.5 times more likely to end up on death row than if they were in the former Jim Crow southern states of Georgia or Alabama, both of which uphold capital punishment.

## COVENTRY COUNCIL

# Stop Coventry Labour's council house sell off

LATER THIS month Coventry City Council plans to sell off its entire housing stock. Council tenants will be balloted on the proposal to transfer the ownership of their homes to a private housing association, the Whitefriars Housing Group. Similar transfers have involved smaller authorities or only part of the total stock.

The city council is desperate for the transfer to go through. Every council home in Coventry has received several glossy brochures, spelling out the case for transfer. Council staff have been instructed to visit every home and talk to tenants personally. They have even delivered a video to sell the idea.

The council argues that it can't afford to pay for the repairs needed to make its buildings habitable without a massive rent increase. And, indeed, there is a desperate need in some areas for massive investment.

The council has calculated it would need about £260 million to do the necessary repairs. Over the foreseeable future it estimates that central gov-

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ernment will provide only a fraction of that.

Current laws applying to local government finance severely restrict the capacity of local authorities to raise money for housing investment. A private company has a comparative advantage in that it can freely borrow money from banks and building societies.

Whitefriars Housing Group have promised that rents will rise by no more than one per cent above inflation for the first five years and that tenants will not lose any rights they currently hold under the council. They also claim that tenants will have a greater say in the nature of their housing as the management board will include tenants. But

hidden beneath all their glossy propaganda is a clear indication that they intend to make tenants pay for privatisation.

First, the promise on limiting rent rises for five years applies only to existing tenants. New tenants will not be covered by this guarantee. Secondly, any repairs carried out on a property, not deemed absolutely necessary, will result in a rent rise for the tenant. For double glazing that means an extra £1.49 per week; for a new kitchen, £3.49. And finally, of course, after the five-year period tenants have no assurance that they will not face steeply higher rents.

Virtually all existing council tenants now hold secure tenancies. Transfer will

mean them becoming assured tenants. The main difference relates to eviction. As an assured tenant, you become liable to eviction after only eight weeks in rent arrears.

Will tenants have a greater say in the running of their homes? The management board of Whitefriars Homes Ltd. is to be made up of one-third councilors, one-third tenants and another third "independent people". So tenants will always be the minority. And, mysteriously, all the board members, including the tenants' representatives, have already been chosen!

The first priority is to campaign for a massive "no" vote in the ballot. It is also vital that local government workers, whose jobs and conditions are under threat because of the potential privatisation, organise against it. Finally, we must recognise that whatever the outcome of the ballot, even if privatisation is rejected, council housing across Britain is woefully inadequate. We must fight for a massive injection of funding for real social housing nationally.



Three in four people want Britain's railways re-nationalised. It is a stark indication of public horror in the wake of the Paddington rail disaster that claimed 30 lives and seriously injured 250 others. *Jeremy Dewar* details the background to an avoidable disaster that shows private bosses are prepared to kill for profit.

# Stop the gravy train – nationalise the railways

MANY LABOUR voters thought that re-nationalisation of the railways was their party's policy at the 1997 election. But it was categorically rejected by Tony Blair and his supposedly "old Labour" deputy John Prescott. Now the issue of rail nationalisation is back on the political agenda in the wake of the Paddington rail tragedy.

The devastating crash occurred when a local Thames train collided with a Great Western express approaching Paddington station at speed. The disaster shattered whatever public confidence remained in the privatised rail network.

Sickeningly, Richard Middleton, a fat cat director at Railtrack, the company legally responsible for safety on the railways, dismissed public outrage as "hysteria". Yet even a cursory examination of the crash reveals the perilous state of this privatised industry, proving that far from being hysterical many people are drawing rational conclusions after the second catastrophe on the same line in two years.

The crash happened after the Thames train driver went through a red signal and crossed towards the high-speed line on which the Great Western train was running at 70 miles per hour. Why did the driver not stop at the red light?

According to an independent report, compiled after the crash and co-authored by a former British Rail head of safety, up to half the signals between Paddington and Ladbroke Grove are dangerously obscured; one is "quite simply hidden behind a bridge". The signals are of various designs, some having been modified in unconventional ways, others indicating routes for two-way tracks as well as whether it is safe to proceed, and numbering an astonishing 50 over a seven-minute journey. The now notorious signal 109, which the driver probably failed to see, had been passed at danger at least eight times in the last five years.

Whose fault is this? Sections of the media and, of course, the rail bosses would like to pin it on the drivers. But many drivers have repeatedly complained about the poor visibility of signals on this stretch of track, all too aware that without major improvements they might be the next dead driver. Railtrack has refused to simplify the layout.

Most experts, including the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) believe that the single biggest reason for drivers going through red lights is fatigue. Since privatisation accelerated in 1992, 40,000 railworkers have been sacked, leaving the remaining workforce doing an average 45.3 hour week just to make a living wage. It is cheaper to work a driver to the bone than to recruit and train a new one. Little wonder then that such incidents occur about twice a day!

Another problem highlighted by the recent tragedy is the bewildering number of criss-crossing lines on the approach to Paddington station. Over the last three post-privatisation years, rail traffic has increased by 20 per cent, resulting in huge profits for the rail



Prescott surveys the wreckage of privatisation.

companies. But almost none of these profits have been ploughed back into improving the track, 50 per cent of which, according to a senior engineer, is "on its last legs". The number of broken rails soared by 20 per cent in 1998 alone. The statutory rail regulator reported to John Prescott last year that "Rail track quality is worse than it was under BR."

The crazy situation arising from the patchwork quilt of signals in the vicinity of Paddington station, described in April by Rod Muttram, Railtrack's safety adviser, as the "safest in the world", has been exacerbated by the recent introduction of the Heathrow Express which runs every 15 minutes.

A simple solution exists that would provide a much greater margin of safety: give the high-speed trains sole use of well-maintained, dedicated track which local trains cannot cross and abolish the use of bi-directional track. Japan has adopted this approach with the result that it has never experienced a high-speed train crash since introducing dedicated track in 1964.

Finally, the public has become aware that the technology to avert disasters caused by signals passed at danger (SPADs) also exists. In fact, it has existed since the early part of the twentieth century as Vic Coleman – another Railtrack executive – explained in January:

"Even as early as 1900 certain railway companies were thinking seriously about devices which could prevent a driver passing a signal at danger without being aware of it... Their pilot installation between Reading and Paddington was in place by 1910 and working successfully."

Two train protection systems now exist: the Advanced Train Protection (ATP) system, which automatically applies the brakes on a SPAD; and the Train Protection Warning System (TPWS) which merely warns the driver and does not work on a train travelling faster than 60 miles per hour. The difference? Well, for the capitalist accountants in the pay of privatised

rail companies, the ATP system would cost £1.2 billion to introduce across the network and the TPWS is a mere £150 million.

The inquiry into the 1988 Clapham rail disaster recommended that all trains be fitted with ATP. The then Tory government ignored the report, preferring to spend the money dismantling the network in preparation for privatisation. The Association of Train Operators cynically justifies this by valuing a human life at £2.76 million and insisting that ATP, costing £14 million per life saved, is too expensive. Worse, Prescott, at the much heralded 25 October "Rail Summit", merely argued that the deadline for the introduction of TPWS be brought forward from the original date of 2003. ATP will be the subject of yet another inquiry, which will report when the heat is off.

What has angered railworkers and passengers most throughout this sordid affair is the refusal of the fat cats running the rail companies to take any responsibility for their fatal inaction. The 100 or so companies which bought up British Rail for a song made combined profits of £1,027 million in 1998. Railtrack alone made £398 million profit last year. Even Railtrack's much publicised £27 billion, 10-year investment plan is a con: £16.4 billion is earmarked for running repairs and renewal; £1.5 billion is for commercial development of assets; just £3.2 billion, spread over 10 years, is for improving the network.

Many British Rail managers and executives became millionaires overnight through management buy-outs. Gerald Corbett "earns" £335,000 a year and is headed for a million-pound bonus this year. Yet none of them will carry the can for killing 30 people at Paddington as a result of their policies.

No one will be brought to justice for corporate manslaughter because no single director will shoulder the blame for the under-investment and penny-pinching that made the disaster inevitable. In fact, only one person has ever been found guilty of corporate manslaughter in British legal history.

In a few years Thames Trains and Railtrack may be fined, but it won't change their policies. In July Great Western was fined £1.5 million over the 1997 Southall crash. In view of the company's £300 million turnover, this was rightly described by a relative of one of the victims as "derisory".

Even Prescott's plan to introduce an industry-wide whistleblowers' scheme – CIRAS – to allow railworkers to report safety hazards without fear of management reprisals was vetoed by three of the rail operating companies. Workers reporting breaches of health and safety regulations are already supposedly protected in law by the health and safety regulations and the Public Disclosure Act, brought in this July. In practice, however, these offer little protection to workers who can be victimised for other reasons by bosses who resent any encroachment on their right to manage.

The 73 per cent of the population who favour re-nationalisation are absolutely right. All 100 rail companies must be brought back into public ownership immediately. This is not off-the-wall – it was Labour Party policy up until March 1997, when Gordon Brown overturned it on the grounds that it would cost the Treasury £2 billion to buy majority share-holdings in all the companies. The simple answer to that objection is not to pay the merchants of death a penny – no compensation for the fat cats!

Yet the Labour government has no intention of taking such action. Instead, it is planning to increase the role of private capital in transport and other dangerous industries. Air Traffic Control, London Underground and British Nuclear Fuels are all still up for sale. How many future air disasters, tube crashes and nuclear chain reactions will be met by Gordon Brown telling us that it would be too expensive to reverse these privatisations?

As it is, the working class taxpayer is being taken for a ride. Railtrack gets a £1.3 billion annual government subsidy – more than BR ever

received. After Paddington, when they were under pressure to spend some of this on safety measures, Railtrack had the cheek to demand the government effectively raise the subsidy by taking a 15 per cent stake in the company. In return, Railtrack will take over five of London Underground's lines or operate the East Coast mainline trains!

But re-nationalisation is only part of the answer. British Rail, like the other nationalised industries, was dirty, run-down and itself accident-prone. Margaret Thatcher traded on this by saying it was inherent to nationalisation. Wrong – it is inherent to state capitalist nationalisation, which continues to run the industries for profit, not to meet people's needs.

This is why we need to fight not only for a nationalised rail service but for it to be run under railworkers' and rail users' control. Only when the working class controls investment, safety procedures, time-tabling, ticket-pricing, pay and conditions – every aspect of the rail service – will we begin to get the train network we need.

How do we fight for this?

With a political campaign for re-nationalisation without compensation, involving lobbies, demonstrations, a challenge to Prescott's membership of the RMT and the London mayoral elections to pressure the government. Alongside this we must support railworkers' struggles in the here and now.

Immediately following the crash, the main drivers' union, ASLEF, took steps to increase safety. ASLEF instructed all drivers to impose a strict speed limit when approaching major stations, to ensure all cabs had two drivers on board and to refuse to drive any train which did not have an operative protection device.

The RMT had, meanwhile, balloted before the Paddington disaster for a 24-hour strike against plans by operating companies to take away guards' responsibilities for safety – a move which would de-skill guards and ensure the death toll for future accidents is even higher. Despite an 84 per cent vote for action, Virgin, South West Trains and Connex South Central shamelessly dragged the union through the courts and obtained an injunction on the grounds that the strike would be secondary action against Railtrack!

Railworkers faced with this cynical sabotage must smash the anti-union laws and call for solidarity from other unions should anyone be fined or jailed for taking action in defence of rail safety.

These actions, against the background of unmistakable sympathy for re-nationalisation, show the way forward. Labour must be forced to change course, re-nationalise the railways without compensation, and cancel their other privatisation plans. Through their unions, workers must fight to impose their control over the rail industry and force Labour ministers to recognise this in law. Achieving these goals would be the most meaningful tribute to those who tragically and needlessly lost their lives on 5 October to corporate greed.



## UNISON

# Vote Bannister: prepare to fight

EUROPE'S BIGGEST union is at a cross-roads in its six-year history. The battle lines are drawn in the race to succeed Rodney Bickerstaffe as general secretary of the 1.3 million-strong public sector union Unison. Nominations close on 26 November.

The challenger from the left is Roger Bannister, branch secretary of the Knowsley branch on Merseyside and a long-standing member of the National Executive Committee (NEC). He stood against Bickerstaffe in the last general secretary election in 1995 and gained nearly 20 per cent of the vote. This time he has the backing of the Campaign for a Fighting and Democratic Unison (CFDU) and the other main organised left force in the union, the Socialist Workers Party (SWP), which stood its own candidate in 1995.

If, as appears certain, Bannister secures the required 25 branch nominations, he will definitely be facing Dave Prentis, currently deputy general secretary, who was anointed as Bickerstaffe's heir apparent by the September meeting of the NEC. Prentis has enthusiastically aligned himself with the Unison leadership's attacks on those left-dominated branches that have been prepared to fight in recent years. To the overwhelming majority of Unison members, however, he is a completely unknown quantity.

Workers Power supporters in Unison, organised around the bulletin Well Red, welcome the prospect of a united front of left activists in support of Bannister's candidacy. We are already working to maximise the number of

branch nominations for him and to organise hustings at branch meetings. We urge all our readers in Unison to vote and actively campaign for Bannister in coming weeks.

While our support for Roger is not uncritical, there is a very real difference between him and Prentis. We would warmly welcome an electoral victory against Prentis, who enjoys control of the union's national apparatus in the run-up to this election (which in practice means his face is now plastered across every Unison publication that comes through members' doors). Whatever rhetorical criticisms he may make of particular Blairite policies, his record shows that he is determined to make Unison safe for New Labour.

An easy win for Prentis would open up the prospect of five years of retreat by Unison in the face of a range of New Labour attacks, such as Best Value and the Private Finance Initiative (PFI), that threaten to undermine the very principle of public sector service provision. More members' jobs will go to private sector bosses with little protection against the erosion of pay, terms and conditions, including pension rights.

Bannister's election campaign will be an uphill fight for the left. Large metropolitan branches in Birmingham and Sheffield, led by the left, remain suspended, while many other activists are under threat of investigation and possible expulsion. But in their vicious attempt to crush internal opposition via the witch-hunt the bureaucracy dominating our union is undermining its membership base and leading the union

to crisis at a time when we should be growing rapidly.

Union density in a number of former local government strongholds has fallen below 50 per cent. There is an urgent need for a recruitment drive with national and regional resources targeted at attracting young workers, often on temporary contracts or sent in by agencies, to replenish an ageing membership.

But regardless of the eventual outcome of this winter's poll, socialists in the union must seize on the opportunity offered by the election campaign to mobilise rank and file militants:

- to halt the ongoing witch-hunts and any further restrictions on internal democracy;

- to campaign for industrial action to fight against PFI, Best Value and other backdoor privatisation schemes and

- to fight the whole arsenal of anti-union laws, actively backing those who strike in defiance of them. This means leadership support for unofficial action, with strike pay and full legal and industrial backing for strikers or branches prosecuted under these grossly anti-working class laws.

On these key issues and more Roger's campaign literature is saying many of the right things but his election programme needs to be far clearer and more developed. One leaflet simply states that Roger opposes "more privatisation of public services". Elsewhere, he has made plain that he supports the call for taking those services already sold off to the private profiteers back into the public sector. Two essential points are still missing, however: clear opposition to any

compensation to the private bosses and a call for these services to be run under the control of workers' and users' groups.

Years of chronic underfunding have meant many NHS and local authority services are in a deplorable state. We cannot simply defend the status quo, but have to fight for a massive injection of new funds through the introduction of a swingeing wealth tax on the rich and a steeply progressive income tax. In addition, we must make it clear that we do not want to see a return to the remote, unaccountable bureaucracies long associated with public sector service delivery.

The CFDU, of which Bannister is a member, has a policy of linking its minimum wage demand to the European Union's decency threshold, currently around £7 an hour. Meanwhile, Unison's conference policy is for a minimum of £5, far better than £3.60 but still inadequate to eliminate poverty pay as housing costs in London and the South East spiral ahead of inflation and fares on public transport skyrocket. At present the Bannister literature only mentions the £5 figure "with no exemptions". We call on him to stand by existing CFDU policy.

The Bannister pledge to reject the general secretary's whopping salary of more than £70,000 is excellent, along with the demand that all Unison officials be paid no more than average members' wages. But a root and branch democratisation requires more: especially the annual election of all officials - making them subject to immediate recall, and

really ensuring the union is member-led by giving mass meetings the power to make policy and vote directly for strikes and other industrial action.

Bannister calls for "opening up the political fund to support candidates in local and parliamentary elections whose policies are more in line with Unison's". We agree that the constitution of the union should not bind us to only backing a party that is intensifying its attacks on public sector trade unionists. We believe the current undemocratic and bureaucratic divide between the Affiliated Political Fund and the General Political Fund should be abolished - it is only there to stop ordinary members actively putting demands on New Labour.

We call for a full and open debate around the continued expenditure of members' subs on supporting New Labour but we are against Unison members opting out of the APF at the moment. Why? Because we are in favour of the unions being able to fight Blair from within the Labour Party, not ceding ground to him without a fight. The key issue is to democratise the Unison block vote in the party and put it at the service of the rank and file.

Well Red supporters will fight for the above policies to form part of Roger Bannister's election programme as part of our fight to build a genuine rank and file movement around revolutionary socialist politics across Unison as a whole - a movement that can mount a decisive challenge to bureaucratic misleadership and effectively defeat the range of New Labour attacks now facing public sector workers.

## DERBYSHIRE

# Boycotting "big brother"

A BOYCOTT of a new timesheet system involving the electronic "tagging" of workers begins in Derbyshire on 3 November. Around 1,300 home helps in the Derbyshire County branch of Unison delivered a massive 93 per cent "yes" vote for action.

The dispute started because the Labour county council attempted to impose electronic timesheets. Management has already spent over £200,000 setting up a contract with BT with the aim of forcing the social services staff to phone a call centre many times a day - using their own phones and those of service users - as they log in and out at the beginning and end of a shift and for each home visit they make.

The council came up with the idea over a year ago and straight away home helps recognised it for what it was - "electronic tagging" of the low-paid, predominantly women workers to give managers greater control over the service and use this device to cut hours and conditions. Workers also fear the council's ultimate aim is to streamline the service to make it attractive to private companies in the event of a sell off.

The workers are solid. They see the electronic timesheets as proof that management doesn't trust them despite the amount of "good will", i.e. free time, the home helps put in (because the time allotted to each elderly or disabled user is woefully inadequate).

It is a further attack coming on top of the massively increased workload and level of responsibility home helps have had to take on in the wake of community care policies.

The job is now about much more than cleaning - with workers respon-

sible for administering medication, alerting GPs to problems and so on. But workers have received no pay rises to compensate them for their changing role - some are still on as little as £4.75 an hour.

The job is stressful enough without the added burden of trying to get through to a call centre over 10 times a day. Plus the extra time this takes will mean less time to attend to service users.

With the £200,000 already spent the council has a lot to lose. So far they have only offered minor sweeteners. They can't afford to offer much in terms of one-off cash bribes. Instead they are likely to try dirty tricks such as docking pay for work beyond minimum contracted hours or to impose new contracts - a tactic they used against school meals

workers during a previous council attack on low paid women workers.

Many home helps see strike action as a last resort given the nature of their work - care work. But as the nurses' action in Ireland shows, action by care workers can hit the bosses where it hurts and get public support.

Home helps in Derbyshire must be ready to take this step if the council refuses to back down in the face of the boycott - to ensure a significant victory and put a stop to any plans the Derbyshire County Council, and other local authorities, may have to introduce this kind of "big brother" management across the board.

■ Messages of support to: Derbyshire County Unison, County Hall, Matlock DE4 3AG Fax 01629 580322.



## CARDIFF

# Strike against job losses

CARDIFF'S COUNCIL services were brought to a virtual standstill on 19 October as 12,000 Unison members staged an all-out, one-day strike in protest against proposed compulsory redundancies.

Union officials claimed an 80 per cent success for the action, which closed City Hall, the Castle, the Sherman Theatre, day centres, resource centres, libraries and more.

TGWU and GMB members

refused to cross picket lines, while teachers also sent a delegation to support a march on the Welsh Assembly - a march which started an hour late, thanks to the police having problems finding County Hall.

The union action was in response to a council "modernisation" package involving up to 50 job losses, mainly among lower management grades: the thin end of the wedge, as Unison members

recognise.

Not only will the reorganisation ultimately affect service users, the council are also trying to attack union organisation - they plan to scrap the Joint Consultative Committee and replace it with a social partnership style works council.

Cardiff's Labour Lord Mayor, Russell Goodway, chose to ignore an agreement to consult with Unison over the redundancies, and arrogantly

attacked workers who regard a council post as a "job for life".

Up to now, Unison's local leadership have been timid in their demands, attacking Goodway's methods but accepting the logic of council cuts. The success of this strike must inspire more militant workers to take the initiative and demand all-out action to attack all cuts. It is the increasingly notorious Russell Goodway who should be fearing for his job.

workersPOWER



# Ford workers strike back against racist management

IN A stunning display of solidarity workers at Ford Dagenham recently walked out in protest over the racial harassment of black workers at the plant. Over 2,000 workers on the day and night shifts at the Paint, Trim and Assembly plant took part in the strike which crippled production of the Fiesta.

The immediate cause of the walk-out was the assault by a white supervisor on an Asian shop steward. Jaswir Tega was talking to another black worker about insults they had recently experienced when he was violently pushed and nearly fell onto the conveyor. This was the latest in a long line of incidents in a plant which the workers label as institutionally racist.

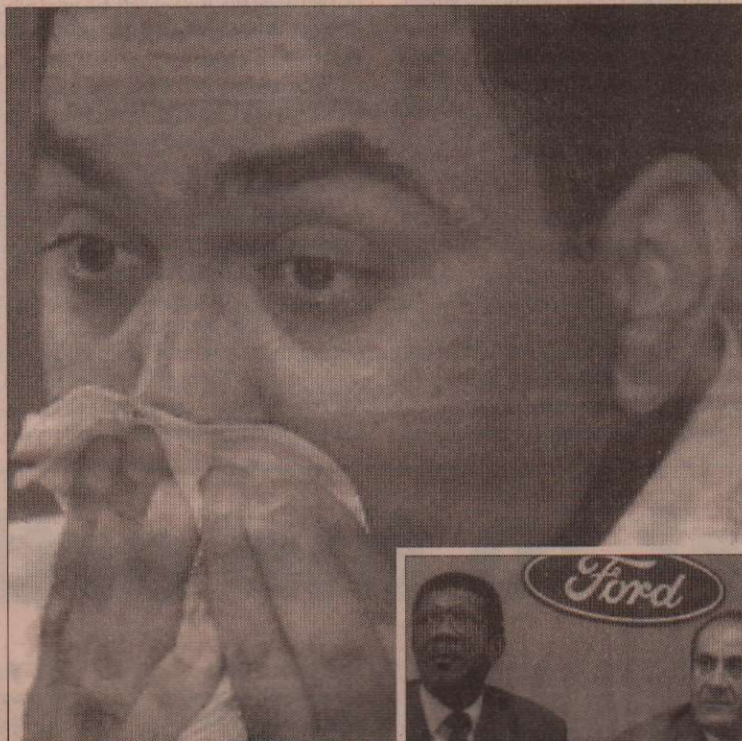
This description was given its most dramatic and public airing at the tribunal where Ford admitted racial discrimination, harassment and victimisation against Sukhjit Parma. Mr Parma was the victim of a four-year campaign of racism which included verbal abuse, denial of protective clothing when oil spraying, confinement in a "punishment cell" and culminated in death threats from a BNP-voting worker.

Throughout this stewards in the engine plant, where the unions admit that racists control part of the structure, refused to help him. Even now the convenor has issued a leaflet accusing the TGWU of fabrication and Sukhjit of being a liar and a gold-digger. This highlights the need for black and Asian workers to have the right to caucus within the unions in order to force the unions to confront racism, whether it comes from management or union members.

Equally, Sukhjit was ignored by Ford's management who refused to take his complaints seriously despite their supposedly "zero tolerance" of racism. It was only when he finally went to a steward in another part of the plant that his grievances were taken up.

This is the latest in a long history of racist incidents in the Dagenham plant (see box). In fact, since 1991 when the plant lost the Mondeo and was given a last chance to "improve quality and productivity", a general culture of all types of bullying and intimidation has become prevalent.

At present Dagenham is on short-time working, despite being named as Europe's most productive Ford plant by the Economist Intelligence Unit. This obviously leads to anxiety and uncertainty, and an ever increasing attempt by team leaders and supervisors to cut costs and speed up work. At shop floor level management platitudes such as



**Sukhjit Parma (above) and Bill Morris with Ford's global president, Jac Nasser (right)**



"cost effectiveness" and "agreed performance milestones" inevitably lead to the bullying of the workforce.

In such a climate the union officials in Dagenham, from the TGWU and the AEEU, have seriously failed the workers. While making much of their support for the recent action against overt racism, Bill Morris and Ken Jackson have gone along with virtually all of Ford's proposals for squeezing ever more profit out of the Dagenham plant. Even now, rather than calling out the whole membership in order to achieve the removal of all racist and bullying managers and supervisors, and expelling racist stewards, Morris rushed to cool things down by arranging to meet Jac Nasser, Ford's global president.

At this meeting management and unions agreed an action plan to stamp out racism at the plant. The plan includes setting up an equal opportunities committee and appointing a diversity manager. Bill Morris said the discussions were "extensive and amiable", and believed that the issues of equality and diversity could now be taken forward.

It is a step forward to make the Ford bosses agree that there are problems in their plants. Previously, they had claimed that there were none and that all workers were treated "equitably

and consistently". They were so complacent – or, rather, complicit – that a request by Steve Riley, one of the convenors, for a meeting to discuss the implications of the Macpherson report on Stephen Lawrence had been ignored for over six months.

However, Morris' other comment is much more worrying. Having managed to defuse the present situation he now declares that "we are confident the company will deliver." Yet we are left with the same management, supervisors and foremen – 98 per cent of whom are white at a plant where nearly half the employees are not. They have been running the place during the recent disputes. Many of them are the racists.

What this shows is that if zero tolerance to racism and bullying is to really be implemented it will only be done by the workers themselves taking united, political strike action such as that just displayed by the Dagenham workers.

We call for:

- workers' control of hiring and firing
- drive all active racists and fascists out of the union – don't work or cooperate with them
- strike against all instances of racist harassment and general bullying
- no to line speed-ups and flexible working.

## RACISM AT FORD – ANY COLOUR AS LONG AS IT'S NOT BLACK?

Ford's acceptance of liability for Sukhjit Parma's four years of racist harassment in September is just the latest in a long line of such disputes at the Dagenham plant.

The BNP used to be active at the plant in the early 1980s. Tony Lecomber, a prominent fascist leader who was convicted for attempting to bomb the Workers Revolutionary Party's headquarters, was a trainee foreman at Dagenham.

By 1985 this had led to anti-racist strikes, most famously over a racist "joke" questionnaire distributed by white foremen.

In October 1992 Ford's own survey showed that women and ethnic minorities were under-represented at foreman, skilled post and

management level.

In February 1996 Ford paid out £1,500 each to four black workers after replacing their faces with white ones in an advertising poster. Since then, the company has had to fork out a further £70,000 to seven black workers after a tribunal found evidence of a colour bar in the recruitment of truck drivers. Three hundred drivers then left the TGWU to join the racist IRTU.

This is not only a record of management collusion with and promotion of racism – crucially, it is also a record of workers' struggle against the divide-and-rule tactics of the bosses and their stooges in the workforce, a struggle that can be built on in the future.

# workers POWER

BCM BOX 7750 LONDON WC1N 3XX ★ 0181 981 0602

COMMENT

## Foul food and poison politics

Britain was gripped by a frenzy of nationalist hysteria last month that was every bit as disgusting as the feed agribusinesses shove down the throats of cattle.

The latest arguments were over the respective merits of agricultural hygiene in France and Britain. A sane discussion about food safety was rendered impossible amidst the anti-French hysteria and generalised Europhobia.

The Mail's "Just Say Non" campaign and the Sun's demand that Blair should start to kick some French butts come as no surprise. But the serial xenophobes of the tabloid press were not the only ones to get stuck in. "Filthy hypocrites", screamed Farmers' Weekly, of their French counterparts.

Having squealed like a stuck pig over the continuation of the French ban on British beef, agriculture minister Nick Brown went ballistic in response to an EU report which revealed that French farmers fed sewage to their cows. He offered the ultimate sacrifice: he would stop drinking French wine and eating French products. There is no greater thing that a Labour minister can do than to put aside his claret for his country.

Brown's boycott prompted much speculation that the entire cabinet were going to sign up to his crusade, but no other lionhearts were to be found. This led the Tory leader William Hague – who increasingly talks like a man whose brain has taken a long vacation – to claim that the government, rather than the mad cows, had had their spines removed.

What really stank about the food wars was not sewage in cattle feed or the rotting carcasses of mad cows, but the nationalism. This chauvinist furore about beef is poison. It needs to be kept out of the food chain.

The real villains of the piece were actually revealed during the row: the agribusinesses. These corporations, and the rich farmers on both sides of the channel who work with them, wield enormous influence over governments.

The BSE crisis cost Britain and the European Union £4 billion. A crisis rooted in poor farming methods, directly related to the primacy of profit over safety and the complicity of the government turning a blind eye, was paid for by European taxpayers. In the meantime several dozen paid with their lives, having contracted CJD from BSE-infected meat. How many more will die thanks to this criminal disregard for food safety?

Food under capitalism will never be entirely safe because it is produced for profit. The profit motive drives the agricultural businesses and big farmers of France and Britain, not taste, nutrition or consumer safety.

The beef war is nothing but a war between two sets of capitalists. The French government is engaged in a protectionist manoeuvre to continue to benefit from the increase in domestic beef consumption and beef exports that the original EU ban brought to French agriculture. The British farmers' response is a cynical means of pushing for similar protectionist measures in order to boost their sales in the aftermath of the self-inflicted BSE crisis. It is cynical because it was widely known that cattle-feed producers have used sewage, dead animals and all sorts of detritus in a bid to increase beef production. The US have done it for years and no British farmer has called for a boycott of US goods.

Nationalism is invoked to encourage us to take sides in the battle. The ideology of hatred, envy and fear is promulgated by the bosses' mouthpieces in the press and in the government. Buy British to support British bosses. Don't buy French products, they're ripping us off.

This is what capitalist trade wars are like – desperate and dirty as the rivals fight to corner a lucrative share of the market. Workers – urban and rural – and small farmers, French and British, should have nothing whatsoever to do with it.

The whole debate around the beef wars is conducted in terms of us and them, two countries opposing each other. We did not hear a word about consumers' rights as opposed to the farmers', or how shoppers in Britain and France were being sold poor quality meat so agribusinesses could make larger profits.

But perhaps this time it didn't quite work. Supermarkets noted little change in the sale of French goods. The reactionary demonstrations, while noisy, have not been large. Perhaps the BSE scandal has not been forgotten nor the British farming industry forgiven. Perhaps workers, on both sides of the channel, are beginning to see through the fog of nationalism. By raising the flag of internationalism socialists can certainly help this process.

Food production can be made much safer but we cannot rely upon agribusiness or government officials. After all, these are the same people who, a few weeks ago, were busy carrying out their plans to impose GM foods on us without proper trials and testing.

Food is becoming more and more of a political issue. Socialists need to take a stand against the vested interests of agribusinesses and capitalist farmers. We must fight for workers' and consumers' control over all aspects of food production to increase standards of hygiene, safety and taste. We demand the nationalisation, without compensation of all agribusinesses, animal feed producers and capitalist farms. Workers' control in these industries can, as in the rail industry, be a matter of life and death.



# When all is said and done...

*Out Of Place* - a personal memoir by Edward Said (Granta, £25, hardback only), reviewed by G.R. McColl

"One of the routine questions I was asked by Israeli officials (since my US passport indicated that I was born in Jerusalem) was exactly when I had left Israel. I responded by saying that I had left Palestine in December 1947, accenting the word 'Palestine'. 'Do you have any relatives here?' was the next question, to which I answered, 'No one', and this triggered a sensation of such sadness and loss as I had not expected... by the early spring of 1948 my entire extended family had been swept out of the place, and has remained in exile ever since."

These words come from Edward Said's preface to his recently published reflections on the first 30 years of his life in Palestine, Egypt and the United States. Surprisingly, the above paragraph, an apparently simple statement of historical fact, related with personal sorrow, has been at the centre of a media-fuelled controversy in New York that has gar-

nered headlines internationally.

Said is a left-leaning intellectual, based at Columbia University, whose reputation as an astute cultural and literary critic rests on such books as *Orientalism*, and *Culture and Imperialism*. He is also among the most prominent figures in the Palestinian diaspora of the past five decades, having served on the Palestinian National Council, where he developed into a sharp opponent of Yasser Arafat.

Said has since emerged as the most articulate voice for secular Palestinians who see the Oslo peace accords as a gross betrayal of the legitimate national aspirations of the Palestinian masses.

Coinciding with the publication of *Out Of Place* was an article in the right-wing, pro-Zionist US magazine, *Commentary*, attacking Said's integrity. Its most shocking and feebly supported claim was that Said had not been born in Jerusalem (where, in fact, a German-

born Jewish midwife delivered him) and was effectively Egyptian from birth.

The allegations, contained in an article that would normally have had few readers, soon surfaced in the *New York Times* and became the talk of the city's "chattering classes". Said has vigorously refuted the claims and is threatening legal action.

The attack on his character has a transparent political motivation. Clearly, if a major question mark can be raised over the honesty and, indeed, the very identity of such a key Palestinian figure it is that much easier to discredit Said's opposition to the "peace process" and the Israeli state in the "court" of public opinion.

Ironically, the disinformation campaign against Said comes at a time when he has written a highly individual and almost apolitical book. In Said's own words, momentous events like the loss of Palestine, the overthrow of the Egypt-

ian monarchy, the rise of Nasser's pan-Arabism and the eventual emergence of a mass Palestinian movement figure "only allusively even though their fugitive presence can be seen here and there".

The genesis for this memoir arose from Said's battle with a life-threatening leukaemia for which he received massive doses of chemotherapy. *Out Of Place* is an erudite man's attempt to make some sense of his life just as it appeared to be ending. It is a somewhat tortuous but elegantly written text.

Said's primary concerns are with the oppressive family regime he experienced as a child and adolescent, living mainly in Cairo. But the account he gives of his family, Palestinian Christians who had become extremely affluent members of a mercantilist bourgeoisie, helps undermine a myth often relied on by Zionist apologists. In its most extreme version, the Israeli state is presented as a civilising force in a hopelessly backward region,

populated almost exclusively by poor, primitive farmers and shepherds.

The lives led by Said's nuclear family and many of his relatives, who remained in Palestine until spring 1948, attest to a rather different picture of people rich in linguistic skills, obsessed with the value of formal education and favourably disposed towards both European and American culture.

Given the steep price on the dust jacket, I cannot unreservedly recommend *Out Of Place* to anyone not already familiar with and interested in Said's literary output. The book vividly captures many details of "an essentially lost or forgotten world", but in the main it is a poignant account of three decades of privileged but psychologically difficult existence.

Whatever the strengths or weaknesses of *Out Of Place*, it is the duty of all socialists and democrats to stand with Said against those who seek to defame him.

## From the heart to the arthouse

The Estaque district of Marseille, a largely working class, multi-ethnic enclave in France's economically ravaged second city: this is the setting for director Robert Guedigian's remarkable second feature, *A la place du coeur* (Where the heart is).

It bears comparison with the best of Ken Loach's work and deserves a wide audience. But sadly, like many a Loach film it has been consigned to the arthouse cinema by the UK's film distribution market.

The film transposes a late James Baldwin novel, *If Beale Street Could Talk*, from the black ghetto of New York's Harlem in the early 1960s to contemporary France. Though the film blunts the hardest edges of Baldwin's story, it is utterly faithful to the spirit of its literary inspiration.

The film's plot centres on the severely tested relationship of an 18-year-old black sculptor (Francois, played by Alexandre Ogou), adopted by a white working class family, and a 16-year-old white trainee hairdresser (Clim - a luminous Laure Raoust), who is pregnant by him. It opens with Clim, whose voiceovers mix a subtle commentary on the plight of inner city French youth and a naive romanticism, queuing to visit an imprisoned Francois.

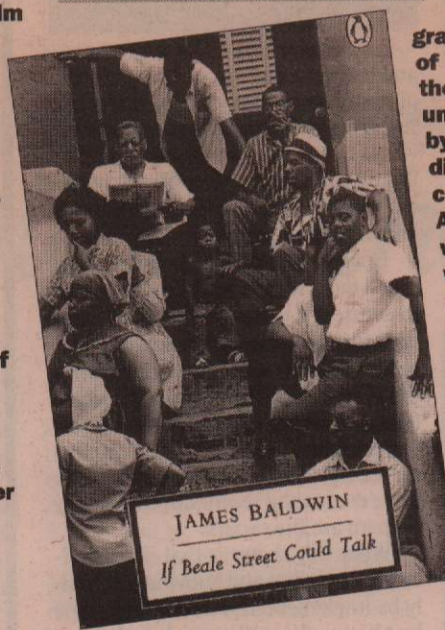
He awaits trial on a rape charge, evidently the victim of a racist frame-up by a sinister cop who has persuaded the rape victim, a Bosnian Serb refugee, to identify Francois as her assailant. Clim's belief in her partner's innocence is absolute and shared by his adoptive father and her own

parents, who have known Francois from childhood.

Following Baldwin's own fragmented narrative style, the film relies on extended flashbacks to illustrate the course of a decade-long relationship between rough-and-ready playmates who become devoted lovers. Clim's and Francois' families draw ever closer to each other, with the dramatic exception of his biological sister (rechristened "Blondine") and adoptive mother who immerses herself ever more deeply in a tragicomic religious fanaticism.

Fleeting but indelible images outline a backdrop of crisis-wracked industries that drives two proud men from the ranks of the labour aristocracy into desperately insecure and hazardous employment. There are glimpses of the alienation of marginalised youth - the teenage suicide of one childhood friend and the haunted existence of another as a criminalised petty drug dealer.

Rachel Thomas reviews, *A la place du coeur*, directed by Robert Guedigian, at selected cinemas



The book that inspired the film

But there also moments of joyful exuberance as two fathers drunkenly celebrate the prospect of becoming

grandfathers to the strains of Louis Armstrong, and as these middle-aged men unleash their frustrations by hurling rubbish and discarded furniture at a cop car.

Another scene captures with great economy of word and motion the bond of tenderness and trust between Clim's parents that sustains them amid an exhausting battle for their child's future and against an injustice that has wounded them. Meanwhile, Francois' father, despite his friendship with Clim's parents, disintegrates at the prospect of losing his son to the French penal system. Clim's mother,

Marianne (Ariane Ascaride), a part-time factory worker who has long since abandoned but not quite forgotten her ambition of being a professional singer, agrees to travel to Sarajevo in an attempt to trace the woman who has accused her daughter's partner.

This is the film's only jarring plot twist.

The sudden shift from an atmospheric Marseille to the bombed-out blocks of Sarajevo is a risky and not entirely successful move. While director Guedigian does not entirely avoid Balkan caricatures, he retains an assured grasp of time and place, illustrating how distinct yet common experiences of oppression and the daily struggle for economic survival transcend the national and linguistic boundaries of "Fortress Europe".

"We're all from the same shitheap", explains Marianne to her husband following her return to Marseille in a simple but profound understatement. This is not an overtly political film. There is no mass campaign to free Francois. If you did not know already you would not learn that Marseille had been a recent bastion of support for the Front National.

Instead, political realities permeate the fabric of these everyday lives. Thus Guedigian distils a defiant working class spirit that can neutralise the virulent racist poison of Le Pen or now Bruno Megret.

*A la place* strikes few false notes, avoiding sentimentality at the same time as being unabashedly partisan. There is ambiguity and grief even as a gross injustice is partly righted.

The film rarely flinches from depicting desperate circumstances but projects a basic optimism about our potential. In a modest yet powerful way it asserts the survival of human, and specifically working class solidarity, providing a powerful antidote to cynicism and despair.

## Little insight from the beautiful people

*Beautiful People* views the Balkan wars from the perspective of Bosnian refugees in London. This, combined with the fact that the film is written and directed by the Bosnian-born Jasmin Didzar, promises a unique insight into ethnic conflicts in the former Yugoslavia. Sadly, however, *Beautiful People*, despite some genuinely funny and poignant moments, fails to deliver.

The film seeks to weave together too many diverse narrative strands: the romance between Pero, a Bosnian, with Portia, the doctor daughter of a Tory MP;

the adventures of a gang of English junkie football hooligans; the conflict between a Serb and Croat, former neighbours; the marital problems of Dr Mouldy, intertwined with the trauma of a Bosnian woman, pregnant after being raped; the mind-altering involvement of a BBC journalist with the conflict. Ultimately, however, all the problems Didzar raises are wished away in conclusions which owe more to *The Love Boat* than his supposed mentor, Eisenstein.

Like last year's holocaust "comedy", *Life Is Beautiful*, *Beautiful People* suffers

Jon Underwood reviews *Beautiful People*, directed by Jasmin Didzar, on general release

from an uncertainty of tone. In particular, the former-neighbour subplot is woefully misconceived. A racist job of not have made a better (or worse) job of portraying two irrational middle-Europeans who merely need the services of a strict English matron to resolve their childish conflict. To make matters worse, Didzar throws in a sympathetic portrayal of a

Welsh fire-bomber - representing exactly the kind of petit-bourgeois nationalism the film should surely be attacking.

On the other hand, the scenes in which football hooligan Griffin is inadvertently dropped into the war zone are brilliantly realised; a glimpse of the war's full horror helps expose the true savagery of British asylum laws. When Pero's black neighbour also falls victim to the immigration authorities we seem set for a powerful, telling finale. Sadly, she is forgotten in the final orgy of happy endings, wherein Pero marries

into the Tory family, and even the racist hooligans end up reading bedtime stories to a young Bosnian war victim.

*Beautiful People* offers little insight into the causes of the war in Bosnia; nor is it born out of first-hand experience (Didzar settled in Britain in 1989). In attempting to weave together so many stories it ends up trivialising all of them. When, however, Portia finally tells her Tory father to "fuck off", it is a sentiment with which we can all agree and a moment almost worth the admission fee in itself.



# marxism THE BASICS

A BEGINNER'S GUIDE TO REVOLUTIONARY SOCIALISM

## The dress rehearsal

Paul Morris looks at the Russian Revolution of 1905, the great "dress rehearsal" for the 1917 Revolution

THE YEAR 1905 started with a peaceful march led by a priest and ended with a workers' insurrection, led by socialists. Though the revolution was put down, and its leaders tried and exiled, Russia was never to be the same again. The events of 1905 were a "dress rehearsal" for 1917, when the workers at last seized power.

In 1905 the Russian Tsar was locked in a disastrous war with Japan and was taxing the bourgeoisie to the hilt. The bourgeoisie were calling for a democratic constitution – albeit one in which the workers would have few rights. The workers and peasants were starving. Independent trade unions were banned. Instead the secret police set up puppet "worker's societies" controlled by a priest, Father Gapon.

Both the Bolshevik and Menshevik factions of the Russian Social Democratic and Labour Party (RSDLP) were illegal and in exile.

In January 1905 the workers of St Petersburg had had enough: they went on strike and took to the streets. Gapon led them in a march to plead with the "Little Father" (as they called the Tsar) for a constitutional monarchy. They marched not behind union banners but crucifixes.

The Bolshevik agitators were booed at strike meetings and at the march, for suggesting that the struggle be linked up to the struggle for a democratic republic. Just 15 members of the RSDLP joined the march.

As the 200,000 demonstrators approached the Winter Palace they walked into a hail of bullets. Hundreds died, thousands were injured. Bloody Sunday, 9 January 1905, was the spark that detonated the revolution.

Between January and October the struggles raged back and forth: in the cities, the countryside and in the socialist movement itself (see timeline).

RSDLP activists returned from exile and were able to work more or less openly as the workers – reeling from the shock of the massacre, their illusions in Tsarism shattered – ditched Gapon and flocked to the RSDLP.

Within the party a series of debates that seemed, on the surface, to be about "organisation" began to have an impact on the strategies of the revolutionaries and overlapped with the theoretical struggle over the "permanent revolution" versus "democratic dictatorship of workers and peasants".

The original Bolshevik/Menshevik split (1903) had been over Lenin's insistence on a party of "professional revolutionaries" – a party of combat not a passive party of subs collecting and reading rooms. Trotsky stayed with the Mensheviks then, but the debate over permanent revolution placed him to the left of the Bolsheviks.

The Bolsheviks found it hard to adapt to the outbreak of struggle. On the ground they saw a straight line developing: strikes, insurrection, revolutionary government. But the workers threw up something that didn't fit into this schema: the soviets. Starting off as cross-workplace strike committees, these councils of workers' delegates started to run whole towns and cities once general strikes had shut down the power of the bourgeoisie.

While the Mensheviks enthused about the soviets – Trotsky became deputy leader of the Petersburg soviet – the Bolsheviks saw them as an attempt to construct "broad", non-party organisations. Initially, therefore, the Bolsheviks tended to counterpose the party to them. It took a fight by Lenin to convince the Bolsheviks that the soviets were not inherently "anti-party" but were actually embryonic forms of the workers' government.

The Mensheviks, meanwhile, were content to ride the tide of revolution. Right-Menshevik leaders like Felix Martov, who had opposed the workers taking extreme action for fear of frightening away the bourgeoisie, suddenly started calling for "permanent revolution", only to just as suddenly ditch the idea in the wake of the defeat.

Trotsky himself played an exemplary role: leading the soviet, organising the general strike, converting workers to socialism by the thousand at daily mass meetings. But when the crunch came, in October 1905 – though it proved his theory of permanent revolution right – it exposed the weakness of his understanding of revolutionary organisation.

As strikes, mutinies and peasant revolts gripped Russia in October 1905 the Tsar cracked under pressure. He issued a manifesto promising a constitutional monarchy with a parliament – the "Duma" – the vote for the capitalists and freedom of speech.

### IN BRIEF

#### ■ Main differences on the Russian left pre-1905

**Mensheviks:** (Martov) It's a bourgeois revolution so the bourgeoisie have to lead it. The workers must hold back from economic demands and support the liberals. No worker participation in any democratic government.

**Bolsheviks:** (Lenin) Bourgeoisie will never make the revolution. So workers must make strategic alliance with the peasantry to bring a radical democratic government through insurrection: the "democratic dictatorship of workers and peasants".

**Menshevik left:** (Trotsky) Worker-peasant government cannot hold back from socialist tasks, so it must be a workers' government, supported by the peasantry: the theory of permanent revolution.

The militancy of the workers was already worrying the liberal bourgeoisie and the Constitutional Manifesto gave some of them the excuse to open negotiations with the Tsar. Meanwhile, exactly as Trotsky predicted, the workers began to add radical economic demands (such as the eight-hour day) to the revolutionary democratic struggle.

The Tsar seized his chance. A policy of concessions to the bourgeoisie was combined with repression against the soviets and mutineer sailors. This faced the soviets with a choice: insurrection or retreat.

Trotsky judged that insurrection in St Petersburg would be premature, because under the impact of repression the general strike had begun to crumble. Though Trotsky called for resistance to the last in the St Petersburg workers' council, he was unable to launch an insurrection: he had no party of organised cadres, rooted in the working class and capable of turning words into action. The soviet was arrested, the delegates smashing their revolvers on the desks as they surrendered.

In Moscow, where the Bolsheviks ran the RSDLP, it was different. The workers' movement was smaller there (and the reactionary middle class bigger). A city wide soviet was not set up until very late (22 November), due to the Bolsheviks' initial sectarian suspicion of them.

But in addition to the soviet, the Bolsheviks had built a party of at least 15,000 committed workers, who understood that a general strike poses the question of political power.

When news arrived that St Petersburg had been crushed, a general strike broke out in Moscow. Strikes on the railways stopped the army being sent in. The Bolsheviks launched an armed insurrection that was to hold out for 10 days in one part of Moscow (its tube stations are still called "Barrikadnaya" and "1905").

In the end this too was crushed. One thousand workers were killed in Moscow, 14,000 died in pogroms and reprisals across Russia, 70,000 were sent to prison camps.

The Mensheviks swung violently to the right. The defeat, they declared, proved them right: the workers' economic demands and strikes had driven the bourgeoisie out of the anti-Tsarist alliance.

The Bolsheviks emerged strengthened politically. Before 1905 the word "programme", to all socialists in Russia, meant a list of static demands to be achieved once in power. But amid the struggle Lenin developed a new concept of the programme: an action programme to guide the revolution as it took place and to link the short-term demands of the workers to the strategic goal of workers' power.

In the manifesto of the April Congress of the RSDLP we see spelled out for the first time in the twentieth century a revolutionary road to power: the general strike, the workers' council, the workers' militia, the armed insurrection.

In the aftermath of 1905 the Menshevik left, led by Trotsky, hardened its differences with the old Menshevik leaders. While in prison and exile Trotsky spelled out the strategic break in his book *Results and Prospects*. Far from proving the Mensheviks (or Bolsheviks) right, the spontaneous struggles linking the eight-hour day with the democratic republic showed it was pointless to go on thinking of socialism in terms of a "maximum" (socialist) and a "minimum" (democracy and reforms) goal.

However, the revolution also exposed the key weakness Trotsky was not to break with until 1917: spontaneism. He believed the spontaneity of the masses would overcome everything, whether it be the confusion of the Menshevik leaders or the maximum-minimum programme split. It was this failure to break with spontaneism that stopped Trotsky building a real party within the St Petersburg working class: in practice the soviet replaced the party.

Before 1905 the workers saw others as their liberators: the Tsar, Gapon, the bourgeois liberals. This was a society where women were the lowest of the low. Where workers weren't allowed to speak to bosses until spoken to: 1905 changed all that. Here they were, debating out their destiny, with women in the vanguard.

While socialism was driven underground, key militants jailed or murdered, it could never be driven out of the heads of a militant vanguard who now fought to build a mass revolutionary party in preparation for the next storm.

### TIMELINE

#### January

- Strike at Putilov factory in St Petersburg
- Peaceful march to the Tsar's Winter Palace. Troops open fire, killing hundreds.
- Strikes sweep Russia in response

#### February

- Peasants burn landlords' houses
- Bourgeoisie forms "Union of unions" a liberal reform group
- Russia loses battle of Mukden to Japan

#### March

- Strikes in Moscow
- Tsar agrees to "discuss a constitution"

#### May

- Third Congress of Russian Social Democratic Labour Party (Bolsheviks) passes resolution calling for armed insurrection
- General strike in Ivanovo-Voznesensk: "council of workers' deputies" formed – the first soviet
- Zemstvo congress allowed – rural local government bodies dominated by middle class
- Russian fleet sunk at battle of Tsushima.

#### June

- Barricade fighting in Lodz
- Battleship Potemkin mutinies in Odessa
- Zemstvos ask to negotiate with Tsar
- Tsar calls aristocracy to conference on a new, undemocratic constitution

#### July

- "Black Hundreds" – proto-fascist gangs – murder Jews and socialists

#### August

- General strike in Warsaw
- General strike followed by pogrom in Baku
- Peasant union formed, led by Socialist Revolutionary party
- Bulygin Duma – an unelected "consultative parliament" – is formed
- Peace with Japan

#### September

- Printers strike in Moscow
- Zemstvo congress rejects Bulygin Duma

#### October

- Strike wave spreads throughout Russia
- Soviet formed in St Petersburg
- Sailors mutiny in Kronstadt
- "Eight-hour day from below" strikes begin (down tools after eight hours)
- 2,000 country mansions burned
- Kadet party formed (Constitutional Democrats) the first legal bourgeois party.
- Tsar issues manifesto granting a constitution and gives amnesty to oppositionists, which take steam out of bourgeois opposition

#### November

- Strikes to prevent execution of Kronstadt mutineers
- Zemstvo congress splits, with right-wing liberals opening negotiations with Tsar
- Moscow soviet formed
- Nosar, head of St Petersburg soviet, is arrested
- Eight-hour day strikes decline

#### December

- St Petersburg soviet surrounded and arrested en masse
- Moscow general strike. Bolsheviks call for armed insurrection.
- Barricades in Moscow last for nine days, until troops from outside crush the workers uprising.



INDONESIA

# Backroom deal decides President

The presidential elections in Indonesia saw the candidate with the greatest number of votes defeated. Why? because the unfinished revolution of May 1998 left in place a thoroughly undemocratic system

INDONESIA HAS only just got an elected president, nearly 18 months after the dictator Suharto was driven from office by the May 1998 revolution. But Abdurrahman Wahid was not elected by the people. He was chosen in a backroom deal in the "Peoples Consultative Assembly" (MPR), which selects the head of state under the old Suharto constitution.

Of the 700 members of the MPR, only 462 were directly elected. Alongside appointed "community organisations", and indirectly elected provincial representatives, sat an influential bloc of 38 members of the armed forces (TNI) and police.

This undemocratic body, whose survival was a result of the unfinished revolution of May 1998, defeated Megawati Sukarnoputri. Her party, the PDI-P, won the largest number of votes in the election but remained a minority in the MPR.

The newly convened assembly met after yet another confrontation between the students, the driving force of the revolution, and the military. An attempt by the high command to introduce new security laws in September following the debacle in East Timor was thwarted by mass demonstrations of students and urban poor. The military, still powerfully entrenched at all levels of Indonesian society, was at last on the defensive.

President Habibie, vice-president under Suharto, was deeply discredited. Not only had he "lost" East Timor but he and sections of the old ruling party GOLKAR, were deeply mired in a new banking scandal which had led the IMF to suspend its loans. Tens of millions of dollars had been siphoned into GOLKAR and Habibie's coffers to finance their election campaign and potential bribes to MPR members.

The swindle backfired and, to the surprise of many, the MPR narrowly rejected Habibie's presidential report, ending his chances of staying in power.

This was a severe blow to the "old corruption", those most closely associated with Suharto: GOLKAR and the military. The vote also reflected divisions in GOLKAR itself. Sensing the end of the old regime, many jumped ship, including high-ups who were searching for new allies to preserve their positions.

Out of this bourgeois jockeying for power emerged a new coalition which sought to prevent Megawati reaching the Presidency. Amien Rais, leader of the National Mandate Party (PAN), forged a "Central Axis" of Muslim parties which persuaded Wahid to join them.

Abdurrahman Wahid is an influential intellectual and leader of the largest Muslim organisation in Indonesia, the 30 million-strong Nahdlatul Ulama. He became an outspoken critic of Suharto in his final years, and denounced the regime's attempt to whip up inter-religious and communal violence.

Having persuaded Wahid to come on board, the spoils of power were quickly handed out. Rais became speaker of



Supporters of Megawati Sukarnoputri fly the flag

the MPR, while the Chair of GOLKAR, Akbar Tanjung, was made speaker of the lower house. Having parcelled out these two powerful positions, the election of Wahid to the presidency was made easier. But Megawati was still only defeated by 60 votes. Having won the Presidency, the vice-presidency was being lined up either for General Wiranto or Akbar.

These plans were to be quickly abandoned in the face of public outrage. The masses, sensing they were being swindled out of what they saw as an election victory, took to the streets around the slogan "Megawati or revolution". Thousands of PDI-P supporters clashed with the army and police, in Jakarta, Bali and Medan.

Within hours Wiranto had withdrawn from the race, apparently having received communications from his regional commanders warning him that his election would spark an explosion impossible to contain. Akbar withdrew shortly after, and Wahid offered the Vice-presidency to Megawati, who was duly elected.

Wahid proceeded to form what he called a "National Unity Cabinet", drawing in figures from most of the major parties, including GOLKAR and the military - there are four generals in the 36-person cabinet. But the cabinet is dominated by "reformists" and those not tainted with too close a connection to the Suharto regime.

What is the nature of this government? The Democratic Socialist Party of Australia, which runs the influential ASIET solidarity campaign, has

declared that "such a cabinet is a return to the coalition that established Suharto's new order back in 1965" (Green Left Weekly 27/10/99). This is far from the truth. The Wahid government is a by-product of the massive revolutionary upheavals that overthrew the Suharto regime. It is the face of a democratic counter-revolution which needs to appear reformist to demobilise the masses through parliamentary means, not a pre-cursor to another dictatorship.

Wahid knows he faces three crucial issues. These are: the economic crisis that has plunged tens of millions into poverty; the national question which threatens Indonesia with disintegration; and the masses' demands for retribution against the Suharto family and the military for the crimes of the dictatorship.

The president made his inaugural speech in Bali, a Megawati stronghold, declaring that the economy needed reviving by raising wages and reducing the inequalities of wealth in the country. The day after his election the "investigation" against Suharto was re-opened. Wahid says he intends to take Suharto to court for the return of the billions looted by his clan. In this way he hopes to divert attention away from the real crimes of Suharto and the whole of the military - the terrible repression, slaughter and torture they inflicted on Indonesian society.

The Achilles heel of the new government is the national question. All its factions have gone on record as being in favour of defending Indonesia's

"integrity", which means keeping national minorities within its borders by force. Megawati even suggested delaying the recognition of East Timor in her attempt to curry favour within the MPR. Both Wahid and Amien Rais are in favour of a federal solution, offering greater autonomy and a larger share of their own resources to areas like Aceh and Irian Jaya (West Papua). But like the Russian government of the late 1980s, they are offering their oppressed minorities too little, too late.

Tens of thousands took to the streets in Aceh after Wahid's election demanding he support a referendum on independence. Wahid has taken personal responsibility for Aceh, hoping to play the Muslim card in this deeply religious area. He has given Megawati responsibility for Ambon and Irian because of PDI-P support amongst non-Muslims.

A key demand of the students and the masses has been for the dismantling of the army's "dual function": its dominant role in politics from the cabinet down to village level. The Wahid government has already made some cosmetic changes at the top. Wiranto, although in the cabinet, is no longer armed forces chief (the job has been given to an Admiral). The post of defence minister has been given to a civilian for the first time since the 1950s.

In an interview shortly after his election, Wahid said:

"We have to maintain the 'dual function' for another five years, until the next election."

On one question Wahid is absolutely clear - who his enemy is. When asked

about the role of the students, who have blocked every attempt at an army comeback by taking to the streets, he said:

"There is no student power. We have small groups of students, and the men behind them are all hooligans."

He went on to denounce street violence and declare himself a follower of Mahatma Gandhi, which is presumably why he needs so many generals in his cabinet.

The masses, the current student vanguard and left-wing parties like the PRD need to recognise the changed phase of the revolution. Whereas in the previous phase they have been able to rally the urban poor and the democratic petit-bourgeoisie against the dictatorship, uniting with the mass base of Megawati's party in the streets, this will be much more difficult in the next period. The bourgeoisie rode the revolutionary wave. It is now putting on its democratic and reformist mask.

For a while it will be able to lull the masses through false promises and hopes of reforms. Sections of the masses, like the base of the PDI-P, will see it as "their government" worthy of support. Initially they will be patient, unwilling to take to the streets.

The students and the left must rebuild their support as champions of the oppressed. They must ally themselves with the national minorities and champion their rights to self-determination, up to and including separation from the Indonesian state. They must address themselves to the demands of the workers, mobilising them to turn Wahid's words about raising living standards into action. Demands must include:

■ Fix the minimum wage at a decent level, determined by committees of the workers and their families.

■ Protect pay against inflation through a sliding scale of wages.

■ Expropriate the riches and factories owned by Suharto, his family, Habibie and co, and place them under the control of the workers. Put all the murderers on trial for their lives.

■ Cancel all payments to the blood-suckers of the IMF. Expropriate the super-exploiting imperialist companies.

■ Sack the minister-generals. Down with the "dual function".

Under the pressure of the national struggles, the economic crisis and the demands of the masses, the "National Unity" will begin to fall apart. The fraudulent character of the MPR will be exposed in the new crisis and the fight to abolish it and replace it with a sovereign constituent assembly will win new supporters.

The workers and students must quickly re-orient to this new situation to take advantage of the coming crisis. They must establish a new revolutionary communist party in the struggle, one which can finally settle accounts with the military and the capitalist system it defends.



# Haider's resistible rise

Strong gains for Jorg Haider's far-right Freedom Party in last month's Austrian elections sent shock waves across Europe. *Michael Gatter* reports from Vienna

The Freedom Party has made an amazing leap to second place in the Austrian elections.

Haider's extreme right-wingers won over 27 per cent of the vote, knocking the conservative People's Party into third place, and getting to within five points of the Social Democrats. In several major cities the Freedom Party (FP) got more votes than any other party.

Haider's success is all the more staggering when it is put in context. In 1985, the year before Haider took the leadership of the party, the FP scored just 4 per cent of the vote.

Haider campaigned on a classic hard-line anti-foreigner platform, blaming immigrants for unemployment and calling for Austrians to be put first. But the real reason for his rise is growing disenchantment with the two-party system that has run Austria since the war.

Haider's victories follow decades of broken promises from the Social Democrats.

Despite the country's prosperous image, the living conditions of working class Austrians have deteriorated sharply over the last two decades. Unemployment has tripled since 1986. In the last four years there have been three major cuts packages and wages have stagnated.

The Social Democrats have been in government for the entire post-war peri-

od (apart from four years in the late 1960s). For the last 13 years they have been in coalition with the People's Party, the party of the capitalists and the rich farmers. The Social Democrats have not lifted a finger to stop employers "downsizing" the workforce and have carried out cuts and privatisations. And after so long in power, the Social Democrat officials have become ever more corrupt.

Workers who traditionally vote Social Democrat have been getting more and more fed up with their leaders. But the party bureaucrats have kept control - no significant left opposition in the party or the unions emerged. Workers' protest actions have been brief and infrequent.

For all these reasons it is very easy for Haider to present himself as a spokesman for the worker - or, as he puts it, "the little man".

That is why Haider is so dangerous. He can present himself as a "strong man" who cares about the people while the ruling coalition government - already in power for 13 years - has failed to improve anything.

Haider tries to guide the frustration of the people towards right-wing "solutions". FP posters raised the slogan "Stop us being swamped by aliens". He cleverly tapped in to popular dislike of the union leaders' privileges to make a general attack on the unions themselves.

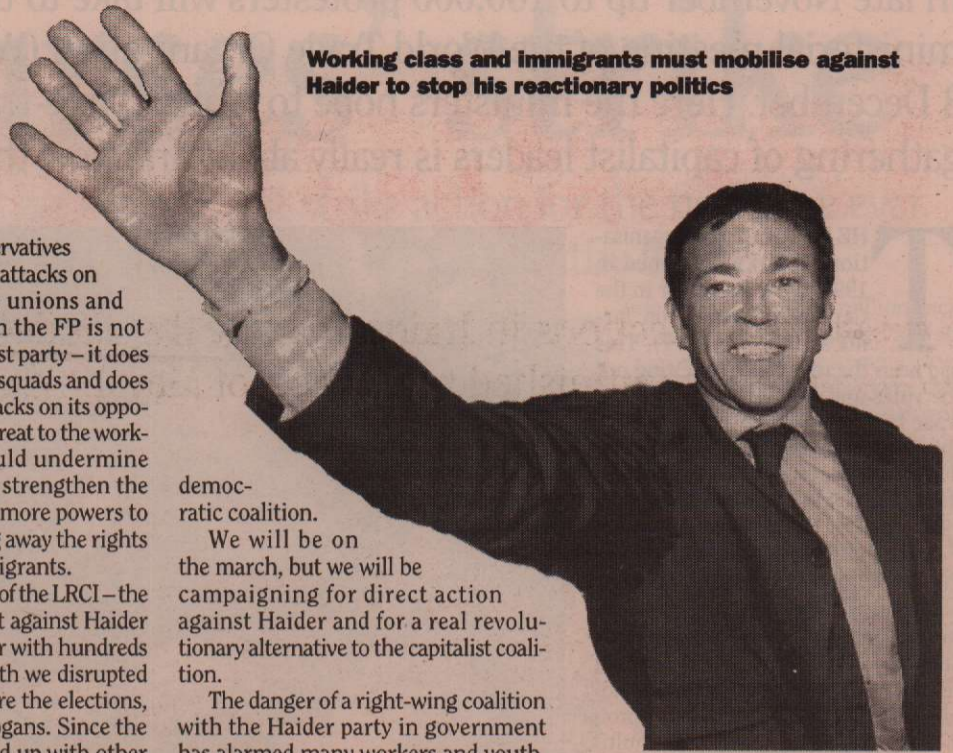
An FP government - probably in

coalition with the Conservatives - would mean massive attacks on the welfare state, the unions and immigrants. Although the FP is not strictly speaking a fascist party - it does not have its own street squads and does not launch physical attacks on its opponents - it is a massive threat to the working class. The FP would undermine democratic rights and strengthen the state apparatus, giving more powers to the police and stripping away the rights of the unions and immigrants.

The Austrian section of the LRCL - the AS - has made the fight against Haider its top priority. Together with hundreds of left-wingers and youth we disrupted Haider's final rally before the elections, chanting anti-racist slogans. Since the elections we have joined up with other left-wingers to hold a weekly "speakers' corner" in the centre of Vienna, drawing crowds of young people to hear us agitate against Haider and racism. We initiated a small protest march of 100 people to the FP headquarters and delivered speeches against Haider.

On 12 November there will be a rally in Vienna when tens of thousands are expected to come out against Haider. It is organised by an alliance of liberals, social democrats, greens and intellectuals, who are speaking out against Haider, but whose real agenda is limited to preserving the conservative/social

Working class and immigrants must mobilise against Haider to stop his reactionary politics



democratic coalition.

We will be on the march, but we will be campaigning for direct action against Haider and for a real revolutionary alternative to the capitalist coalition.

The danger of a right-wing coalition with the Haider party in government has alarmed many workers and youth. In the next millennium Austria will see harsh attacks on the working class and immigrants. But, after an initial shock, it will also see growing resistance and class struggle.

The populist demagogue Haider will be forced to break his promises even more than the other parties did. In the region of Carinthia, where Haider is the governor, he has already faced some workers' protests in recent weeks.

The AS calls on the social democratic workers and progressive youth to take action against Haider. We are fighting to set up "Stop Haider Committees"

at schools, universities and workplaces to organise protest actions.

Pressure must be brought to bear on the union and Social Democrat leaders to organise mass action to stop the FP coming to power. A campaign needs to be built to force the Social Democrats to get out of the coalition with the conservatives, and take measures to defend the working class: a 35-hour week without loss of pay, a public employment programme under workers' control, defence of pensions and central wage bargaining, and the abolition of all anti-immigrant laws.

# Generals do IMF's dirty work

The opposition have acquiesced in the military's takeover but for the masses it means more austerity

Pakistan's new military regime looks set to carry out the International Monetary Fund (IMF) austerity plan that would slash spending on the country's cash-starved schools, hospitals and public services.

IMF officials have demanded the cuts, in talks with coup leader General Pervez Musharraf, as the quid pro quo for restoring \$1.6 billion in aid which had been suspended before October's coup.

Earlier this year IMF officials had told Nawaz Sharif, the elected prime minister who was deposed on 12 October,

that Pakistan - one of the world's poorest countries - had to "tighten its belt" before the money would be released.

Now Musharraf will carry through the cuts Sharif could not deliver. In a televised address to the nation, the general said: "Our economy is in deep trouble and revolutionary steps are needed to put it back on track."

These included "rebuilding investors' confidence" by carrying out "pragmatic tax reforms", sackings and closures to "turn state enterprises toward profitability", ending

price subsidies and "strict austerity measures".

Musharraf announced seven policy objectives, none of which mentioned alleviating Pakistan's spiralling rates of child poverty, unemployment and illiteracy.

The economic crisis facing Pakistan is dire. The country has reserves of just over \$1 billion, which is enough to pay for just two weeks of imports. Unemployment is at record levels, and inflation is rampant.

Foreign debt adds to a catastrophic situation. It stands at \$32 billion, and

45 per cent of the state budget is devoted to paying it off, with interest. Another 25 per cent of state spending goes to the military.

Meanwhile, the UN reports that a third of Pakistan's children are malnourished. Half the population is unable to read or write.

The US government seems confident that Musharraf will implement the cuts the IMF wants. Despite calling for democracy to be restored, on 27 October President Clinton waived sanctions imposed three days after the coup.

## WHO IS RUNNING PAKISTAN?

General Musharraf has put bankers, businessmen and soldiers into all the top slots in his government.

● **MOHAMMED YAQUB**  
Member of Musharraf's security council. Governor of Pakistan state bank since 1993. Worked for the IMF for 20 years. Has called repeatedly for cuts in state spending.

● **SHAUKAT AZIZ**  
Appointed finance minister on 16 October. A vice-president of US banking giant Citigroup, he ran its Pakistani operation. The bank's chairman said Aziz would be "a tremendous asset to the country."

● **ABDUS SATTAR**  
Rich lawyer and former head of Pakistan's foreign office. Sattar is an expert on the country's constitution - which Musharraf says has "only been temporarily held in abeyance" - and has long-standing diplomatic ties with the USA.

## WHY HAS THERE BEEN SO LITTLE PROTEST AGAINST THIS COUP?

The army seized power with scarcely a whisper of opposition from the Pakistani people.

Former prime minister Nawaz Sharif was deeply unpopular. His attempt to bring in 15 per cent VAT on all purchases had sparked demonstrations across the country.

In his two-and-a-half years in office, Sharif lost little time amassing an immense family fortune. On 28 October, the army showed foreign reporters around his vast estate. General Musharraf has threatened to put Sharif on trial for corruption.

The principal opposition leaders rushed to back the coup. The Islamist opposition welcomed "a transition to a system that works". Benazir Bhutto, leader of the Pakistan Peoples' Party, told the BBC that

she would be happy to work with the military regime and that the army had no choice but to take power. Her father, a former prime minister, was overthrown by General Zia in 1979 and hanged after a show trial. Imran Khan, the cricketer who stood against Sharif for prime minister in 1997, told Radio Four that the army was left with no option but to depose a "fascistic" prime minister who had dared to oust senior military figures.

Bhutto's and Khan's motives are highly questionable. Sharif was investigating Bhutto for corruption, and with good reason. Her husband had justly acquired the nickname of "Mr Ten Per Cent". Khan's wife Jemima was under investigation for a dubious export deal.

Despite the masses' silence, the coup is

a serious setback for Pakistan's working class and poor peasants.

Musharraf's planned attacks on state industries, spending and services will, however, inevitably provoke opposition. The pro-capitalist political parties will hope to profit from the slow, controlled return to "democracy" promised by the general. But to break free from the debt slavery that holds this nation of 138 million in poverty, a very different opposition is needed.

The workers and their trade unions need to set up their own mass party, committed to fighting austerity, overthrowing the military, and leading a concerted drive against endemic corruption - by taking land, industry and finance out of the hands of a tiny elite and into the hands of the working class and rural poor.



## WORLD TRADE

# WTO: the bosses' weapon

In late November up to 100,000 protesters will take to the streets of Seattle, Washington to demonstrate at the ministerial meeting of the World Trade Organisation (WTO) which will take place between 30 November and 3 December. Here the ministers hope to launch "free-trade" negotiations. **Keith Harvey** explains what this gathering of capitalist leaders is really about and how the decisions taken will influence every one in the world

**T**HE WORLD Trade Organisation (WTO) was formed in 1995 as the successor to the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT). This had been the main agency setting out the rules and regulations governing trade between member nations after the Second World War. It had also overseen the Tokyo and Uruguay Rounds of trade liberalisation up to 1994.

Like the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and World Bank, the WTO is a vital part of the armoury of the major western imperialist governments as they seek to open up the vast natural resources and labour of the semi-colonial working class and peasantry to profit-making by the top 1,000 or so multinational firms and commercial banks.

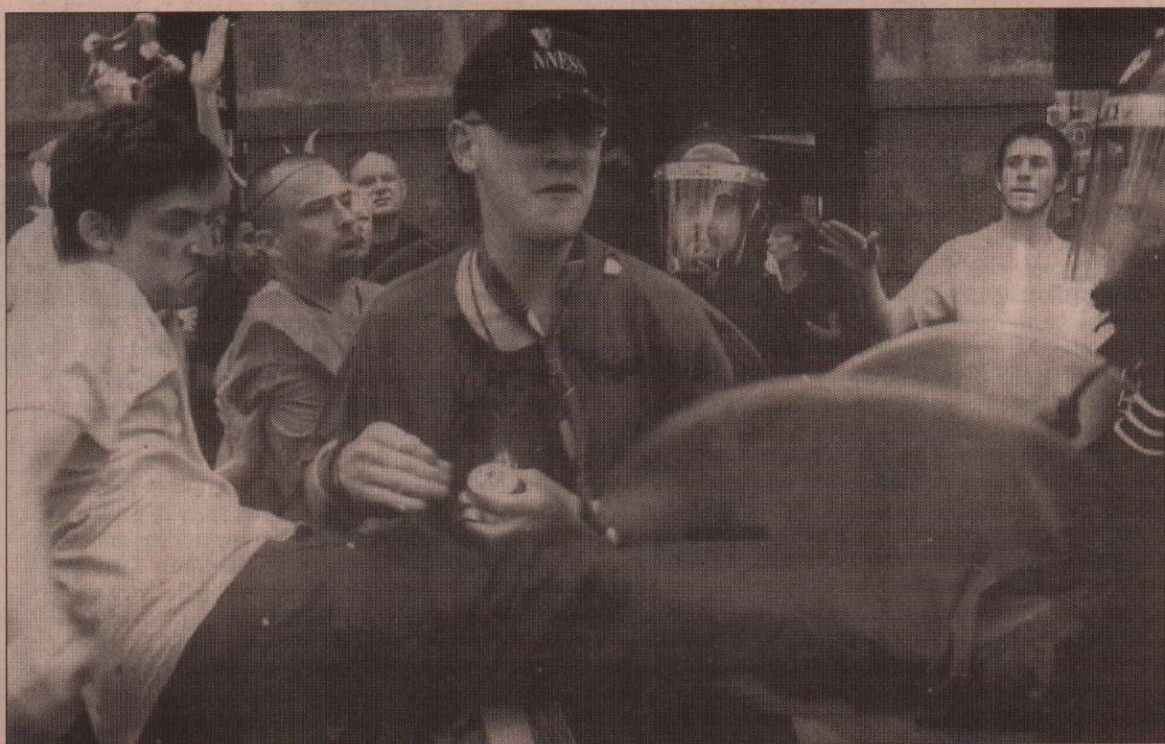
The WTO concentrates on keeping barriers to the free flow of goods and services as low as possible so as to stimulate the demand for the products of the multinationals and promote foreign ownership of companies. Where necessary the WTO adjudicates between member states in disputes; recent rulings have included the ban by European Union (EU) states on hormone-fed US beef, and the ban on US-backed Caribbean banana imports into the EU – both of which went in the USA's favour.

The key nation states of North America and Europe set the terms of the WTO. Although committed to breaking down restrictions on trade the WTO's rules naturally do not extend to outlawing restrictive practices routinely carried out by multinational corporations (MNCs) such as transfer pricing, the forming of cartels and market-fixing measures of all kinds that are clearly anti-competitive.

Over the years the WTO has sought to broaden the range of goods and services that fall under its jurisdiction and so reduce the scope for member countries to preserve profitable segments of their economies for national firms. The new Millennium Round foreshadows major changes in three areas. The first concerns investment flows. In the mid-1990s the OECD drew up a plan (the Multilateral Agreement on Investment – MAI) which was an MNC charter to tear down all national regulations that restricted, directed or conditioned the flow of foreign investment into any country.

Hence, if agreed by the WTO, any democratically enacted legislation that set out minimum standards for wages, working conditions or environmental standards, could have been ruled null and void under such an agreement. Due to widespread and persistent opposition around the world the MAI was shelved. But now the EU in particular wants the WTO to take it up again. They want any restriction on foreign investment in and out of any country outlawed, and the same with any "performance requirements" imposed on foreign firms by national governments.

The WTO argues that unrestricted foreign investment flows can only spur growth and wealth creation and hence benefit all. This is simply not true. The latest research on the relationship of growth rates to foreign investment flows, carried out by UN bodies, reveals that growth rates were far higher in the 1970s, compared to the 1990s, and yet restrictions on Foreign Direct Invest-



Demonstrators clash with police at the Smash the City march in central London, 18 June.

ment (FDI) have lessened in the last decade.

A quick look back at the horrendous experience of East Asia after August 1997 is instructive. The flight of billions of dollars in short-term investment from the region wrought havoc and misery for the masses on an unprecedented scale. In the year and a half after the 1997 crash more than 26 million people were unemployed in one country alone – Indonesia.

Meanwhile, the performance of Malaysia, where restrictions on capital flight were relaxed, has been much more tempered both in terms of output slump and job losses. The fact remains that the MNCs call for unrestricted capital flows not out of any desire to see living standards rise in the Third World (in fact the gap between OECD and non-OECD states grows apace), but rather to be free to take advantage of any short-term movements in the equity and

money markets to earn an extra profit.

The second main focus for the latest round of WTO talks is competition policy. The WTO has always preached the gospel of free trade – officially, because it argues that free trade in goods, services and capital flows promotes growth while protectionist systems reduce it, and everyone stands to benefit from such growth. But the real reason for espousing competition is that on a level playing field the biggest and strongest teams – those equipped with the state of the art equipment – will win.

Those firms with access to the latest research and development advances, and the largest amounts of capital for investment in plant and equipment will be able to sweep aside the weaker home-grown firms in poorer countries. Monsanto, for example, has ruined native agriculture in many areas, abetted by the WTO's insistence that barriers to agricultural

trade come down.

The espousal of the virtues of free competition is a cruel deceit. What happens is that a reduction of barriers to trade destroys local competition and replaces it with monopoly competition between a handful of top-league multinational firms which proceed to divide up the spoils.

Now the WTO wants each member country to be compelled to draw up legislation which forbids aid to domestic firms and which affords the same treatment to foreign multinationals as to nationally-based companies.

Finally, the WTO has decided it is time to rescind some previously agreed exemptions from the free trade policy; in particular, government procurement policies, which had thus far been outside the scope of the WTO.

Governments are currently free to set their own rules on the award of state con-

tracts for public sector projects. Traditionally, national governments favour their own firms; now, the WTO wants all to be open to foreign competition – naturally resulting in more contracts for the key MNCs. One specific lobby group arguing for a relaxation of procurement policy is the US-dominated private health care industry which wants to use the WTO to break down the public health care systems and privatise them.

The thousands upon thousands who will descend on Seattle later this month know that the WTO works for the tiny minority who head up the leading MNCs and who fight to increase next year's dividends for their major shareholders. The Seattle protests should be an important step towards building a huge international coalition of forces from within the west's labour movements, and popular and trade union organisations of the Third World to put a brake on the MNCs' attempts to effectively repeal all progressive, protective legislation on working conditions and environmental standards that inhibit ruthless exploitation.

Strikes, demonstrations, street parties, can all help build a mass movement globally that forces the representatives of semi-colonial countries and the developed west to refuse to enforce more MNC demands over the world's most oppressed and cruelly exploited people. Where the WTO accedes to the multinationals' demands the working class movement must act to force national parliaments to overturn or defy such WTO provisions which entail an attack on the living standards of the masses.

Later this month in Seattle justified in the gross exploitation of the semi-colonial world will probably reach boiling point, as it did in Geneva at the last ministerial meeting in 1998 when the cars were overturned, or in London on 18 June this year when buildings in the City were trashed in protest against the power of big finance capital. Let the banners on the streets proclaim: WTO – We're Taking Over!

## HOW THE WEST KEEPS WINNING

The WTO consists of 123 countries, with its headquarters in Geneva. Although the half dozen or so key industrial nations dominate its decision-making, most of the member states are relatively impoverished Third World nations.

Key WTO representatives are career technocrats who meet in secret, whose names are rarely known outside the WTO's own ranks and whose decisions can override the "sovereign" parliaments of member states. Unlike the IMF, however, the WTO does not arrive at decisions by a system of weighted-voting which concentrates power in the hands of the USA and EU; rather, it reaches agreement by majority vote (in reality, few votes are taken and decisions are reached by consensus).

So how then is it possible that the semi-colonial countries end up agreeing to measures that are clearly against the interests of the vast majority of people living in these countries?

Of course, the decision-making process is consciously designed to minimise the role and impact of the weaker nations. Negotiations are carried on for years in small com-

missions dominated by a handful of G7-based officials, embodying the elites of the major imperialist powers.

Proposals for changes by the Third World countries are routinely blocked by the west while key changes wanted by the big MNCs and their governments proceed through a mixture of bullying and bribery on an individual basis to intransigent objectors.

But this is not enough to explain the repeated and far-reaching capitulations to the demands of the MNCs. The answer lies in the betrayal of the Third World's masses by their own ruling classes pursuing their own narrow class agenda which does not include squaring up to imperialism at the end of the twentieth century.

Earlier in this century the norm was for the feudal land-owning, ruling elites of backward countries to ally themselves with imperialist countries and their big corporations with a view to opening up the natural resources and trading opportunities to western exploitation.

Ranged against them were an alliance of urban middle class and aspirant manufacturing classes, who in turn could drag the

embryonic working class into supporting them. This alliance fought for political independence and the ability to develop the national economic industrial base, often behind tariff walls; they clashed repeatedly and sometimes viciously with the western powers, even if the new ruling classes in the Third World were hostile to the independent interests of the growing working class.

Since the Second World War – and in an accelerated fashion over the last 20 years – the dominant ruling classes in semi-colonial countries have changed. The most pro-imperialist factions have come to power, often based on financial sectors with the most to gain from creaming off, both legally and illicitly, the foreign investments that come into the country.

Commissions, kick-backs, expropriated loans from the IMF and World Bank, favoured contracts for family members and kin groups – all serve to bind the ruling classes to the WTO, IMF and western multinationals to the detriment of the national economic development of the country as a whole, and especially to the jobs and livelihoods of the mass of the population.



# Union leaders attempt to de-rail nurses' strike

Last month, 27,500 nurses in the Irish Republic took national all out strike action for the first time ever. Members of Workers Power, Ireland, report on this historic fight and the lessons for the future

After eight solid days of all out strike action, the trade union leaders persuaded nurses to go back to work pending a ballot on a new offer. But so strong was the nurses' opposition to calling off the strike, that the strike has only been deferred and not officially ended.

Now the nurses, who had massive public support during the strike, face the greatest danger yet in their battle with the government. They will now come under intense pressure from union officials, managers and ministers alike to get them to accept a rotten deal.

The strike, over pay, grading and conditions began on 19 October. Three days later 10,000 nurses took to the streets of Dublin, marching in a defiant show of strength. Coach loads of nurses from all over the country arrived to attend the march. Their militancy was reflected in the strident placards and the slogans chanted all the way up O'Connell Street: Florence Nightingale's light has gone out; When Brian and Bertie get shirty, We'll get dirty; We're not Bowin' to Cowen', Help Stop Mad Cowen Disease (references to Brian Cowen, Minister for Health and Taoiseach Bertie Ahern).

Under the statue of the great union leader Jim Larkin and in front of the General Post Office, a historic focus of workers' struggle, the crowd cheered as speaker after speaker demanded the nurses claims be met in full. They blasted the hypocrisy of the right-wing coalition government which is mired in financial scandals and is sitting on a budget surplus of several billion while "beds are closed in the Mater hospital, theatres closed in Vincent's because we haven't got enough of a human resource of qualified nursing personnel".

Low pay and increasingly bad conditions after the savage health cuts and pay freeze of the 1980s have led to a staffing crisis as many nurses gave up their jobs in disgust.

Despite the lies the Coalition Government are peddling, the core of the nurses' claim is easy to understand. The key demand is for three long-service increments of 6 per cent after 16 years, after 19 years and after 22 years for staff nurses, moving them to a career/promotion structure in line with other paramedics and with teachers.

At present staff nurses, who comprise 80 per cent of all nurses, reach the top of the scale at a wage of £22,300 and stay there. In addition they are demanding a 15 per cent to 25 per cent pay increase for most nursing grades. The Irish Labour Court, the state sanctioned mediation body, only conceded an increase of 10 per cent. Although the Labour Court increased the traditional allowance (i.e. for degree level qualifications or location costs - city "weighting") from £328 a year to between £1,000 and £1,500 a year, the Alliance (of the four unions representing nurses) are demanding that it should be available to more staff.

The Labour Court has not addressed the fact that it is not worth the effort for staff nurses to struggle to become a ward sister as the net gain in income is tiny. Instead the Court's proposals mean the demotion of nurse managers to a lower grade.



10,000 nurses march in Dublin, 19 October

The Fianna Fail/Progressive Democrat government has proved it is the nurses' enemy-in-power. It stood firm as the bitter opponent of the nurses in the run-up to the strike. It refused, point blank, to negotiate right up to the day before the strike began. Even then ministers only came into talks to intimidate the nurses. They lectured the nurses that they must limit their claims to within the Labour Court recommendations in line with Partnership 2000, the pay restraint deal all the Irish union leaders have signed up to. In addition, they announced that nurses would not be paid from day one of the strike, despite the provision of emergency cover - an additional blow to nurses without strike pay.

Why has the government taken such a hard line? The first and primary reason is that they are a rich man's government as their tax amnesties for the bosses and the recent revelations of widespread business use of offshore accounts, with the state's full knowledge, show.

Secondly, they have to defend Partnership 2000. The bosses revere Partnership 2000 because it has enabled them to keep workers on low pay while the "Celtic Tiger" profits go through the roof. If the government conceded to the nurses demands by breaking this wage agreement, they would be looking at a domino effect of industrial action as other public sector workers followed suit. The nurses' have to be beaten, or at least contained within Partnership 2000.

Thirdly, the Labour Court has issued

its verdict on the nurses, claims and to go beyond this verdict would be to seriously weaken the Labour Court which has been a key organ of class collaboration, ever since it was set up in 1948.

The government showed how hard it would fight to starve the nurses into defeat by peddling lies about nurses' pay (using maximum rates and including overtime pay) in the national papers the day before the strike started.

Despite the efforts of the government the nurses' strike has been incredibly popular because everyone knows the nurses have been hard done by for a century or more, victims of the sexist Church/State power structure that sees women as only fit for menial work and refuses to acknowledge the nurses' skilled professionalism and dedication to patients. This popularity has been demonstrated by the volume of letters to the media, almost all supportive; by radio and television polls; by the stream of well-wishers visiting the pickets with food, chocolates, etc. In Dublin, firemen visited striking nurses every day with lunches.

From the start, however, the strike has faced a number of difficulties. The bureaucrats in The Irish Nurses Organisation (INO), which represented the majority of nurses, refused to use the money in the union coffers as a strike fund, which meant the majority of nurses got no strike pay.

Nurses provided emergency cover without pay throughout the strike. But emergency cover can be a double-edged sword. The health managers, including

consultants, aided and abetted by the government, used it to undermine the strike by extending the definition of "emergency", pressuring the nurses to put in more free hours.

Instead of the Irish Congress of Trade Unions (ICTU) calling for the rest of the health service workforce to take solidarity action, all other workers continued going to work in the hospitals.

Finally, other public sector workers with claims in the pipeline (teachers, public transport workers and civil servants) did not press forward with their own demands. To have taken their own action and come out alongside the nurses would have greatly strengthened the nurses' fight.

On 27 October the bureaucrats ordered a return to work pending a second ballot to the disgust of nurses on the picket lines, who were heard on radio and television interview arguing that they should stay out while the ballot took place.

The strike committees, they said, could handle and oversee the ballot and it would take no more than 24 to 48 hours to conduct. However, Liam Doran, INO bureaucrat, who wants an acceptance of the deal, said a ballot would be impossible to conduct on the picket line and rubbished the nurses who argued otherwise. The Alliance executive gave the directive for the pickets to be called off pending the ballot result. The pressure will now build for them to accept the deal and end the strike.

The initial Labour Court recom-

mendation of a £150 million package, which the nurses rejected and struck against, has now been supplemented by a mere £20 million bringing the total up to £170 million. The key demand of three new 6 per cent increments for staff nurses has not been met. Instead, the offer would create a new staff grade at the top of the scale with a 5 per cent increase attached. And not all staff nurses who reach their increment ceiling are to receive it. Only 2,500 nurses nationally will be eligible. In all, the deal on offer will leave approximately 20,000 out of 27,500 nurses with little improvement except the 2 per cent that they were entitled to anyway under Partnership 2000, in addition to some increased allowances taxed at the top rate.

Nurses, rightly, are extremely angry about the new proposals. The vast majority expressed their immediate rejection of this settlement, when it was announced. "It must be a joke" said one irate nurse at St James' Hospital, Dublin.

The Mater Hospital strike committee spokeswoman said the deal failed to address the key issues. There are already more than 500 nurses in the Mater whose years of service would qualify them for the proposed senior staff nurse position; but with just 2,500 such posts being proposed nationally, hundreds are bound to miss out. In addition, the offer of an overtime rate of time and a sixth for work between 6pm and 8pm was also attacked by nurses. This amounts to a miserly £1.00 extra after tax for a two-hour period. "It would not pay for the bus home in the evening", one nurse said, "we've been made fools of."

A spokeswoman for Beaumont Hospital's nurses' strike committee said their reaction to the proposals was "shock" and "horror". "We were out for nothing" she said. "I think we should have gone for all-out strike from the beginning and we would not be still here now." said another nurse outside the Mater.

All the signs are that if a ballot had been conducted on the picket line it would have been overwhelmingly rejected. The bureaucrats' tactic of deferring the strike pending another ballot, was a ploy to weaken the nurses' resolve and to have the rotten deal accepted. There will be enormous pressures on nurses not to resume action. Not least the backlog of work which they will face will be a grim reminder of how difficult it will be if they have to go out again. In addition, the nurses have now had a taste of the government's vicious propaganda campaign. The stories of patients suffering due to the strike at the Children's Hospital at Crumlin and St Luke's Cancer Hospital were deliberately trumped up by the government and media stooges as a way of generating negative propaganda.

Nurses must stand firm and use their vote to give a resounding "No" to this deal. The health union bureaucrats clearly don't want the nurses to resume the action. But in the event of a "No" vote, nurses must come out on strike again, and use the links already built up to organise a country-wide mass campaign to reject this sell-out which their leaders are backing, and to win their full demands.



# 1989: the year th

Ten years ago the world underwent a revolution.

**Dave Stockton** relates the historic events which led to the fall of Stalinist regimes across Eastern Europe beginning in 1989. He examines the reasons behind the collapse of Stalinism and looks at the lessons for the working class today.

## The revolutionary

**O**NE MAJOR historic event followed another with incredible speed in 1989. It was one of those years when, as Karl Marx put it, there are "days in which 20 years are embodied." The concentration and scope of such events is living proof that what we are witnessing is not the product of a conspiracy or the working through of a policy but a seismic shift, a dialectical leap where long accumulated pressures and changes are revealed or released.

In May 1989 a mass movement of China's students occupied Tiananmen Square – and mounted mass demonstrations in other major cities shortly before a state visit by Mikhail Gorbachev. At first the regime seemed paralysed and even inclined to negotiate with the students. But once Gorbachev was out of the way – and when it became clear that

workers were forming trade unions and supporting the students – the bureaucracy sprang like a tiger and bloodily suppressed the movement.

On 24 August the first non-Communist government in Eastern Europe since the 1940s took office in Poland and began the demolition of the power of the Polish Stalinist party.

In the summer Hungary – a favourite holiday destination for East Germans – began demolishing its barbed wire frontier defences with Austria and a stream of citizens of the German Democratic Republic began to defect. In early October mass demonstrations of hundreds of thousands began calling for reform in Leipzig and East Berlin. By 8-9 November the Berlin Wall was first breached and then torn down.

In Bulgaria Todor Zhivkov – dictator for 35 years – was overthrown by an

inner party coup which led to mass demonstrations in Sofia and other cities between 10-18 November.

In Czechoslovakia on 20 November 200,000 marched in Prague and flooded Wenceslas Square, by 7 December bringing down the Stalinist government in the "velvet revolution" – so-called because of its lack of violence.

Indeed, what was as amazing as the speed with which Stalinist regimes collapsed, was the fact that the bureaucracies, with the exception of the Chinese, made only the most half-hearted attempts at repression.

Most of them, knowing that they would get no support from the Soviet garrisons if they attempted a Tiananmen Square-style massacre, abdicated in the face of peaceful mass demonstrations. In East Germany and the Czech Republic it was a close-run thing – with the

## The bureaucracy fr

**M**IKHAIL GORBACHEV was a vital factor in the revolutions of 1989. Not because he was trying to bring them about. Quite the reverse.

When Gorbachev visited Beijing his mere presence in the city encouraged the students in Tiananmen Square. When he visited Berlin his presence on the platform in the Alexanderplatz led to joyous chanting of his name to the evident horror of Erich Honecker and the old hacks grouped around him.

Why did the presence of the Soviet leader, a long-time Stalinist bureaucrat, have such an effect?

What had changed within Stalinism in 1989 was that the founder member of the "World Communist Movement", the bureaucracy of the Soviet Union had lost faith in the old ways of ruling. Its leading faction, led by Gorbachev, no longer believed in a rigidly centralised planned economy, or a monolithic one-party regime.

Gorbachev was well aware of the fact that the economy of the Soviet Union had been stagnating since at least the mid-1970s. Without having kept up with the West during the previous stage of mass consumerism, centred on the car, the new computer revolution was leaving the USSR lagging hopelessly behind.

The arms race absorbed a massive proportion of GDP and the lion's share of Soviet research and development. The New Cold War, and Reagan's threat of developing Star Wars technology, were putting unbearable strains on the Soviet economy. The Gorbachev faction increasingly believed that this could only end in economic and social collapse.

Gorbachev set out to save the bureaucratic system from itself. He launched a three-tiered policy of reform based on glasnost, or increased freedom of speech, a programme of economic reform known as perestroika, or reconstruction, and a new attempt at "détente", disarmament negotiations and withdrawal of support from the "friends" of the Soviet Union in the Third World.

At first glasnost was no more than an encouragement to forces "from below" to criticise the stagnation and corruption of the Brezhnev years and pillory Gorbachev's remaining conservative opponents within the bureaucracy.

From 1987 to 1989 Gorbachev repeatedly radicalised his programme. A mass of producer co-operatives rapidly turned into small businesses, their number increased by other businesses which were previously operating on an illegal basis. Informal clubs and discussion circles on social, educational, sporting and political questions came into existence. By 1989 there were 60,000 of them.

In 1988 many of these clubs began to group together into "popular fronts". These were clearly quasi-political parties, drawing in not only the intellectuals but sections of the bureaucracy too. These were all outside the framework of party supervision and censorship. In August 1989 Gorbachev struck the clauses against "anti-Soviet agitation and propaganda" from the constitution and by the close of the year ended party control over all but its own newspapers.

Last but not least Gorbachev was determined to pull back from the commitments to prop up pro-Soviet regimes in Eastern Europe and the Third World. It was, in his view, Brezhnev's vain-glorious military adventure in Afghanistan and his support for leftist military regimes in Ethiopia and Somalia that had opened the way for Reagan's cold warmongering. In Eastern Europe the 40 Soviet divisions on Poland's borders and the open threats of intervention had persuaded General Jaruzelski to ban the 10 million-strong Solidarnosc on 12 December 1981.

In 1988 Gorbachev announced a phased withdrawal from Afghanistan. In discussions with East European leaders he made clear that they should follow his lead in opening up "dialogue with society". Above all, he more than hinted that the USSR would not step in to save them if they faced popular upsurges, and these had already begun.

In Russia there was the first miners' strike and mass strikes broke out in Yugoslavia. In the spring

of 1988 a wave of strikes against wage restraint and price rises swept Poland. The Gdansk shipyards and the Nova Huta steelworks were occupied once again and the miners struck. They demanded the re-legalisation of Solidarity and negotiations. Jaruzelski, with Gorbachev's permission, gave in and began the process of round-table negotiations which were to lead to partially free elections.

What Gorbachev did not realise was that these "reforms" would set in motion all the fundamental contradictions of the system – and that once these were unleashed a revolution was inevitable.

By giving people freedom of expression, he was unleashing aspirations and hopes which he would be unable to meet – for free trade unions, for national self-determination, for a free press, for a real multi-party system.

Of course, Gorbachev's reforms aroused serious resistance from within the sclerotic mass of the bureaucracy, which in turn forced him to allow greater and greater freedoms in order to outmanoeuvre them. The bureaucracy itself fractured along the lines of economic function, local, regional, and national levels.

Each segment of the bureaucracy desperately had to mobilise its own social support, to blame others for the shortages, corruption and inefficiency of the system and ultimately to grab the spoils from its collapse.

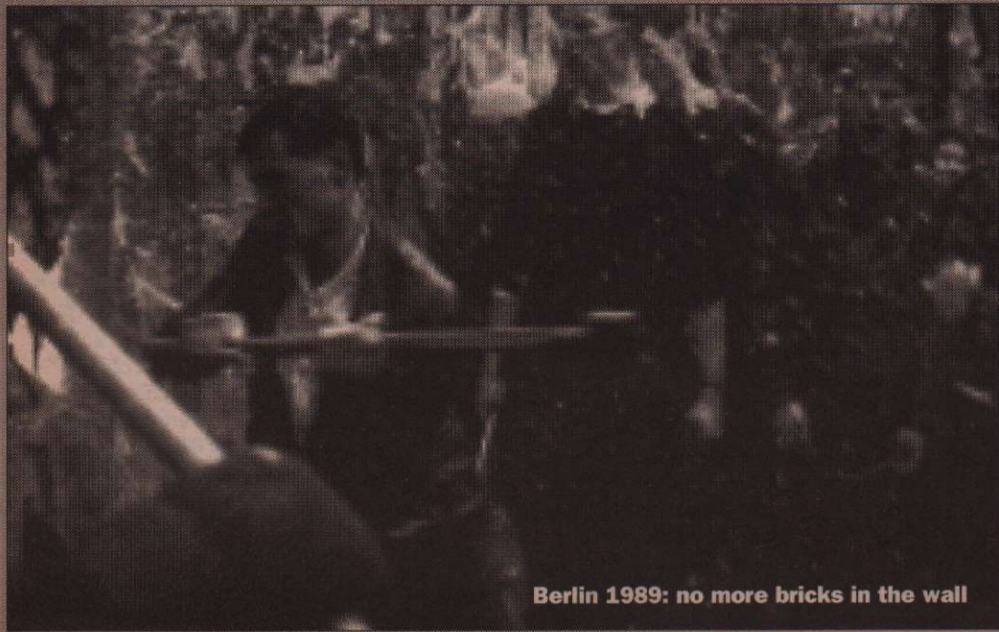
One by one, the illegitimate regimes of Stalinist tyranny, imposed throughout Eastern Europe after the Second World War, fell or were pushed from power. Deprived of the backing of their sponsors in the Kremlin, the Stalinist rulers lost confidence in their decaying system of bureaucratic planning, and in their ability to sustain themselves. The ruling parties lost cohesion and fractured.

In Poland it was the workers' strikes which won the re-legalisation of Solidarnosc. But the swift moves in early 1989 to negotiations and then elections meant that the new Solidarnosc was not like the old.



# The Berlin Wall fell

## wave that broke Stalinism



Berlin 1989: no more bricks in the wall

paramilitary police and the militia ready to open fire and hospitals prepared for mass admissions. But at the last minute party leaders backed off, politburos split, hardliners like Eric Honecker and Milos Jakes resigned.

Governments of "reform communists" were followed by coalitions involving the opposition. Then free elections swept the Stalinists aside in quick succession over the next few months.

Of course, a lack of bloodshed did not make it any the less a revolution. Everywhere the secret police apparatus was drastically reduced, renamed and confined to the role such institutions play under "democratic capitalism".

The party militias which still existed were disbanded, their role in the constitution abolished. Millions deserted the parties' ranks and a

purge of the army of the active Stalinists took place. The remaining institutions of planning were abolished and the doors opened to western trade and finance.

Romania was different. It had no Soviet garrison and the most hated dictator in Eastern Europe was more than willing to follow the Chinese example. But by Christmas Day the lifeless bodies of the Ceausescus lay slumped against a Romanian courtyard wall. A mass insurrection triumphed.

In Russia the arch-reformer Gorbachev lost control over the contending liberal and conservative factions of the bureaucracy. An abortive hardline coup on August 1991 would unleash a chain of events that led to the ousting from power and dissolution of the CPSU, followed by the dissolution of the USSR itself at the end of the year.

## factures despite itself

At the union's first national congress in Gdansk in September 1981 the central demands had focused on "workers' self-management", not a return to private enterprise. Catholic and pro-market intellectuals were involved but they did not dominate at the level of the movement's programme.

Things were different in 1989. Timothy Garton Ash, a British bourgeois journalist, observes that the Solidarnosc which was to win the elections of June 4 was a network of Citizen's Committees "which were joined by many people - doctors, engineers, teachers, journalists - who had not been so active before", whereas "Solidarity as a trade union had grown only sluggishly since its (re) registration in April."

In Germany, Czechoslovakia, Hungary, where there had been no workers' upheavals in the 1970s or early 1980s and where the groups of dissidents had been largely restricted to the intelligentsia, the opposition was even more bourgeois or social democratic in its outlook. There was a general acceptance of the market. This was reinforced by the Christian/Social Democratic model of a "social market" and Gorbachev's talk of a "socialist market economy". The "forums" - Civic, New, Democratic - which sprang up in these countries were dominated by writers like Vaclav Havel, philosophers and students.

Their main obsession was a "return to Europe", the building up of "civil society", and to a "normal life". In other words they wanted to be part of an advanced (imperialist), liberal-democratic, capitalist society.

There was also a - completely justified - yearning for freedom of association, for voluntary organisations, for being "free to speak one's mind", to reject the "big lie" of official ideology. But since the official ideology was "Marxist" and (falsely) claimed its legitimacy from the working class - was easy to throw out the baby with the bath water and some became open, many concealed, anti-communists.

The fancy phraseology helped the intelligentsia

*At the same time huge sections of the bureaucracy and their hangers-on were eager to turn their coats and revile what until yesterday they had praised*

conceal from themselves and from others (like the working class) exactly where they were going. What everyone could agree with was what they did not want, and that was a Stalinist police state and a consumer-unfriendly planned economy. The latter could overproduce sheet steel but meant, as one Polish worker said to Garton Ash, "40 years of socialism and still no toilet paper!"

At the same time huge sections of the bureaucracy and their hangers-on were eager to turn their coats and revile what until yesterday they had praised. Once the courageous students and workers had taken the risks on the streets, once the die was cast, once the Forums were discussing and the elections being prepared, the social forces of bourgeois democratic counter-revolution began to mobilise with a vengeance.

In most countries there was a window of opportunity for those who wanted to prevent a restoration of capitalism. Sometimes it only lasted a few months. In Poland the government headed by Tadeusz Mazowiecki spent the last three months part-demolishing and part-purging the state apparatus. Then in January the "shock therapy" of finance minister Leszek Balcerowicz came into force.

In Germany the intellectuals of New Forum did not want speedy absorption by Helmut Kohl and the West. But they foolishly set themselves against any form of national unity. On the mass demonstrations slogans soon changed from "Wir sind das Volk" (We are the people!) to "Wir sind Ein Volk" (We are one people/nation).

In Czechoslovakia, on the other hand, it was early June 1990 before a Civic Forum government came to power and Havel became president. The first attempt at economic reform was delayed until September. But even then it was not until the Civic Forum split in early 1991 that a party and a coalition for "radical reform" were in place.

By July 1990 Germany was re-united on a wave of the one-for-one Ost-D-mark exchange rate. In

the same month Nato heads of state announced that the Cold War was over. That year elections throughout the region brought new parties to power committed to restoring capitalism to countries where it had been uprooted for 40 or more years.

After a brief respite, the same events engulfed the USSR. Far from creating a space for the revival of "reform Stalinism", as Gorbachev had hoped, the loosening of repression was soon to claim the very architect of perestroika himself. He fell to the coup and counter-coup in 1991. By the turn of the year Yeltsin had dissolved the USSR, let loose the market on Russia and finally vanquished the political challenge of the conservative Stalinists.

In 1989 Eastern Europe was the epicentre of an earthquake whose tremors spread throughout the world, tremors which continue to be felt today.

Guerrilla movements throughout the Americas that gained diplomatic leverage or military aid from the Stalinist states sued for peace without justice. The capitulation of the Stalinist-influenced ANC, through their compromises with South Africa's apartheid regime, accelerated in 1990 with Mandela's release.

The initial impact on the politics and ideologies of the mass labour movements throughout the world was great. The retreat of the intellectuals, many of whom worshipped at the altar of "really existing socialism" or at best kept silent about its crimes, suddenly became converts to the market and to the virtues of "democracy".

Even the vocabulary of "socialism" changed to exclude common, public or state ownership of the means of production. The idea that there was an alternative to the market as a way of organising the economic activity of society was rejected.

For some the Russian Revolution was simply an aberration. Others insisted, more stridently, that history was at an end, and the future reduced to an endless repetition of the present under the title - The Triumph of the Market.



# The workers betrayed

**I**T WAS the working class across Europe, by their strength and courage, who set the 1989 revolutions in motion. But the workers of Eastern Europe laboured under a gross illusion; that once they had helped to destroy the oppressor, they could take a back seat. They put their trust in the money men and women, the politicians with powerful and wealthy friends in the west, to reconstruct the country.

Few believed that it was possible to throw off the dictatorship and yet rescue and reassemble a completely democratic form of socialist planning. Instead they absorbed the lies they were told about the democracy of the market, about the empowering experience of private property. And, when they got the chance, they voted for bourgeois parties and policies.

But they have paid a heavy price. Eastern Europe has been through an economic slump deeper than the Great Depression of the 1930s. Millions of jobs and many social services are deemed incompatible with capitalist economic logic. Real wages have fallen dramatically.

While famous western brand goods may be piled high in the shops, they are out of reach for the majority of people. Russia's GDP is less than half what it was in 1989. The country has had four prime ministers in a year without an election and is ruled by a capricious would-be tyrant, probably no more in control of his faculties than Chernenko, Gorbachev's predecessor.

We predicted in 1989 that there would be a high price to pay for stopping the revolution half-way. Now the apologists for capitalism, firmly in power, cynically admit that they "underestimated" the degree of trauma and pain that would be necessary and how long it would take before the fruits of the market could be eaten.

And democracy? The deceived workers in Hungary, Slovakia, ex-East Germany, Poland and Russia have made some use of their right to vote by swinging back towards parties of the Stalinists in 1993 and 1994. They promise to protect the shell-shocked masses from the worst effects of capitalism's incremental advance. But this democracy is completely hollow. It provides no safeguard against the next round of treason and deception.

Gone is the real democracy that flowered briefly in 1989 and 1990 when the factory and street committees drew the mass of the population into direct and accountable politics that was not divorced from the world of work.

Were those who fought for freedom in 1989 wrong to even start the fight? No, the fight was unavoidable. The idea that to preserve the Stalinist dictatorships would have given "breathing space" for revolutionary communists to organise is laughable. Was a 40 to 70 year breathing space not enough? Indeed there was no air – the air of workers' democracy – to breathe! Only the poisonous fumes of decaying Stalinism. Its economic and political collapse was inevitable. Indeed, it was long overdue.

To adapt one of Trotsky's metaphors – it was not only ripe but rotten-ripe. The failure to hurl it into the abyss over the previous decades brought an added poison into the situation. The market economy seemed the only viable economic system and bourgeois democracy with its freedoms and human rights infinitely preferable to the Stasi or the Securitate.

It was simply not possible for the mass of youth, of intellectuals and workers who were suffering under a welter of lies and repression to wait for a genuine Trotskyist mass party to emerge at their head before they took to the streets. "People make history but not under circumstances of their own choosing." This is a law that applies to proletarian revolutionaries like anyone else.

Genuine communists were right to rejoice at the mass demonstrations and strikes which brought the historically condemned Stalinist monstrosity down. We were right to defend the violent action taken to destroy the secret services, smash the Stalinist party apparatuses, and establish the freedom to organise, to meet and to print whatever their rulers did not like to read.

These things were – and to some extent remain – gains of the 1989 events even if they have to be set against the sufferings of 10 years of attempted capitalist restoration.

That the revolution stopped half-way – at

*Ten years on, the workers of Eastern Europe and Russia are still living with results of their actions and their inaction.*

*They still have most of the democratic rights they won in 1989.*

*But they also have the savage capitalism they could have stopped.*



Striking miners from Prokoplevsk, Russia, July 1989

democratic rights, at the smashing of the Stalinist party dictatorships – was tragic. It was due, in the last analysis, to the absence of a powerful proletarian international revolutionary movement, able to fight for leadership – to warn of the sufferings capitalism would bring, to point out that liberal democracy would not mean the rule of the people, of the workers and the peasants, that "civil society" was also "bourgeois society" where the poor, the unemployed, the old and the young could expect no social solidarity or security.

Given the heavy repression of Stalinism, it could hardly be expected that there would be a Trotskyist party in place within these dictatorships. But there was not "even" an international network of underground circles pledged to a clear programme of political revolution.

Some who looked to Trotskyism did participate in the revolutionary events, but they pursued a policy of adaptation towards the intellectuals or the reform wing of Stalinism. A co-thinker of the United Secretariat of the Fourth International (USFI), Peter Uhl, was in the leading ranks of the opposition in Czechoslovakia. He shared a commission with Vaclav Klaus, a supporter of capitalist restoration through shock therapy, which drafted the Civic Forum's first programme – a hopeless fudge promising something to everyone.

Such "mistakes" were hardly accidents. After all Ernest Mandel, the major theorist of the USFI, had oriented his organisation with the slogans of deepening perestroika and glasnost, with the comforting doctrine that it was impossible to overthrow planned property relations because they were a "higher form" of economy and history does not go backwards.

Truly such out-of-season centrism, masquerading as Trotskyism, was a disaster. It meant that the likes of Uhl did not warn that the leaders of the forums and movements, like the new Solidarity, were class enemies of the workers and would open the floodgates to mass unemployment, low wages, slashed education and social security systems.

Ten years on, the workers of Eastern Europe and Russia are still living with results of their actions and their inaction. They still have most of the democratic rights they won in 1989. But they also have the savage capitalism they could have stopped. The process of capitalist restoration is far from complete. True in the countries nearest to the EU – Poland, the Czech Republic, Hungary and Slovenia – capitalism has been restored, but only in the form of semi-colonial states which are completely subordinate to US, German, French and British multinational corporations, and to the IMF and the World Bank.

In Romania, the CIS states and the Balkans bourgeois restorationist regimes are still trying to complete the transition to capitalism under conditions of terrible economic collapse.

The dissidents forums, the bourgeois neo-liberal parties that emerged from them have often been driven from power by, or into coalition with, successor parties from the old Stalinist parties. The masses have turned to these parties only to be betrayed once again. Such is the very nature of liberal democracy which is organised, systematic deceit of the masses.

Some have turned to reactionary nationalist demagogues (some of them former Stalinists) for easy answers, directing their anger at visible if false targets – minority ethnic groups, the Roma, the Jews. And in former Yugoslavia nationalism has plunged the Balkan region into years of war and carnage.

But a small vanguard, made up of active trade unionists, the libertarian youth and a few small far left groups, is emerging, determined to resist the erosion of living standards and attacks on their civil rights. They are searching for an alternative to "savage capitalism". It is to this layer, bound to grow in time, that we must look in order to build the basis of a revolutionary mass movement.

Such a movement can again make history, fighting for democracy for the workers, fighting against the ravages of the market, and fighting for the collective ownership and planning of the economy without dictatorship, so that real socialism can be constructed out of the ashes of both Stalinism and capitalism.



# Chechnya: Yeltsin's bloody gamble

**R**USSIA'S DIRTY war against the Chechen people grew fiercer last month, with civilian casualties mounting dramatically. Fifty or more refugees were killed and dozens injured when a Russian rocket hit a convoy fleeing for the neighbouring republic of Ingushetia in late October. In addition, Russian military officials finally acknowledged that they carried out a bomb attack on a market in the capital city, Grozny, a week before. Chechen officials say a maternity hospital and mosque were also hit by explosions. In Grozny, emergency workers have confirmed that more than 100 people were killed.

Next door in Ingushetia, there are already 140,000 to 170,000 refugees, with another 100,000 waiting to cross. Some 6,000 Chechens were packed into an old train, waiting a mile from the frontier. Valhi Kagirov, a bus driver from Grozny, said: "They give us food you would not feed to dogs."

The Chechen War is central to Russia's concerted campaign to reassert its control and influence over the entire Caucasus region, including the independent republics of Georgia, Armenia and Azerbaijan. The Moscow regime is anxious to either preserve or restore its access to Central Asia's natural resources. This comes in direct response to the USA's recent penetration of the region and Washington's encouragement of a new, scarcely covert, anti-Russian alliance, backed by the USA's muscular and frequently independent-minded regional gendarme, Turkey.

The new pro-Western GUUAM alliance (Georgia, Ukraine, Uzbekistan, Azerbaijan and Moldova), has expanded from an economic coalition to an effectively military one, with a joint force defending the new Baku-Supsa pipeline from Azerbaijan to the Black Sea coast of Georgia. The explicit purpose of this and the planned Baku-Ceyhan pipeline through Georgia to Turkey, is to create

a route for oil from Central Asian countries outside Moscow's control. This poses both an economic and strategic threat to Russian interests.

The eruption of tensions within Georgia (where the Russians can use the minority national enclaves) and the assassination of Armenia's premier, who had been on the brink of signing a peace deal with Azerbaijan, highlight the region's potential for explosive conflict. Likewise, Russia's new interventions in Central Asia, where it poses as the friend of regimes under pressure from Islamist "terrorists". The ruthless subordination of Chechnya is central to Russian plans.

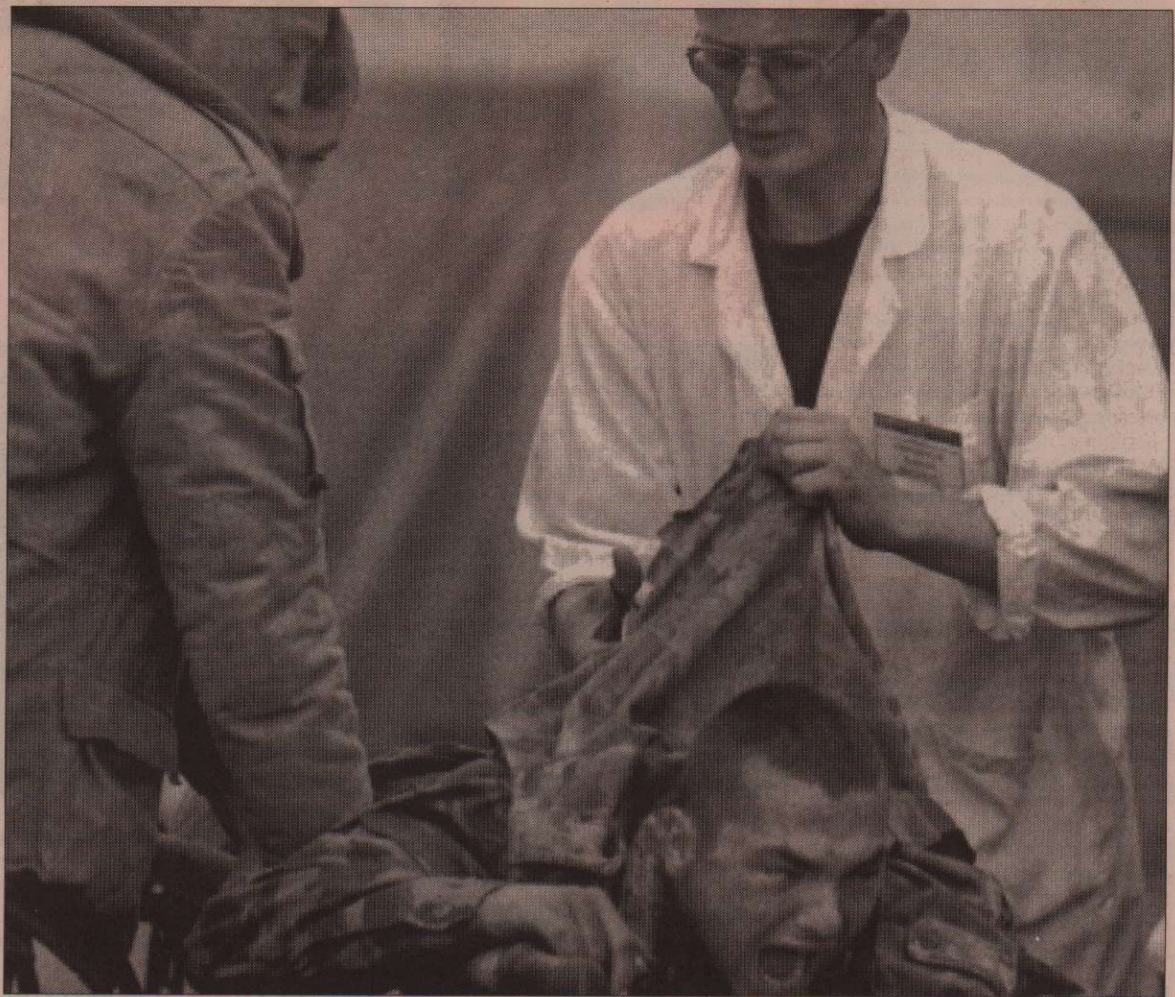
From 20 October Chechnya's Terek river became Russian premier Vladimir Putin's Rubicon. Crossing the Terek and attempting to encircle Grozny signal a full-scale war in Chechnya.

It is a war Putin and Boris Yeltsin dare not lose. Almost unlimited resources have been made available: crack troops paid premium wages, high-tech equipment to co-ordinate the bombardment of the Chechen positions and wreak devastation on Grozny, which has yet to recover from the destruction of the 1994-96 war.

Russian forces may take Grozny. But it is unlikely that the Chechen fighters will let themselves be trapped inside the city. The entire objective of the war was to prevent guerrilla attacks on Russian communications and intimidate the north Caucasian republics. This will not be achieved if a Russian puppet is simply installed in Grozny's ruins.

Achieving a quick victory in the mountains over Shamil Basayev's Chechen fighters is simply not possible. Knowing their difficult territory, and enjoying the warm sympathy of the inhabitants, they are ready to wage a long-term partisan war.

Aleksandr Goltz, a military correspondent for the Moscow-based weekly *Izvestia*, believes that with the early onset of winter in the Caucasus "adverse weather conditions will restrict the use



Russian soldier pays the price in Moscow's brutal war.

of air-strikes, on which the campaign has so far heavily depended. Crossing the Terek river now and wading further into Chechnya implies once again - severe losses for the Russian military, not to mention civilian casualties and refugees."

For Yeltsin and Putin the war is a desperate gamble: a throw of the dice on which they are staking all. Russia has its own "Vietnam syndrome": Afghanistan. When the body-bags start coming home, others bearing Yeltsin's and Putin's names might well be taken out of store. Russia just cannot sustain a long and expensive high-tech war in both Chechnya and Dagestan. The cost of the military operation in Dagestan alone since August is \$80 million.

Key parliamentary and presidential elections are looming. Putin, Yeltsin's designated heir, hopes to guarantee the succession by a mighty victory over the hated Chechens. Rumours are rife in Moscow that Yeltsin has a decree on his desk banning the Communist Party of the Russian Federation (CPRF) - the largest party in the Duma and his main rival in the elections. This is not because the CPRF has threatened him. Indeed, it supports the Chechen campaign. It is because he knows that, as the only serious opposition, they would gain from a further slide in the economy or a military debacle in Chechnya. Another "Yeltsin coup" is a distinct possibility this winter.

In the past period from 1991 up to August 1998 the Russian restorationist regime was built on a definite social base:

the new crony capitalist class (called the "oligarchs") and the pro-capitalist bureaucracy, plus the new middle layers. In addition, of course, they had massive economic support from the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and European Union. The onset of the crisis a year ago unleashed the wholesale destruction of this base and, with the decline of the oligarchs, came bitter factional struggles inside the ruling elite, the destruction of the middle layers, and growing friction with Washington and Wall Street.

The pretext for invading Chechnya was the bombing campaign in Moscow and other cities. There are now serious indications that these were not the work of Chechens but the Russian security services. It seems likely that the regime will resort to a more confrontational foreign policy, both to secure their threatened strategic interests and to deflect attention from the domestic crisis. This explains why they have approved a 50 per cent increase in next year's military budget despite rumblings from the IMF about future loans.

In the short term such a policy could work. But in the event of a failed Russian campaign in Chechnya it will probably result in a political disaster.

What role will the working class play in the Russian crisis? In general the working class has been absent from the Russian political stage since the wave of miners' strikes and rail blockades last summer.

The effects of the economic crisis and

the betrayal by the CPRF and trade union leaderships had a negative impact on working class militancy. In addition, an important obstacle to working class resistance still remains, with the terrible social atomisation and geographical isolation of the flashpoints of working class resistance.

Recently, however, there have been examples of determined and sometimes successful strike action. Strikes and occupations in Yasnogorsk and the Vyborg (see below), have shown revitalised militancy. There are reports of regional strike committees, proto-soviets, and union and political forces attempting to build a workers' party.

The immediate task for revolutionary Marxists in Russia today is to mobilise against the arch-reactionary, anti-Caucasian policy of the government. The LRCI stands for the defence of Chechnya against the Russian forces and against any anti-immigration policy.

Equally important is support for the Vyborg workers and similar working class struggles. Revolutionaries must stress the need for generalised tactics of mass resistance against regional and federal government attacks including mass and general strikes, with the central goal of re-establishing a state of 1917-style workers' soviets.

- Russian troops out of Chechnya!
- Aid without strings to Chechnya!
- Oppose Russian chauvinism!
- Support the struggles of the Vyborg and other Russian workers in defence of jobs and wages!

## Vyborg workers resist police attack

ON 14 October, 30 armed police wearing black ski masks stormed the Sovietskii pulp and paper mill in Vyborg, 85 miles north of St Petersburg.

They planned to smash an occupation by the mill's workers faced with closure and mass redundancy. At least one person was shot after the "Typhoon" unit of the Spetsnaz, the Russian paramilitary police, forced their way in at 2.00 am. As news spread of the police action, some 700 workers converged on the plant. The police, cornered by the workers, barricaded themselves into a section of the building. Eleven workers were injured, two by gunfire, while eight others were taken hostage.

That afternoon the workers responded by seizing Alexander Sabodazh, the Russian representative of Alcem (the UK-based company which owns the mill). The police soon released the workers they had held hostage.

At 4.40 pm, under orders from the Russian Justice Ministry, the Typhoon officers withdrew, protected by two rows of OMON police.

In 1997 the formerly state-owned mill was purchased by British-based Nimonor Investment Ltd. But the workers refused to let the new owners onto the mill site unless they were paid back wages totalling 42 million roubles (then about £5 million!).

When Nimonor sold their control-

ling interest to Alcem, the factory's 2,160 workers elected their own factory director and barricaded the mill. They also threatened to block the international highway between St Petersburg and Finland.

"We were told that Alcem is planning to turn the mill into a plywood factory, and if they do, a majority of the workers will be fired," said Vera Gaidaman, one of the occupying workers. "If the workers lose the mill, they will have nowhere to go, nothing to eat."

The factory provides jobs for most of Sovietskii's very impoverished inhabitants.

The local authority has recognised that it is currently powerless "to return

the mill to the rightful owners". The strike committee retains full control over the mill. This magnificent victory for workers' militancy highlights the efficacy of the occupation tactic and the need for workers' defence, armed and organised.

In Britain workers and youth should protest to Alcem UK: demanding an end to the violent harassment of Sovietskii's mill workers, full payment of their wage arrears and recognition of workers' control over the plant. According to British company records, Alcem UK is registered at an address at Palladium House, Argyle Street, London, W1. Its precise ownership is unclear, although its directors are listed as two Britons: Bryan

Webb, based in London, and Paul Joseph Williams, with an address in the Channel Islands.

Globally, workers should pass declarations of protest against the attempt to remove workers from their own workplace, declare their complete solidarity and send financial donations. The mill's strike committee has asked workers internationally to send protests to Russian Prime Minister Vladimir Putin, Moscow, Krasnopresnenskaya nab 2.

You may e-mail a copy of your protest letter, declaration of support etc, and enquire as to how donations can be sent directly from Russian campaigners at mgo@aha.ru.



**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.

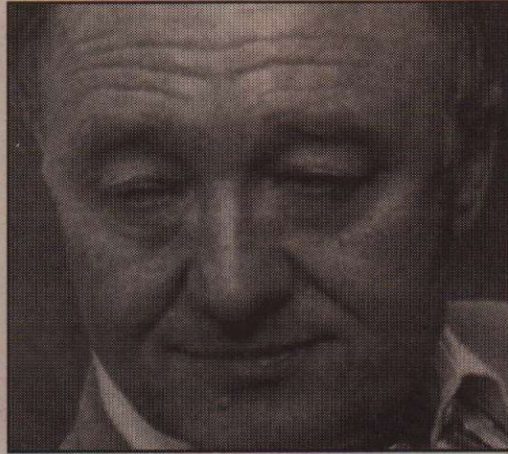
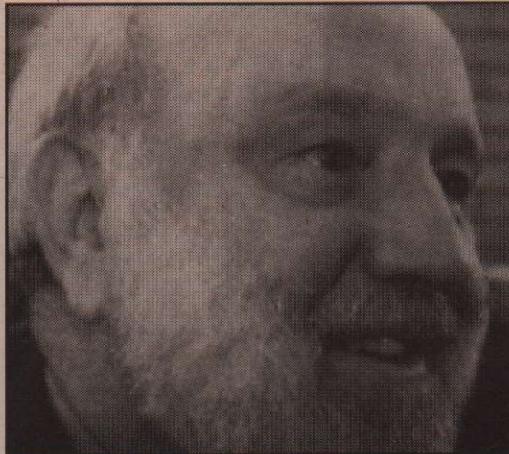
**OCTOBER 1917:** The Russian revolution established a workers' state. But Stalin destroyed workers' democracy and set about the reactionary and utopian project of building "socialism in one country". In the USSR, and the other degenerate workers' states that were established from above, capitalism was 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!

# LIVINGSTONE FOR MAYOR



## No to Blair's cynical election stitch-up

The battle to get Ken Livingstone elected Mayor of London is well and truly on.

Every opinion poll has shown most Londoners want Livingstone as the capital's first mayor. But Tony Blair definitely does not.

Many Londoners remember the role played by the Greater London Council (GLC) in Thatcher's Britain and its leader "Red Ken". The attempts to make public transport cheaper won him many supporters, especially among those reliant on the buses and tubes. Livingstone's anti-racist and anti-homophobic campaigns as head of the GLC in the 1980s were a blow for equality - that was a major reason for Thatcher scrapping the GLC.

Given Livingstone's popularity and the likelihood that he would win easily, why doesn't Blair back him? On some key issues Livingstone is not towing the party line. Most significantly, Livingstone has criticised New Labour's plan to privatise London's tube. The control freaks at Millbank don't trust him to back their leader's every word. So Blair is using every trick in the book to keep Livingstone's name off the ballot paper.

Just as they did in the election for the Welsh Assembly leadership, the Blairites are planning to rig the vote. New Labour claims to stand for "one member, one vote". But under the recently imposed selection procedure, some members' votes will be worth a lot more than others. Ordinary party members' votes will make up only one-third of the poll. A few hundred MPs, MEPs and candidates for the London Assembly get an equal slice. The remaining third will be the votes of Labour-affiliated trade unions.

Livingstone immediately spoke out against this stitch-up, complaining that local councillors have not been includ-

ed in the MPs' slot. He could have added that the whole "electoral college" system is grossly undemocratic. One MP's vote is worth that of 1,000 party members or 6,000 affiliated trade unionists. Every party member and every member of an affiliated union should have a vote - weighed equally.

Party managers rushed to say the "electoral college" system is identical to that used to select Blair as party leader. But in the 1994 vote, unions had to ballot members on their preferred choice. This time round, some right-wing union leaders are refusing to let their members decide - and that suits Blair just fine.

Take the engineers' union AEEU: its leader Sir Ken Jackson showed how he'd earned his knighthood last month by ruling out a ballot of his members. He attacked Livingstone for holding talks with Sinn Fein in the 1980s - despite the fact that Blair is doing the same thing now. The right-wing union chief will undoubtedly cast his union's block vote for loyal Blairite candidate Frank Dobson.

Shopworkers' union USDAW, which represents some of the capital's worst-paid workers, has also refused to ballot.

Members of these unions have every right to be angry. Their subs go to Labour's coffers - but their right to have any say in who should be the Labour candidate for mayor is being taken away.

And the anti-democratic practices don't stop there. Millbank officials have disqualified some unions from voting, saying they paid their 1998 subscriptions late. This includes the rail union RMT and train drivers' union ASLEF, which spoke out against private rail companies after the Paddington rail disaster. Both unions were expected to back Livingstone's call to stop Railtrack getting its hands on the London Under-

ground.

Others banned from voting include manufacturing union MSF, whose leadership would back Ken Livingstone. The broadcasting union BECTU and the National League of the Blind and Disabled are also affected.

The ban is not being applied evenhandedly. Unlike unions, individual party members whose subs are in arrears will be allowed to vote if they pay them off.

If workers in London want to challenge Blair's manipulation and ensure that they have a say on who should be the Labour candidate in the election for London's mayor, then we will have to organise and fight. Simply shouting "unfair" will not stop New Labour's attempts to impose Frank Dobson as Blair's safe pair of hands. Start the campaign now:

- Take petitions round your workplace calling for unions to ballot their members and for a vote for Livingstone.

- Workers in affiliated unions should demand the right to vote in the selection of the Labour candidate and the block vote cast proportionately - reflecting the support in the union for different candidates.

- Get your union branch to hold a meeting on Labour's candidate for mayor. Invite Livingstone and Dobson to come along and argue their case.

- Raise the argument about the future of London's tube. After Paddington, can private companies be allowed to run the system as Dobson and Prescott advocate?

Livingstone is, of course, no revolutionary and these days is not even a very left reformist. In addition, Workers Power sharply opposes him on many crucial issues of the immediate campaign.

He refuses to call for higher taxes on the City's fat cats and says he believes that the market should be central to the British economy.

Over recent months he has been carefully cultivating big business support and has been shamelessly watering down his policies.

Most disgracefully, he fully backed Blair and Clinton's bombing of Yugoslavia, and refused to criticise even the use of uranium-depleted shells on civilian targets.

Nevertheless, his opposition to tube privatisation and the support he has won from millions of working class Londoners mean that a victory for Livingstone would be a step forward. We want to see his name on the ballot paper and if he stands we will be campaigning for a Livingstone landslide.

A victory for Livingstone will be a message to Tony Blair that he can't just ignore what Londoners want: a safe, publicly-owned transport system, properly funded health and education and a higher minimum wage.

If Blair succeeds in denying him the Labour nomination, Livingstone should stand anyway. If he puts his loyalty to Blair's party above his loyalty to working class Londoners, socialists should respond to Blair's manoeuvres and Livingstone's careerist cowardice by launching a mayoral challenge. The left should take the opportunity to campaign for socialism by uniting around a single candidate and a clear revolutionary programme.

Its policies must include:

- No tube sell-off.
- Tax the City fat cats.
- Fight for the government to reverse cuts in council grants.
- A massive spending programme on health, education and public transport.
- Bring racist police to justice.
- Raise the minimum wage to £7 an hour.
- Scrap PFI, Best Value and all school and hospital privatisation.
- Homes for the homeless - jobs for all.

## FEEDBACK ■ Contact us on 0181 981 0602

**Workers Power is the British Section of the League for a Revolutionary Communist International**

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### FUND DRIVE

We urgently need money to equip our office with technology capable of producing an improved paper. Our target is £3,000. So far we have raised £1,333.28. Many thanks this month to readers in Brighton, Sheffield, Birmingham and Spain who sent in a total of £303. Send cheques, payable to Workers Power and marked "Fund" on the back.

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