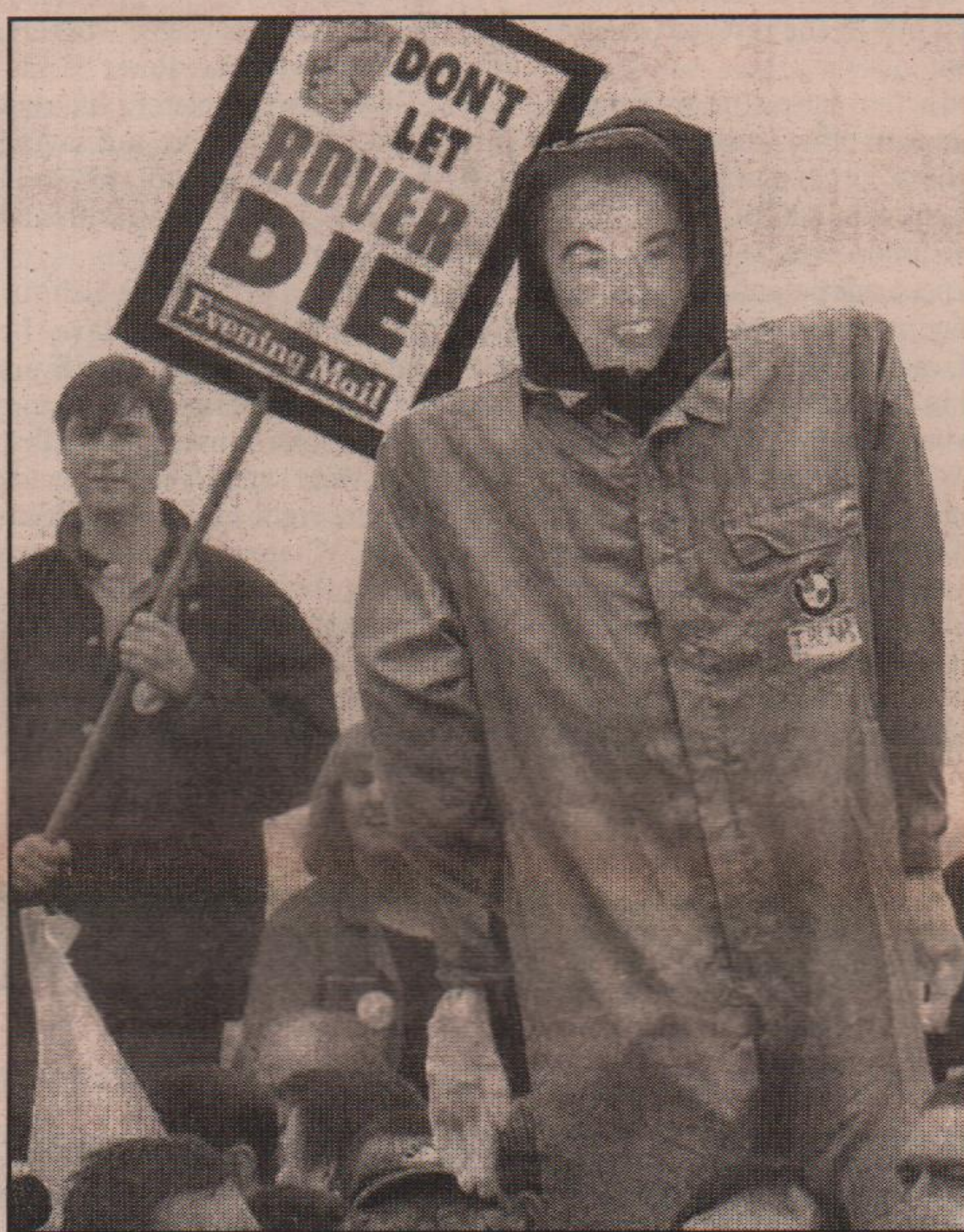


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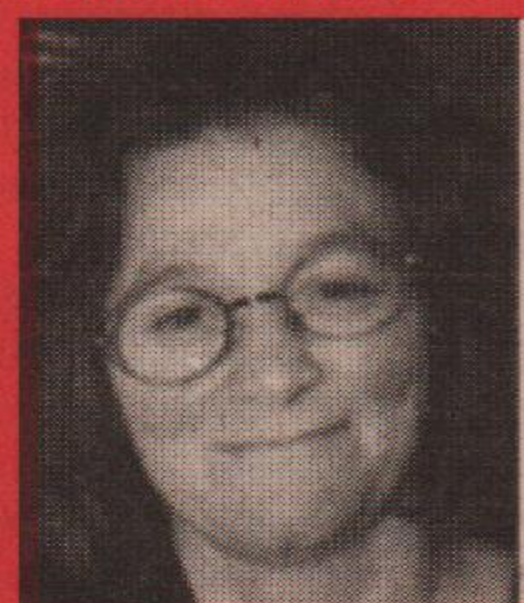
As the crisis in Labour's heartlands grows

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Says Kate Ford
LSA candidate
for the London
assembly elections



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Nationalise Rover un



AFTER BMW pulled the plug on Rover the Labour government – in the shape of industry minister and millionaire-lover Stephen Byers – put up its hands and said, don't blame us. Byers quickly added that there was now nothing Labour could do to guarantee the jobs at Longbridge.

New Labour's love of the market means they won't even contemplate meeting this crisis with the one simple solution that could save jobs – nationalise the industry. No wonder there is a crisis of faith in Labour in their working class heartlands. Their voters are being repaid for their loyal support for Blair with repeated kicks in the teeth. It's time to start kicking back.

The job losses have already started in the West Midlands. Component firms such as Bacol in Smethwick have now sacked workers; there are lay offs at the threatened Good Year plant in Wolverhampton. This is just the start of a possible 50,000 redundancies across the region as a result of the closures and cuts at Rover.

If the asset strippers Alchemy take over Longbridge, at least 5,000 job losses are expected in the plant. Alchemy's current plans are to produce limited models and numbers under the MG title. Many analysts think this is an unrealistic plan and that Alchemy is more interested in the valuable Longbridge site.

But the current plans are taking their

toll on workers. "We've got to the point where we just want to know who's staying and who's going", said one. The night shift has already been cut and other workers stood down.

That is why it is so essential that the trade unions organise action to follow the Great March. Best of all would be an occupation, but strikes, a march on Parliament, a day of action could all help rally effective opposition to the break up of Rover. Other Rover workers will also be affected. The bosses have lied through their teeth all along the line. They are lying now when they say Cowley and other plants are safe. As the full extent of BMW's sell-off emerged, it became clear that other jobs are threatened including some at Solihull and as many as 2,000 at the research centre at Gaydon.

United action across the group, and in tandem with other workers affected outside the group, is essential.

The problem is that the current strategy of the union leaders is focused on trying to persuade potential buyers and the government to come up with an alternative scheme. While they are engaged in this lobbying, the time for action is being frittered away.

But relying on either alternative bosses or on Labour is fundamentally mistaken. The leader of the "Rover First" consortium is a Liberal Democrat councillor and mayoral hopeful John Hemmings. On his board he has Mike Whitby, deputy leader of the Tory group on the council, and the "popular historian"

Carl Chinn. The idea of this group is to keep Rover together, and Longbridge open, for the sake of "Birmingham".

This sounds good when set against the devastating threatened job losses. But the question Rover First avoids is – whose Birmingham are we talking about? Is it the Birmingham of the multi-millionaire Hemmings, the Birmingham of the boardrooms, the deals done at the Hyatt, the swanky conferences at the Convention Centre, or is it the Birmingham of 10 per cent unemployment, underfunded schools, crumbling hospitals and underinvested industries?

Although the job losses will affect many sectors of Birmingham and the West Midlands, with small businesses threatened as well as waged workers, relying on bosses to "Save Rover" is mistaken. They have completely different interests – making profit, not saving jobs. There is no more security for workers with "Rover First" than with any other employer.

Reliance on either the Labour Government or Council to save the day is equally misplaced. Stephen Byers has been quick to blame BMW, ignoring the fact that he himself pledged that Rover jobs were safe. Of course, trade unionists are right to demand action from Byers. Whatever Blair's mantra about being the "party of business", Labour nevertheless promised workers in the Midlands that life would improve under Labour. It is no wonder that some workers in Longbridge are saying "We



Stephen Byers blamed BMW while doing nothing

voted them in and we can vote them out".

But New Labour is committed to policies which involve a squeeze on public spending and a smaller and smaller role for the public sector. The paltry sum so far pledged to the Task Force, £129 million, will make little difference when so many thousands of jobs are threatened. The government will sometimes step in, as with the money for British Aerospace, but this is to hand money to big business bosses, not to workers. The same is true of its regeneration schemes in the North East, Wales and the Potteries.

Meanwhile Birmingham's Labour council is currently planning to sell

off council houses and old peoples' homes and is implementing Best Value with a vengeance. We should certainly demand they act to save the jobs, but cannot rely on them.

Many trade unionists have raised the call for "public ownership" of Rover. This still leaves open the question of how Rover would be managed and run. If it is left to compete in the cut-throat market of the global car industry, then the management will demand sacrifices and job cuts, just as the managers of the old nationalised industries used to do.

That is why socialists call for the nationalisation of Rover under workers' control with government funding to guarantee wages and jobs. We need to

After the giant march what next?



LONGBRIDGE STEWARDS are clear that more action is needed following the magnificent 80,000 march in Birmingham on 1 April: "Next stop is London. We need a march to tell Blair he's got to find the money, he's got to intervene. The government pledged its support to us last year", said one leading steward in the wake of the march.

But Rover workers asking the question "What next?" after the march found they came away with no useful answers from the trade union tops.

A parade of General Secretaries pledged their support, attacked BMW, made a few critical noises about Labour and the strong pound, but steered well away from any idea of action.

There were attacks on government policy for the crisis in manufacturing industry, there were "messages to BMW" to stand by their obligations, there were "messages to Tony Blair" calling for government intervention. But there were few precise demands, and no specific calls to action that could rally workers beyond the hope of an alternative buyer and a general idea that public investment was needed. No talk of nationalisation or even "public ownership".

TGWU negotiator Tony Woodley, who at the Gaydon shop stewards meeting a few days after the BMW announcement had gone as far as to mention the "N" word (nationalisation) and eaten strikes, could do no more than repeat the lame threat "We won't go quietly".

Some stewards say that Woodley was "reined in" by the TGWU leadership, many feel he would like to do more. That's as may be, but Woodley won't break from Morris and company. He



made a point of warning the audience that there would be thousands of redundancies, concentrating his fire on the sale to asset strippers Alchemy and on the way that BMW has made off with the technology and know-how of the Land Rover engineers. He was tapping in to a huge well of resentment at the way BMW management have treated Rover workers. All this can be directed toward the idea of an alternative "British" buyer, backed up by government funds.

The longer this focus on an alternative buyer goes on, the more any fighting spirit will slip away, the more the

attention of senior stewards is on negotiating with BMW, the city council, the Rover First consortium and the government the less they will concentrate on organising effective action.

A march in London should be used to focus the demands of the whole union movement, to force Labour to nationalise Rover. If it's merely a token protest, calling for increased funds, it can be ignored by Blair and Byers. That's why it is vital that trade unionists demand their executives support a London march, lay on coaches and call on the whole membership. Best of all, of course,

would be to call it on a working day and make it a day of protest strikes.

But this sort of action must be directed towards the goal of organising strikes and, most importantly, occupations if workers are to stop Alchemy's plans. Ironically it was left to Carl Chinn, in the middle of a revivalist "patriotic" speech calling for support for British manufacturing, to call for action. Chinn got a huge roar of support from the audience when he called for Brummies to stand at the Longbridge gates with the workers to stop any attempt to move the plant and machinery for the Mini.

A number of Longbridge workers are well aware that direct action is needed. "There's no mood at present for an occupation – but if they try to move the Mini, then they might find that difficult. Carl Chinn was right," said one steward.

But they are hemmed in both by official union policy and by what they feel is a lack of willingness to fight from the shop floor. The same sentiments are expressed by experienced militants across the Rover plants. One argued, "The problem is there's a missing layer. After all the retreats, the speed-ups and so on in the last ten years, many conscious socialists left. This has meant that union principles and ideas aren't being passed on. And the young workers are Thatcher's children. That's not to say they're Tories, but they haven't thought about political issues".

This is a genuine problem expressing real difficulties, but it is one that has to be tackled head on. What it forgets is not only how fast workers learn in struggle, but how a number of determined socialists and militants, arguing the need for effective action, and linking this to aims that meet the needs of the workforce, can get a hearing.

The argument for occupation, nationalisation and for sharing out work must be put again and again in the next few weeks. And this means organising regular mass and section meetings, regular rallies and protest events. At all of these the argument for action can ensure that "Thatcher's children" quickly become real rebels against that hateful parent. That is why Workers Power is working, together with other socialists, towards bringing together those workers in the Rover plants who are prepared to fight for such action.

der workers' control

campaign for this demand across the group – and we need to link up with other car workers, such as those at Ford whose jobs are also under threat, to fight for a nationalised car industry.

Labour will say that they haven't got the money or means to carry this out. This is a miserable excuse. We won't accept it.

Instead we will fight to open the books, accounts and computers of the car firms to workers' inspection. This will give us a clear idea of the wealth that they have and the profits they have salted away. It will expose the mismanagement of the bosses and enable us to prepare a rational plan for production – with a shorter working week and no loss of pay – that can guarantee every job.

More important, it won't cost anything to the government to nationalise the industry under workers' control, providing we don't pay the bosses a cent. These people have made a fortune from our work. They have piled up profits and have aggressively begged for and got all sorts of tax breaks and subsidies from the Labour government. Now they are trying to run off with the loot and leave thousands jobless. They shouldn't get a penny in compensation.

To make Labour meet these demands will require an almighty working class struggle. But if we don't launch it then the only alternative is a jobs massacre every bit as bad as the one carried out by Thatcher in the early 1980s. We cannot let that happen.

THE CRISIS IN THE GLOBAL CAR INDUSTRY



The crisis at Rover is the most acute expression of the cut-throat competition in the global car industry. Each of the car giants is fighting for a share of an uncertain market. Yet they produce more and more cars and make their employees work harder and harder. This illustrates the madness and irrationality of the capitalist system.

Each company has millions invested in plant and machinery. To carry on making profits, each company must try to steal a march on its rivals. This is reflected in constantly evolving production methods and organisation as well as in mergers and acquisitions.

The last few years has seen a rush of take-overs and new partnerships. For instance, DaimlerChrysler, itself formed just two years ago, has now bought a big stake in Mitsubishi, giving it access to the Japanese market. Ford has bought in to Volvo and Mazda, GM has a 20 per cent stake in Fiat. Ford is now engaged in a major "restructuring" of its European production, threatening the Dagenham plant. Vauxhall and Renault are planning a joint venture in van manufacture. Each company has a national base, but has to move into other continents to survive.

They also have to try to produce a range of cars. The logic behind BMW's doomed take-over at Rover was to give it a mid-range vehicle within its "palette" of cars. Niche market production tends to survive successfully only with the backing of giant companies.

The vicious competition means that the costs of a new model from research and development to launch are absolutely huge, yet the shelf life is shorter and shorter. Ironically, the car bosses themselves contribute to this situation by persuading customers that they need new cars regularly, that they need more and more "extras as standards" and so forth.

This obscene consumption increases year on year. To make a profit on the scale of investment needed means selling at least 2 million "units" a year and this is likely to rise.

The car giants have tried to overcome some of these problems

by simplifying the basic models while increasing the surface differences. They have also tried to control more elements of the production chain, taking stakes in component firms, buying in to parts production and distribution and even into oil – BMW with Castrol, for example.

But the biggest cost cutting has come from increasing productivity, getting workers to work harder, driving down conditions, introducing more "flexible" working and so forth. So each set of workers is told that to compete, they will have to adopt the latest schemes such as the reintroduction of the hated Friday night shift, or working longer hours to meet the surges in demand. As one Rover worker put it, "I've worked 11 hour shifts starting at eight at night. What more do they want? Blood?"

If costs rise in one area, then the companies may simply move production. National borders are of little consequence to them, although there are costs in moving which means that they can't move as easily as they might like workers to think.

It is the workers who pay the price for the cut-throat competition. Their jobs, wages, homes and living standards fall, while the boardroom bosses escape with fat cheques and pay offs. This will go on as long as the bosses are allowed to get away with it. This means it is essential to put an end to the terrible round of "concession bargaining"; it is essential that workers stand together to fight for better, not worse conditions. If less cars are needed, then share out the work, cut the hours, make work more, not less, tolerable. Or start producing things that are needed, improved transport systems, cheap, safe and clean public service vehicles and so forth. Instead of sacking talented, skilled workers, put those skills and talents to work.

Of course the capitalists cannot stand these ideas because their system is driven by the logic of profit and competition. That is why to end this madness we need a different system altogether – socialism, a society run by workers themselves and an economy planned by workers themselves, organised to meet human need not private greed.

For international solidarity

Messages of solidarity have poured into the Longbridge Works Committee from workers all over the world.

Berlin BMW union representative Hans Koebrich came over in person to march with the Longbridge banner.

Hans also sent this message (see below). Workers Power ensured this got to through to convenors of the Rover plants and to Tony Woodley at the Birmingham march. This message was a vital contribution to

answering the right wing anti-German hecklers, and when Woodley read it out, it was greeted with cheers from the trade union and socialist contingents.

As one experienced militant from Landrover put it: "Don't take it out on the Germans – that's a vital argument I've been having all week in the plant. It's particularly important to get across to young workers when the press is full of anti German nonsense."

Dear colleagues,
The Shop stewards of BMW Motorcycle plant of Berlin discussed the situation of Rover-workers in Longbridge in our meeting on 28 March. We understand very well your anger about BMW's decision to sell "Rover cars" to a financial speculator. The new "owner" is not able nor willing to guarantee your jobs. On the contrary: his concept to produce special cars on a very small scale will lead to mass redundancies.

Not only Rover workers will be affected, the whole region will be too. In the German constitution is written: "property means responsibility". But we can't feel their responsibility.

The fate of workers, their material being, depends on their jobs in this industry. But their fate doesn't play any role in employers' decisions.

It is significant that stocks usually rise in the case of mass redundancies. The Rover crisis wasn't caused by the

workers. It is a result of decisions made by politicians and managers. Workers couldn't influence those decisions. It is also a result of worldwide overcapacities in the car industry, that is heated up with more and more intense production.

We support your struggle to defend your jobs. To stop job losses on such a large scale it is also important for all autoworkers to pull together. If the dam breaks other big companies will not hesitate to act in a similar way during the next crisis.

The big mass demonstration in Birmingham on this Saturday will be an important step in putting those who are responsible in BMW management and in politics under pressure to create a solution to save the jobs of Rover workers and their dependent suppliers.

Hans Koebrich,
Shop steward in the German metal workers' union, IGM, BMW plant, Berlin

We support your struggle to defend your jobs. To stop job losses on such a large scale it is also important for all auto workers to pull together

BUILD EUROPEAN RANK AND FILE UNITY IN THE CAR INDUSTRY

The following letter proposing organised solidarity with Rover workers in Germany was also sent. We urge all Rover workers and other British car workers, to take up this proposal and create the basis for a rank and file cross-Europe car workers group that can begin to organise against the multinational car giants.

Dear Brothers and Sisters,
I wish to extend solidarity greetings from the IG Metall leadership in the company Mahle in Stuttgart, (international car component supplier) and to make a proposal for solidarity work.

We add our greetings to those of others in Germany such as the participants of an international trade unionist Conference (TIE) who have called for solidarity with Rover. The "Vertrauenskerperleitung" (Union-leadership) and "Betriebsrat" (Works Council) of Porsche have also sent a motion of solidarity to Longbridge.

The sale of Rover by BMW to a venture capitalist group would be a death sentence causing thousands of job losses. This behaviour is scandalous. But also scandalous is the behaviour of the representatives of the IG Metall and the Works Council in the supervisory board of BMW, where they agreed to the sell off. It is scandalous and very short-sighted.

What the BMW management is doing towards Rover today, will tomorrow be done by Ford or some other transnational company towards BMW. All workers in the car – and components – industry should be aware of this.

Therefore solidarity with the workforces of Rover is not just a question of sympathy, but the base for any trade union action in the car industry, whenever we want to defend workplaces, wages and working conditions against the great companies.

I know of some Works Council members in the Berlin plant want to make solidarity with you and I think they will try to contact you. But the "responsible" trade union leaders at BMW have obviously such a high identification with their company, that they are ready to undermine their own ability to resistance.

If there is now an outbreak of hate against everything German at your place, this is understandable. But nationalism is as short-sighted as identification with the company interests. Of course German capital is mean. That's right. But the meanness does not come from the fact that it's German but from the fact that it's capital.

I want to make the following proposal for reinforcing trade union solidarity and co-operation: send a delegation of shop stewards to Munich to the BMW headquarters, to speak with the presidents of the European and central works councils. Then we will organise a rally together with unionists from the German car industry there and in Regensburg, the big production plant. If you agree, I will seek support for this in Germany. This way we can organise together action of solidarity.

I wish you a successful demonstration on 1 April.
Solidarity greetings
Matthias Fritz
IGM Mahle, Stuttgart

UNISON

Build a rank and file movement

LAST MONTH'S branch-sponsored anti-privatisation event and Campaign for a Fighting Democratic Unison (CFDU) conference both offered a chance for the left in Britain's biggest union to take stock of its forces and strategy in the wake of the recent contest for general secretary.

Rodney Bickerstaffe has been succeeded by Dave Prentis, a witch-hunting bureaucrat and the choice of Bickerstaffe and the union machine. The left's vote increased, however, with Roger Bannister (the CFDU candidate) polling 31.6 per cent and Malkiat Bilku (the leader of the Hillingdon strikers) polling 12.4 per cent, amounting to a joint left vote of 44 per cent – well up on the combined vote of Bannister and Yunus Bakhsh (SWP) in 1995, despite a lower turnout this time.

Prentis' election signals that it will be business as usual regarding New Labour's attacks on public sector workers and the welfare state – some speeches in opposition to particular policies but little or no action by the leadership. It also means that there is no end in sight to the vicious witch-hunt. While it appears that the suspended Birmingham branch may be back on stream in April, elsewhere the war on the left continues.

Among the latest casualties of the three-year long witch-hunt of left activists and branches is Faith Ryan – from Birmingham – expelled from Unison for supposedly harassing a full-time official. Meanwhile, Roddy Slorach (Glasgow Unison social services convenor) is campaigning against his expulsion from the union three months ago, and Candy Udwin and Dave Carr, branch secretary and chair of UCLH branch are still awaiting the result of their disciplinary hearing in February – they were thrown out of it because their solicitor wanted to tape record the proceedings!

In addition the union bureaucracy has expelled seven members from the Newham branch including three SWP supporters. A once vibrant local government branch has all but ceased to function over the past three years.

Sheffield Metropolitan Unison, a local government branch representing nearly 10,000 members, is still suspended with no signs that this will change in the near future – as a result, since May 1999, the Liberal Democrat Council has had a free hand when it comes to attacks on terms and conditions, and privatisation.

The bureaucracy are clearly targeting left activists and militants primarily

organised around the SWP and the CFDU because of their leading role in campaigns to fight privatisation, to fight against the attacks via the 1997 "single status" deal and to defend democracy in the union. But the General Secretary election result shows that more work is needed to convince the wider membership of the link between defending union democracy and building a union that will effectively resist the New Labour attacks.

The Anti-Privatisation Conference, initiated by Greenwich and Bromley, was a very useful exercise in sharing information from local struggles such as UCLH, Haringey and Kirklees school PFI schemes, and fights against privatisation under Best Value in pilot authorities such as Camden. The conference did what Unison's leadership should be doing – bringing activists together to plan strategies for a real fightback against privatisation. Things couldn't be more urgent as Best Value becomes "the law" for local authorities from 1 April, and up and down the country privatisation looks set to become an ever more widespread reality.

The SWP were invited to the following day's CFDU conference to debate the way forward for the left after the election

but did not attend. They have decided to support the call for a democracy rally at Unison's national conference in June, following in the footsteps of last year's rally that was attended by some 400 members.

This year the CFDU conference has recognised that left unity to fight the witch-hunt has to mean more than a well-attended rally once a year. The conference passed a motion put forward by Workers Power supporters in Unison. This calls for a united national campaign to co-ordinate action in support of victimised individuals and branches and in solidarity with Unison members in struggle.

The motion called for the campaign to focus on the lead-up to the June 2000 conference, which should be used as a springboard for a delegate-based conference in November in defence of and for the extension of union democracy. In the run-up to the national conference the campaign should also seek to win emergency motions to form the basis of a co-ordinated fight over Standing Orders Reports (i.e. what gets on the conference agenda) in order to demand conference credentials and speaking rights for expelled/suspended activists and suspended branches.

There should also be a lobby of conference on the first day and a series of linked fringe meetings (under the title "Out of Order"), following up the fight to raise democracy issues on conference floor.

The SWP must be urged to join with the CFDU in building this campaign. If they will not, the rest of the left must still press the SWP's rank and file, as they did last year, to begin to challenge this sectarianism.

The left must turn this year's conference into a battleground: fighting against the witch-hunt and for suspended or expelled activists and branches, in solidarity with members in struggle blocked from taking the action they want by the bureaucracy. In so doing we will win the respect and support of rank and file members.

Many members are unhappy about the lack of democracy in Unison and frustrated by the leadership's concessions to New Labour – they can be attracted to a principled, unified, democratic fightback mounted by the left. Workers Power supporters, organised around the bulletin *Well Red*, will be working hard in the weeks ahead to make sure that the demands of this important motion are turned into action.

TEACHERS

Crunch time in fight over PRP

DELEGATES GATHERING for the NUT's annual conference on Easter weekend do so amid one of the most serious attacks ever launched on teachers' pay, conditions and union organisation.

Despite almost universal opposition among teachers to the introduction of the divisive Performance Related Pay (PRP) scheme, Education Secretary David Blunkett is absolutely determined to press ahead by the start of the next school year. Headteachers received orders to sacrifice a day's teaching just prior to the Easter break in favour of a training day on PRP.

In March 1999 delegates voted unanimously for a one-day national strike by the union against PRP. There have been no real concessions by New Labour on this issue, but one year later there has been no action at all initiated by general secretary Doug McAvoy and the so-called "Broad Left" NUT executive. In short they have turned a blind eye to the decision of last year's conference.



To date the union has not even staged an indicative ballot on strike action, opting instead to conduct an opinion survey to assess what teachers might be prepared to do in opposition to PRP.

The boldest move to date by McAvoy has been to apply for a judicial review to block the implementation of a new government regulation that would compel teachers to grass up their colleagues to headteachers. His suggestion that if

the courtroom manoeuvre fails, "we will take strike action in schools" should be regarded with the utmost scepticism.

The blatant attempt to obstruct a conference decision has spurred the development of Schoolteachers Opposed to Performance Pay (STOPP). At very short notice STOPP called a demonstration that attracted 1,000 teachers from across England to march through London and voice their anger at PRP.

But the 18 March conference, organised by STOPP, which attracted nearly 150 NUT activists, failed to take the decisive stand required to take the struggle forward. The conference did call for a boycott of training days associated with the PRP scheme and for STOPP to petition among teachers to win pledges not to "cross the threshold" (in effect, opt out of the existing pay scales in order to pursue an immediate £2,000 bonus). It also renewed the call for a one-day national strike, but it did not even begin to lay the basis for unofficial action against PRP.

The motion for unofficial strikes, put forward by Workers Power supporters, organised around the bulletin *Class Matters*, was defeated by a large majority at the STOPP conference, but the rest of the NUT left clearly has no alternative strategy for thwarting the Blairite plan for dividing and ruling classroom teachers.

The strong presence of the Socialist Teachers Alliance (STA) on the NUT's

executive has very limited value if the STA is either unwilling or unable to build from below at the level of individual schools and associations for the sort of action necessary to beat back the attack.

The Government is undeniably more vulnerable to action than at any time in its three-year history in office. *The Guardian's* recent revelations about New Labour's deceitful numbers game on education funding, Blunkett's shameful betrayal on the question of selection and the swift resignation of three highly paid "superheads" have fuelled disillusionment among teachers with the government.

As Kate Ford, a leading Hackney NUT member and London Socialist Alliance candidate, put it:

"PRP will be with us in six months unless we win this campaign. Teachers will soon be applying to cross the threshold and they have been given the green light the NUT's leadership. In short, if we don't act now it will be too late."

RAIL

Stop the victimisation: support Sarah Friday

GUARDS AND drivers belonging to the RMT rail union staged two one-day strikes in late March in support of Sarah Friday.

Sarah, a union health and safety representative, was dismissed by South West Trains (SWT), part of Brian Souter's Stagecoach empire. In addition, union members joined a 150-strong demonstration in late February that briefly occupied the forecourt at London's Waterloo station.

The protest and industrial action came in the wake of SWT managers suspending and eventually sacking Sarah after a confrontation with a Waterloo line manager on 9 February.

RMT members at the London mainline station voted for strikes by a five-to-one margin on a 55% turnout. As the RMT announced the ballot result, both Assistant General Secretary Bob

Crow and Greg Tucker, Waterloo branch secretary and London Socialist Alliance candidate, noted that there would be widespread public sympathy for the walk-outs because safety issues had gained "a bigger profile than ever".

The announcement of the first strikes came only four days after a 10 March accident in which an SWT train crashed into stationary carriages at Waterloo, injuring more than 30 passengers.

The RMT action caused significant disruption to suburban commuter rail services between Waterloo and a dozen stations, with SWT also admitting some cancellations and delays on its intercity services. Some 200,000 weekday commuters regularly use SWT services in and out of Waterloo.

The RMT has now launched a ballot among SWT train crews at other depots. Even the union's far from left-

wing Deputy General Secretary, Vernon Hince, has strongly backed the call for a "yes" vote. He stated that Sarah "has clearly been victimised."

The SWT management dismissed Sarah "for drawing attention to lax safety standards - particularly the long hours worked by train drivers". She has described her own sacking "as payback time for union work I have done as the local safety rep for the last three years".

On 20 March, however, an interim relief hearing in Croydon went against Sarah. SWT bosses were swift to seize on the interim ruling and have launched a bitter war of words. SWT's managing director, Graham Eccles, cited the tribunal chair's description of her as a "stubborn and truculent" woman. SWT have spent thousands buying two full-page adverts in the London Evening Standard to smear Sarah.

Sarah, speaking to a conference against privatisation organised by several Unison branches, refuted management's attacks and levelled her own serious charges at SWT. She depicted a workplace where management had become increasingly aggressive after privatisation:

"The first thing operators did was to restructure our terms and conditions. Basic hours for drivers increased from 39 to 44, and 11-hour days became the norm."

Such changes were not "particular to my own company", but characterised the privatised industry in general.

Specifically, SWT never carried out a proper risk assessment of the impact of the increase in the average working week on drivers, who typically "had problems keeping awake on turns on 'high-intensity' suburban routes." She

described the Rail Inspectorate "as largely in cahoots with train operating companies."

The company is vulnerable to solid industrial action. It has already faced a record £3.8 million in fines for the 12-month period ending in January 2000. The penalties arise from SWT's failure to maintain services with the minimum number of carriages required by the franchise contract, late-running trains and the cancellation of services.

RMT activists must fight tooth and nail for the biggest possible "yes" vote in the company-wide ballot and seek to up the action to an all-out indefinite strike to win Sarah's unconditional reinstatement.

■ Messages of support, etc. to: c/o 3 Blades House, London SE11 5TW.

workersPOWER

Release Kuldip Bajwa release all J18 prisoners

KULDIP BAJWA remains in prison, serving a 21-month sentence for the "crime" of defending the June 18 anti-capitalist demonstration in the City of London against a vicious attack by riot police.

The campaign to release him has received welcome support of late. The J18 Legal Monitoring Group have publicised his case, as have papers such as *Socialist Worker*, *Weekly Worker* and *Action for Solidarity*. The

Campaign Against Racism and Fascism (CARF) has also given support.

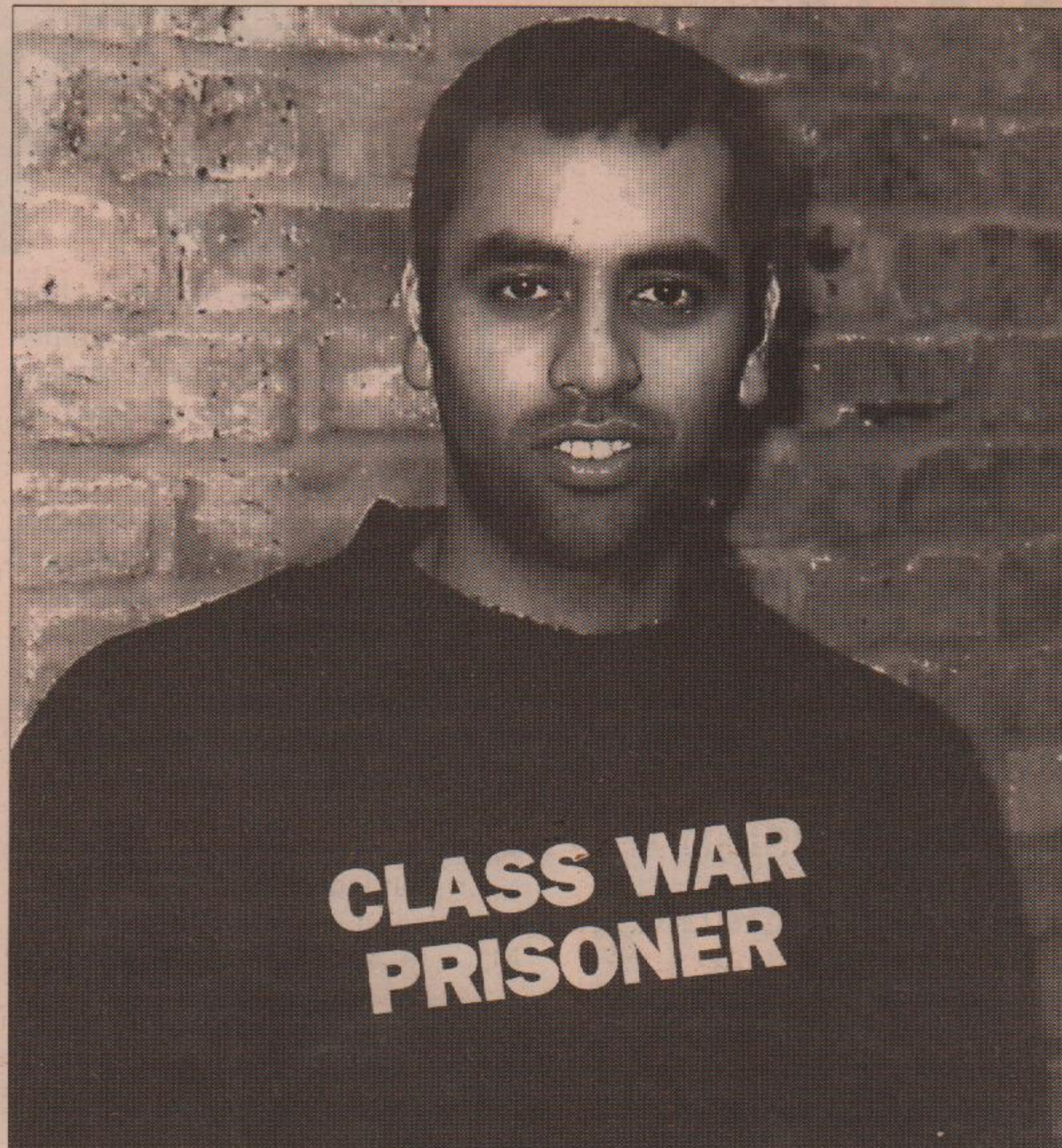
Many thanks to these organisations and papers and to the many people who have contributed to the defence fund. We have now raised over £1,500 towards Kuldip's welfare while he is in prison and for when he is released.

Special thanks to Natfhe members and branches in the West Midlands and Wales who collected money for

Kuldip, and, in the West Midlands, adopted him as a sponsored prisoner.

Money (cheques payable to Workers Power Welfare Fund) should be sent to: **BCM Box 7750, London, WC1N 3XX**

Letters, books, papers etc., should be sent to: **Kuldip Bajwa, DN 7230, HMP/YOI, Highpoint, Stradishall, Newmarket, Suffolk CB8 9YG**



CLASS WAR PRISONER

Latin American solidarity with Kuldip

Buenos Aires 4 March 2000

We send our solidarity and demand the immediate and unconditional release of Kuldip Bajwa, unjustly condemned by the British judiciary in a clear act of class revenge.

The recent release of Pinochet by Home Secretary Jack Straw due to "humanitarian reasons" adds to our sense of outrage. The butcher of the Chilean working class walks free and a youth who challenges capitalism and the parasites of the City of London is sent to jail.

All these clearly expose the imperialist and reactionary nature of British justice in the first place and of the Blairite 'Third Way' as well. All their talk about an 'ethical foreign policy' and democracy is nothing but hypocritical mumbo jumbo.

We will take this campaign to the Argentine left and human rights groups to make Kuldip's case known and gain support for his defence.

Finally, we kindly thank you for the support you gave to the campaign demanding the release of the Mexican and Argentine students. As you probably know the four Argentine students, our comrade Christian Castillo among them, were released due to the strong display of solidarity both in Argentina and across the world. We are now demanding the release of the Mexican students still in prison, and that charges against them be dropped.

**In comradeship,
Juan Chingo
on behalf of the Trotskyist Fraction
Estrategia Internacional**

J18 US class war prisoner

We have also received support from Global Action who are publicising Kuldip's case world-wide. They also informed us of the case of Rob Thaxton who has been given a 7-year sentence in Eugene, Oregon, USA as a

result of action there also on 18 June last year.

For details of his case please contact: **PO Box 11331, Eugene, Oregon 97440, USA.** E mail to globalaction@angelfire.com

DRUGS

Stop Labour's war on drugs

The Police Foundation, chaired by Viscountess Runciman of Doxford and comprising two chief constables, has just issued its report "Drugs and the law". Boy was Jack Straw surprised when he read it.

This relatively conservative charity conducted a two and a half year inquiry into drug use. Its main conclusion was to recognise what every youth in Britain already knows - all drugs are different. It therefore called for the re-classification of ecstasy and LSD as Class B drugs and Cannabis as a Class C drug.

This is a far cry from decriminalisation, but it does remove the British state's ludicrous and unjust ability to imprison those caught in possession

of soft drugs.

With the vigour of men on speed Straw and Blair raced to condemn the report's findings. Its conclusions - however well-grounded in science - do not match the nasty little prejudices of these two jumped up swots.

Straw had to concede that "there is a coherent argument in favour of legalising cannabis". Which explains why he is against it. Coherence is not his strong point. He bases his every political move on the ignorance he shares with a generation of middle Englanders whose world view is shaped by the rantings of *Daily Mail* leader writers.

He would rather pander to this ignorance, for the sake of votes, just as he

does over asylum seekers, than take even the limited steps proposed by the Police Foundation which would bring Britain's incredibly harsh drug laws in line with most of the European Union countries.

Thankfully, Labour MP for Newport, Paul Flynn, did raise the flag for sanity after the report:

"Britain has the harshest drug laws in Europe and the worst drug problems. . . The UK's mindless prohibition is doing more harm than good."

Britain's laws are directly responsible for drug-related crime because they criminalise users despite there being no victims of the "crime" in question, they leave distribution in the hands of big crime bosses and they encourage petty

crime to feed habits because safe, cheap and licensed provision of drugs is not available.

Above all, Britain's laws give police the pretext to harass and terrorise working class youth, especially in the black communities.

The law is wrong - and the Police Foundation report doesn't go far

enough. It is welcome as the starting point for a sane debate but it should be used by campaigners to fight to:

- Legalise all drugs
- Operate a state monopoly of recreational drug supply to prevent adulteration and smash the gangsters' drug rackets.

REVOLUTIONARY HISTORY TROTSKYISM IN CUBA: OUT NOW

The latest issue of *Revolutionary History* called "The Hidden Pearl of the Caribbean - Trotskyism in Cuba" (Volume 7, no.3) has just been published.

It covers a wide range of topics connected with the emergence and development of Trotskyism in Cuba from its origins in the 1930s right through to the post-revolution Castro era.

Price: £9.95. Order from: barry.buitekant@tesco.net
Visit the website: www.revolutionary-history.co.uk

www.workerspower.com

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Britain: revolutionary action programme launched

Three years into a Labour government, with growing discontent and anger at Blair's pro-business record, Workers Power Britain publishes a new programme for revolution in Britain.

Russia: Putin wins in first round of elections.

Vladimir Putin won outright victory in the first round of the presidential elections on 26 March. The Communist Party leader came second. Meanwhile leftists who called for a no vote for Putin have been arrested and repressed.

Britain: 5,000 jobs under attack at UK's biggest car plant

Over half the 9000 workers at the UK's biggest car plant at

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A huge archive of Marxist theory, analysis and comment from the LRCI.

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And from this month you can sign up for a weekly email. You will, in effect, get a weekly issue of Workers Power with the latest on UK politics, calls for solidarity action, and links to what's interesting for socialists on the web.

There will be free downloads of Workers Power leaflets and stickers, and other LRCI publications.

With internet access costing just £1 an hour in some cafes, and free in libraries, it is becoming easier for ordinary workers to get on the web.

Also, in many Third World countries the web has become a lifeline for anti-imperialist, human rights and environmental campaigners - as well as trade union militants.

We don't think the internet can substitute for the real class struggle: but it's becoming an important weapon to link up militants across the globe, circumventing the "official channels" and bureaucratic censorship.

The site is more text than pictures - so you get straight to the politics. It's a not-for-profit site - so if you like it, send us money. The more you send, the more features we can add.

And it's interactive: we will publish your reports on what's going on in your town, college, or workplace.

So don't delay: make this your first stop on the web every day:
www.workerspower.com

Where next for left unity?

We need a socialist alternative to New Labour - but what kind? The success of the London Socialist Alliance - and the SWP's recent decision to join the Socialist Alliances across Britain - has sharpened the debate about the alternative we need: alliance or party? The debate leads to a more fundamental question, writes *Mark Harrison*: reform or revolution?

Talk to anyone on the left - at least anyone with a shred of common sense and an appetite for struggle - and they will agree on one thing: we need a big, well-rooted, socialist alternative to New Labour.

The desire for such an alternative has grown stronger as workers have voiced their disillusion and anger with Blair.

The shameless ballot-rigging to block Livingstone and Labour's refusal to save jobs at Rover have transformed this anger into a real factor in British politics: on display in a huge demonstration in Birmingham against job losses and an avalanche of working class support for Ken Livingstone.

Labour strategists are pressing every panic button as the threat of major setbacks in May's local elections looms large.

At the same time, the development of the London Socialist Alliance (LSA), has given many socialists in London - both within and outside existing organisations - a means of organising the anger against New Labour. Socialists from different political traditions have found themselves working together constructively to build the LSA into a strong and effective outfit.

The largest group within the alliance, the Socialist Workers Party (SWP), has played a leading role in this process. Now they have gone a step further and turned to the building of such alliances beyond London. The SWP has publicly committed itself to the Socialist Alliance project until, at least, the next general election.

Blair's project in the Labour Party has alienated thousands of reformist workers in London and some of them openly turned to the LSA. They have done this because the LSA appears not to be run by any one party or organisation, is based on a limited programme (many of its demands are reformist slogans of yesterday) and has shown itself willing to work with them without demanding that they immediately sign up to a new party.

The SWP's commitment to the Alliance tactic is clearly predicated on repeating this success.

For the SWP it is a way to organise significant numbers of people breaking from Labour. The SWP itself - numerically weaker than a few years ago and certainly not as well implanted in wide sections of the working class as before - clearly believes it cannot win such people directly to its ranks. Instead of simply pursuing its previous line of march - join the socialists, join the SWP - it now sees Socialist Alliances as staging posts towards winning larger numbers to its ranks.

The desire to reach out to the workers disillusioned with Labour is sound: Workers Power shares it.

But how do we ensure that as many as possible are won not simply to a break, but to a new revolutionary alternative: a revolutionary party?

This is a cardinal question because the wrong answers can lead - as they have done in Scotland - to the creation of a smaller left reformist party (the Scottish Socialist Party) instead of a revolutionary one.

There are two dangers in presenting an answer to this question. The first is sectarian ultimatism: to demand that left-moving workers accept the full revolutionary programme or get lost.

The second danger is opportunism: conceal the revolutionary programme, pretend that what you want is just a big new party in order to attract left reformists. That means abandoning the fight for revolutionary answers to questions thrown up by the struggle.

Within the LSA Workers Power advanced and fought for a principled revolutionary action programme. We lost the vote, but we did not walk away



LSA rally, February 2000

from the project. And our record of building the LSA speaks for itself: we have been at the forefront in many workplaces and estates.

The real danger is opportunism. The LSA is not, and cannot be transformed into a revolutionary party. The limits of the LSA, and other alliances, are clear. Alliances can only be temporary and shifting organisations, capable of intervening well around single issue campaigns or elections, but incapable of conducting the necessary, unified, focused, daily intervention into the class struggle. For that you need a party.

And we don't just mean a revived version of the "old" Labour Party, with its focus on elections and its passive membership.

To achieve socialism - in fact to achieve victory in the major class struggles - we need a revolutionary party: a party of action whose members are bound by a common discipline, and are educated in socialist politics and equipped to stand "against the stream" of reformist and reactionary ideas within the working class.

Only a genuinely democratic-centralist party and accountable party leadership - democratic in its decision-making, centralised in the implementation of those decisions - can organise and direct its members day in and day out.

A party is a permanent organisation, united by its structures and its programme. An alliance cannot substitute for this.

Nor can an alliance furnish the revolutionary programme needed to arm such a party with answers to the class struggle. An alliance - as the LSA demonstrates - will always tend to limit its programme to what can be agreed between the allies. The LSA rejected a revolutionary programme in favour of its current manifesto. That manifesto is often weak in terms of the answers it provides to workers.

It calls for the disarming of the police, but not for the working class and community self-defence organisations that can, alone, enforce this measure. It calls for "public ownership and democratic control of industry and finance". But how will we achieve such ownership? The crisis at Rover immediately begs this question.

We say, as revolutionaries, the answer lies in organising the workers to impose control over the bosses in the factories and workplaces - control over hiring, firing and production. We say, it will involve a bitter fight to occupy facto-

ries and hold them to ransom until the bosses meet our demands. Above all, we say it will take a revolution by the working class to seize the property of the bosses at a national level.

We do not present these goals as ultimatums. Revolutionaries must fight to convince those breaking from Labour of the need for revolutionary politics and for a revolutionary party.

We support each and every limited step workers take in their struggles to defend jobs, wages and conditions. We support each and every genuine reform that strengthens the position of the working class. But we don't hide from anyone our ultimate goals - we say that it is necessary to make a clear connection, a transition, between the day-to-day struggles over jobs, wages and services and our revolutionary socialist goal.

To conceal this goal, in the name of "avoiding sectarianism", will actually serve to confuse and limit in advance the potential to build the revolutionary party. To proclaim this goal openly and to make clear that our objective is a new revolutionary workers' party will enable an honest dialogue with militant workers and reformists within the alliances who do not yet agree with us.

Unfortunately, the SWP is currently failing to advance such a revolutionary programme within the alliances.

As a result it fosters the illusion among many Labour dissidents and non-aligned workers, that a sort of permanent alliance (even a loose, coalition-type party along the lines of the Scottish Socialist Party) is what the working class needs.

The SWP is not even pushing forward its own action programme (around which it did so much work in the unions a year ago), despite the relevance and proven popularity of some of the demands.

We do recognise, however, that Labour dissidents and non-aligned workers may not be prepared, as yet, to join a fully fledged revolutionary party. For this very reason we support the idea of using Socialist Alliances as rallying points for mobilising such people around concrete struggles as well as for concentrating the far left's forces.

Within those alliances we are in favour of two things:

- A clear outward orientation to the class struggle: alliances must mobilise around the strikes, campaigns, demonstrations and community struggles that the working class itself is waging.
- A serious discussion within the

alliances as to the question of what sort of party the working class needs and how we are going to build it.

If the SWP, and the other forces within the Alliances, are willing to undertake both such action and discussion then the possibility of building a significant revolutionary alternative to Labour will become a real possibility.

But let's be clear: every other political force in the Alliances stands to the right of Workers Power and - up to now - the SWP on the revolutionary party.

Both the Socialist Party and the Alliance for Workers Liberty (AWL), for example, simply call for a new workers' party. It is not a question of using this "algebraically": they actually want a new reformist party. Socialist Outlook meanwhile just wants an open-ended alliance of reformists, revolutionaries and "greens".

The Socialist Party is in favour of a new mass workers' party on the basis of reformist politics, while the AWL call for a new Labour Representation Committee.

This is no accident: both groups, in their former guise as Militant and Socialist Organiser within the Labour Party, only ever fought for a watered down programme that refused to spell out the need for revolution. They are past masters at drawing up "programmes" that square the circle between reform and revolution. Since history has destroyed the "blunt instrument" for achieving socialism (old Labour) they want to re-create it.

A re-run of the old Labour experience would not take us forward. Without an actual break by the Labour-affiliated unions from the existing reformist party, a new mini-reformist party would be a joke.

More importantly, 100 years of Labour history show that a reformist, parliamentary party never defends the workers and always subordinates the workers' interests to electoral victory.

The challenge is to use the Socialist Alliances to reach wider groups of workers and win the argument for revolution and the revolutionary party.

Our goal must be to reach beyond the forces of the existing left by winning serious numbers of workers' organisations - unions, tenants' groups, anti-racist campaigns, militant women's, and lesbian and gay organisations - to the project of a socialist alternative to Labour.

In the unions we will argue for support and funding both for Livingstone and the LSA - from the political fund or general fund.

As far as affiliation to Labour is concerned, we don't say "disaffiliate now". That would concede ground to Blair without a battle. Unions should maintain their affiliation, in order to fight inside Labour against the Blair leadership. Donations to the Alliances should be combined with a fight to overthrow undemocratic union constitutions that forbid political donations to non-Labour organisations.

If we are successful in rallying such forces to the project of building a new party then a period of discussion and debate - alongside co-ordinated interventions in the class struggle - could lead to a delegate conference to hammer out the basis of a new party.

Workers Power will argue for the new party to be revolutionary - in programme and practice: not a return to old Labour, a toothless talking shop, or a bunch of revolutionaries hiding behind a reformist facade. Will the SWP argue the same?

■ **What do you think? We will post responses to this debate on the Workers Power Global website. Send an email to: paper@workerspower.com**

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PRAGUE

Turn Prague into Seattle

THE INTERNATIONAL Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank are holding a joint conference this year in Prague, from the 26 to 28 September.

Inspired by the mass demonstrations against the World Trade Organisation in Seattle last November, a growing number of organisations and individuals are planning a similar event in the Czech Republic to protest against our economic overlords.

The IMF is – along with the World Bank and the World Trade Organisation – an instrument for organising the world economy in the interests of the great banks and multinational corporations whose home bases are the USA, the European Union and Japan.

Its policies have been the main cause of poverty, the destruction of welfare, health and education systems, damage to the environment, the installation of authoritarian regimes or the corruption of democracies in the Third World and Eastern Europe. At the IMF's command the regimes of these countries carry out its brutal cuts packages, called "structural adjustment programmes".

In industry the IMF imposes an end to "restrictive" legislation. What this really means is the end of the protection of the health and safety of workers and of the environment. In agriculture it causes environmental degradation by imposing monoculture; through GM crops it threatens biodiversity.

The IMF uses the concentrated wealth of Wall Street and the City of London, of Frankfurt and Tokyo to compel country after country – in Eastern Europe, Asia, Africa and Latin America – to "open up" their economies to the full force of globalisation.

Globalisation is the subordination of the whole world to the dictates of a tiny elite of chief executives, bankers and "their" politicians. They hand out a uniform policy to all states forced to come to them for aid.

This entails the destruction of all protective barriers for developing industries and preserving jobs. It means the privatisation of state industries and services, handing them over to speculators in the metropolitan centres or to corrupt members of the former state bureaucracies.

IMF austerity packages were already wreaking havoc in Latin America and Africa in the 1980s. A country like Colombia – rich in natural resources like oil but suffering terrible levels of social deprivation – paid back 10 per cent



per annum of its Gross Domestic Product (GDP) to the bankers and governments of the First World in the 1980s.

Economic progress ground to a halt and social progress was put into reverse. IMF economists were forced to admit that those countries which adopted their "structural adjustment programmes" actually saw serious declines in GDP, dramatic decreases in healthcare and educational provision and a huge growth of structural unemployment and underemployment.

In the early 1990s this poisonous recipe was applied to Eastern Europe and the new states of the former Soviet Union, with similar results. The GDP of many of these states fell by nearly 50 per cent, life expectancy actually fell by several years.

In recent years the scourge of globalisation has been applied to the backs of workers in the "advanced" countries too. Thatcher's Britain and Reagan's USA were testbeds for this in the 1980s. In the 1990s it was proclaimed the inevitable future of the EU and Japan.

The German model of social partnership and the Japanese model of job security were proclaimed out of date,

doomed to destruction by shareholder value. Companies "could not afford" to either consult their workforces or to assure them jobs for life or decent pensions and sickness pay.

The "power" of trade unions and workplace organisations were likewise "out of date". Insecurity, high levels of structural unemployment, downsizing, sudden mergers and consequent rationalisation on an international scale seemed to have rendered obsolete all the gains and protective measures working people had won in the framework of the national state.

In the 1980s it was mainly the forces of the right who trumpeted the gospel of neoliberalism. In the "developing world" it was the likes of Augusto Pinochet and in the "advanced countries" his dear friend Margaret Thatcher.

But in the 1990s – though the terms neoliberalism and monetarism were quietly replaced by new expressions like market relations, shareholder value and above all globalisation – the "liberal" or "centre left" Bill Clinton, Tony Blair took up the torch.

Now at the gatherings of the world's

leaders and at the conferences of the financial institutions they proclaim the gospel of submission to economic laws.

They proclaim that it is impossible to tax the rich to improve the conditions of the poor – it is futile to fight to raise wages either by legal compulsion or trade union strength because companies, compelled, by their shareholders, cannot pay any more.

They present the "information revolution" and electronic communication as arguments for working people in every type of country to accept the logic of global capitalism.

But on November 30 1999 in Seattle – a city of Globalisation and the E-revolution if ever there was one – a wide spectrum of opponents of global capitalism came together to say: NO – we will not submit to its insane logic. We demand social security and job security, not constant fear and anxiety.

We demand human rights for the whole of humanity not for a tiny privileged few. We demand an end to the debt bondage of the already impoverished two-thirds of humanity. We demand safer, cleaner, less stressful workplaces.

We demand the end to the creation

APPEAL

To all anti-globalisation, trade union, environmentalist, human rights, socialist, anarchist, communist, anti-capitalist and youth organisations, initiatives and campaigning groups:

■ **TURN PRAGUE INTO SEATTLE**

■ **CANCEL THE DEBTS**

■ **DOWN WITH THE IMF AND THE WORLD BANK**

Between 26 and 28 September 2000, the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank are holding a joint conference in Prague, Czech Republic.

We call on all those opposed to the IMF and World Bank to come together in Prague for a massive demonstration against them.

These unelected, unaccountable organisations are responsible for imposing debt bondage, strict austerity budgets, cuts, privatisation and hunger on people all across Africa, Asia, Latin America, Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union.

Last year on 30 November, protesters showed what can be done when the conference of the World Trade Organisation in Seattle was cut short because of the combined action of trade union and anti-capitalist campaigning groups.

We, the Socialist Workers Organisation, based in Prague, Czech Republic, appeal to other organisations across Europe to back our protest and add your name to the list of sponsors.

Visit our website: www.destroyimf.org

of a "third world" within the first world – of a so called underclass to perform dirty dangerous and menial tasks for a pampered middle class, who increasingly alone exercise the "shareowner's democracy". A system which declares these demands utopian does not deserve to continue.

The unity of trade unionists, environmentalists, human rights activists and above all militant youth, showed that a new generation is rising up to challenge the great and the powerful who gather at the conferences of the IMF and the World Bank, the World Trade Organisation, or the World Economic Forum (held in Davos).

Our generation cannot succeed in the fight against global capitalism by retreating into national isolation or building regional fortresses such as the EU or NAFTA.

The mayhem and misery caused by a national, religious or ethnic response to globalisation can be seen in Indonesia, in Nigeria and in Chechnya. We must defend the victims against the oppressors in all these struggles but we must realise that the answer is internationalism – the internationalism of the exploited and the oppressed – not nationalism.

Almost spontaneously we are reaching out to one another across the globe, using every one of the new means of communication in our fight. What we have to do is to spread this new internationalism to every continent and to make it as conscious as possible. The gatherings of the world's rulers, where they co-ordinate their policies, can and should become the focus for international protest, of calls to global resistance. We must make sure that on whatever continent they hold their meetings they will be ringed with demonstrators.

They will meet behind walls of paramilitary police because of the protests against their policies of destruction. We will use these protests to assemble the activists, the militants in ever greater numbers. As in Seattle we will discuss and debate as well as march – we will seek clarity as to our next moves and or ultimate objectives. For global capitalism must not only be confronted and resisted – an alternative, a replacement for it has to be found by millions. A new global socialist movement has to be created in the opening years of the twenty first century – one which learns the lessons from the failures of the twentieth century.

ZIMBABWE

Occupy the land yes – Mugabe no!

THE VIOLENCE in Harare has focused world attention on the crisis of Robert Mugabe's regime.

Having been blocked in his bid to strengthen his presidential powers by Zimbabwe's masses, Mugabe has suddenly rediscovered his radical roots. He is championing a wave of land occupations led by veterans of the war of independence and is denouncing British imperialism so loudly that the Foreign Office has prepared contingency plans for an airlift of British nationals.

He has unleashed his state forces on opposition demonstrations – but while some of the violence was aimed at white farmers protesting at land occupations, much of it was a deliberate attempt to intimidate black oppositionists to his corrupt regime.

The land occupations are entirely justified. The black masses have been kept land hungry for far too long, by big white farmers in league, for a whole period, with the Mugabe regime itself. Now Mugabe is using the land question, demagogically, to win back some support for his increasingly discredited rule. His radical rhetoric is a sham, designed to deflect attention from the crimes of his own regime against the masses.

The opposition Movement for Democratic Change (MDC), which is composed of trade unions, churches and civil rights groups, called the recent violence a desperate act by the government and an attempt to intimidate the opposition.

The occupation movement started in February after the referendum and now more than 700 farms are squatted.

While there are campaigns to occupy white-owned land every year these normally only amount to the occupation of 20-25 properties.

The present campaign is the biggest since independence and testifies to the feelings among veterans, who are leading and organising the campaign, and their supporters. One organiser of the occupations stated: "We want the whites here, but it's past time for them to share. We've begun to wonder what we fought for."

To the veterans of the liberation war, solving the land question is the outstanding question of the war. They went through Mugabe's failed attempt to buy land three years ago and still live in a country where a third of the most productive land is owned by 4,500 white

farmers.

However, Mugabe's support for the land occupation should be seen for what it is – a cynical manoeuvre to win back support for the elections scheduled for May. His actual policies have delivered nothing but poverty and ruin to the towns and country. Inflation is at 60 per cent; unemployment is running at nearly 50 per cent and the country has to pay for a war in the Congo out of which the generals are enriching themselves.

Revolutionaries should support the occupation of the land. But support should only be given to the campaign – not Mugabe and his corrupt cronies. If the land occupations are to be successful the veterans and their supporters have to be organised into committees independent from Zanu-PF and gain

support from trade unionists and workers in the towns. They must be prepared for a turn by Mugabe against them.

Progressives and trade unionists inside the MDC should also support the land occupations and draw up a programme to meet the crisis in Zimbabwe, which should defy the banks and IMF's demands and base itself upon the needs and independent organisations of the workers, poor farmers and landless peasants.

To implement this, the masses must break from the Stalinist-like Zanu-PF and the all-class coalition of the MDC and form their own party – a revolutionary Trotskyist party – that will struggle to break from international capitalism and embark upon the road to the socialist transformation of society.

RUSSIA

The west pays homage

Russian jokes were world famous during the Stalinist dictatorship. They were the only form of protest people could get away with. Under Vladimir Putin this role may be making a comeback. A joke published in *Moskovskii Komsomolets* on 13 March, is based on a famous Aesop's fable.

A crow sits in a tree, holding a piece of cheese in its beak. A wily fox approaches and asks, "Hey, crow, are you going to vote for Putin?" The crow doesn't answer. The fox repeats its question. The crow still remains silent but fidgets uncomfortably. The fox says, "I'm asking you for the last time: are you going to vote for Putin or not?" The crow says, "Yes!" The piece of cheese falls to the ground and the fox makes off with it. The crow muses sadly to itself, "Would it have made any difference if I had said 'No'?"

Vladimir Putin won the election in the first round with 52.5 per cent of the vote. But it seems certain that this was rigged. The margin needed to avoid a second round relied on quite incredible returns from war-torn Chechnya – where no independent observers or press were allowed.

It relied too on higher than average votes from Muslim autonomous republics where the war is unpopular and where the vote was rigged in previous presidential elections. In Tatarstan and



Putin offers up a prayer for his victory

Bashkortostan Putin got 60 per cent of the vote, and even in Chechnya the regime claims he got almost 49.5!

The Communist Party, which had tens of thou-

sands of observers at polling stations, claims that while Putin did come first with an estimated 45 per cent, he rigged the first round in order to seize the presidency. So much for democracy –

Putin style!

Putin would certainly have won in the second round of a run-off election. So why the haste? Partly to make sure that reverses for Russian troops in Chechnya do not undermine the state controlled media's propaganda about Putin's total victory. But the main reason is that the shadowy forces that brought Putin to power require the rapid installation of a bonapartist dictatorship.

Putin's planned "dictatorship of law" is now armed with the "approval" of the presidential elections and with a rubber stamping Duma – which was stamped into giving Putin's "party" Yedinstvo (Unity) an overall majority in December. The real apparatus of power will be the secret police.

The idea that Putin will uphold "the rule of law" is a joke. In Russia there is no rule of law. True, when the West complains about its absence they mean it to apply first and foremost in business matters. They want to see contracts enforced and the Mafia's protection rackets ended. If Putin can create some semblance of this then his Western critics will nod and wink at wholesale violations of the law when it comes to workers in struggle or the freedom of assembly and the press.

Western commentators certainly want Putin to call the so-called kleptocracy – the "oligarchs" who seized the oil, mineral wealth, the media –

No way forward from Zyuganov's party

Gennady Zyuganov gained 30 per cent in the first round of the Russian presidential elections. Did he deserve the votes of workers? *Dave Stockton* argues, No

DESPITE ITS name the Communist Party of the Russian Federation (CPRF), has long dropped all references to communism from its vocabulary. The word socialism does not even appear in its 1999 Duma election programme or in Zyuganov's presidential election address. The terms capitalism, working class, state planning are likewise notable only by their absence.

The central point of reference, which accounts for the retention of the name Communist, is the great power status of the USSR from 1945-85 and the victory of the Soviet Union in World War II. The

central validating ideology of its programme is not even Stalinist Marxism-Leninism but traditional Great Russian patriotism.

Zyuganov's programme for the elections was based on two themes: the need for a far-reaching programme of social reform and state-supervised economic reconstruction and the need to restore Russia's status as a great military power and reunite with the states, now independent, which once formed the USSR.

Zyuganov's programme contains reforms that any socialist could give

support – even if they can be criticised for not going far enough. His programme contains the pledge: "We will return strategically important sectors of the Russian economy to state control." He also promises to introduce price controls, guarantee work to each Russian within the space of two years and to bring about the birth of "renewed Soviet power", raise the minimum wage, introduce labour protection measures for women and so on.

On democratic reforms he says that the presidential powers, to dissolve government, for example, would be

greatly curtailed and the Duma (parliament) made the most powerful force in a new constitution.

But the programme also emphasises the need to strengthen Russia's military might and restore it to the status of a great power.

The military-scientific-industrial complex would receive increased grants. The export of gas, oil and natural resources – stimulated by deals with the IMF – would be restricted.

"My most important concern will be to strengthen the country's defence capability, pay close attention to our glorious Army and Navy, and boost the combat readiness of the Armed Forces."

While Zyuganov's notorious appeals

UKRAINE

BY ROBITNYCHYA VLAD/MRM (YOUNG REVOLUTIONARY MARXISTS)

President aims to tighten grip

With just under 50 million people, Ukraine has the largest population of all the independent states that emerged from the break up of the USSR in 1991 – apart from Russia itself.

It has a powerful working class movement, especially in the eastern Ukraine. The miners of the Donetz basin played a militant role in the late 1980s movement against Stalinism and have taken part in many struggles since then.

Since independence, a long war of attrition has been waged between the presidency and parliament. This has resulted in a stop-go transition from bureaucratic planning to an openly capitalist market economy

The cause of this was a struggle over the pace and character of the process of capitalist restoration in Ukraine. This struggle deepened after Leonid Kuchma's election last November and is now focused on the referendum called by the President for 16 April.

Kuchma aims to further diminish the powers of parliament and increase his own. The referendum seeks to give the President the right to dismiss parliament if the referendum votes no confidence in the parliament. Kuchma also seeks to remove the immunity from prosecution of parliamentary deputies, to decrease the number of

deputies from 450 to 300 and replace the one chamber parliament with two.

In November 1999 Leonard Kuchma won a second term with 52 per cent beating the CP candidate Simonenko. Having campaigned on a virulently anti-Communist ticket, and promised to introduce sweeping economic and political reforms, a showdown was inevitable. Kuchma has enthusiastically supported a coalition of right-wing parties.

The budget for 1999-2000, prepared by premier Yuschenko, had the necessary elements to please the IMF but stood no chance of being approved by the left deputies. When Leonid Kuchma won a second term last November he promised to use his victory to push aside all obstacles to faster pro-capitalist reforms.

On 3 February the government and IMF signed an agreement that insists that all housing and transport costs be met by the workers. It demands an end to state subsidies for poor families and pensioners, an end to subsidies for essential goods. Finally the agreement sets out a plan for fast-track privatisation of state-owned strategic enterprises, and reform of the agro-industrial complex by legalising land privatisation, and the privatisation of collective and state farms.

Who can stop Kuchma? The working class

movement has taken many blows since 1991. The Federation of Trade Unions, a successor to the Soviet-era federation, claims 20 million members. The National Confederation of Trade Unions has three million members and includes some independent trade unions.

Though the Association of Free Trade Unions of Ukraine dissolved due to internal conflicts in April 1996, its constituent unions have a total membership of 150,000.

But the leaders of these unions have obstructed or discouraged actions against the state or oligarchy or IMF plans. Likewise the political parties of the left have been longer on verbal protest than organising any real fightback. The Communist Party saw its grip over the industrial east of the country weakened in the last presidential election. The protests called to support the left minority in parliament in the first weeks of this year were small and dispirited.

Nevertheless protest continues. Some 4,000 people, including the comrades of Robitnychya Vlad (see WP 241), picketed the government building in Kiev on 24 March in a protest organised by the All-Ukrainian Union of Workers. The protesters demanded that the government lower the prices for bread, cancel the recent rises in tariffs for public transportation and utilities, and

ensure the timely payment of wages and pensions.

They also demanded that the government cancel the 16 April constitutional referendum, revoke its agreements with the IMF, and break off Ukraine's relations with Nato. The rally was attended by Communist Party leader Petro Symonenko, who correctly called for a boycott of the referendum.

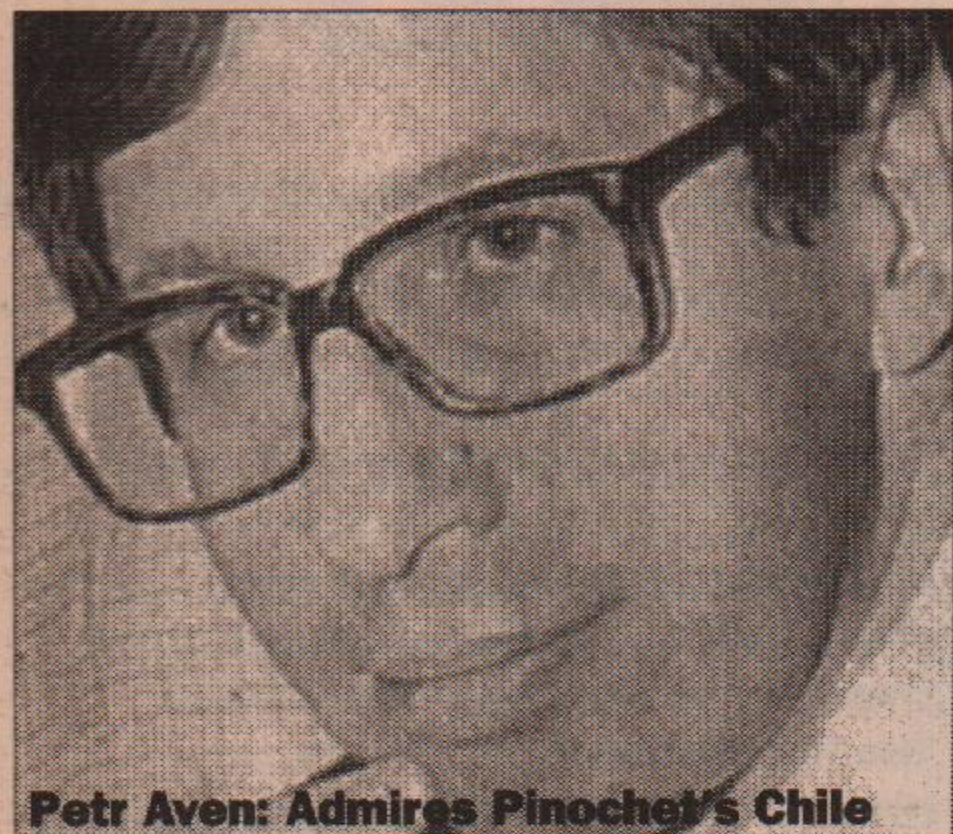
The result of the referendum is largely predetermined because to the president's control of the electoral process and the fact that he has placed his supporters in key positions in all the media.

A mass campaign, including a general strike to stop the referendum, could turn the situation around in Ukraine. In addition, the workers threatened by privatisation and closure must impose workers' control over the managers and oligarchs. They must respond to the threat of mass sackings and closure by seizing and occupying the plants and mines.

At a national level such a mass movement would have to establish a council of action with elected delegates. Such a body could mobilise millions to smash the ruling oligarchy, the Mafia and corrupt politicians. It could decide on and implement an emergency plan for the reconstruction of Ukraine in the interests of the working people.

workersPOWER

to President Putin



Petr Aven: Admires Pinochet's Chile

to order. A few prominent scapegoats, may well be made, since these parasites are hated. But the kleptocracy is the Russian bourgeoisie and Putin is their chief executive.

Some of his closest supporters are more honest about what sort of dictatorship is needed. Petr Aven, president of Alfa, Russia's biggest and most successful private bank, and a key business supporter of the newly elected president, said that Mr Putin should model his regime on that of Augusto Pinochet of Chile, combining Reaganomics with dictatorial controls. In a news-

paper interview Aven commented:

"The only way ahead is for fast liberal reforms, building public support for that path but also using totalitarian force to achieve that. Russia has no other choice . . . I'm a supporter of Pinochet, not as a person but as a politician who produced results for his country."

An unexpected bonus for Putin must be the warm support coming from Washington and London - with only the most formal protest over violations of human rights in Chechnya

US Secretary of State Madeleine Albright endorsed Putin in advance of the elections, calling him a "model" Russian president, a "leading reformer" and a man "determined to move reform forward." For his part Putin declared that Russia was open to the idea of joining Nato.

Tony Blair and Cherie flew to St Petersburg for a "social visit". They doubtless enjoyed the opera, the champagne and caviar. The Blairs seemed happy enough to shake hands with the butcher of the Chechen people. After the elections Blair was the first foreign leader to phone Putin to congratulate him on his victory.

Perhaps this proves that Putin is a natural recruit for the Third Way. He has obviously abandoned such concepts as social equality. According to official figures, just 10 per cent of the Rus-

sian population now possess nearly a third of the country's riches.

Commentators are talking of Blair and Putin creating a "special relationship". The new Russian ambassador to Britain, Grigory Karasin, has said that he believes that "Russian-British relations have a stupendous potential of affecting relations between Russia and the West as a whole".

It is likely that Putin will pay his first foreign visit as Russian head of state to London - perhaps as early as April when a grand talkfest will be held in Westminster to which all the top politicians and business people in Russia have been invited.

Already there are reports of state repression against Russian workers in struggle and left-wing organisations. The workers' movement worldwide must come to the assistance of all suffering the assaults of Putin and his "legalised" dictatorship.

The conference in London, and any Putin visit, must be met by big demonstrations to expose the would-be Russian Pinochet. We must stop him before he can spread his bloody attentions from Chechnya to the whole of Russia. We must demand freedom for the Chechens before the guerrilla war, mass hunger and homelessness become a de facto genocide of the Chechen people.

for a fusing of the Red and the White traditions was not overtly mentioned in his election programme he did pledge to support the official place of the Orthodox Church in state life.

Zyuganov promised to work for a common governmental structure for Ukraine, Belarus and Kazakhstan - the most "Slavic" of the independent republics. While Zyuganov paid lip-service to the need for harmony between the different nationalities of the Russian Republic, the only sufferings mentioned are those of the Great Russians.

Zyuganov's election programme says nothing about the ongoing martyrdom of Chechen civilians, the forcible incorporation of Chechnya into Russia, in violation of treaty obligations. All talk of "voluntary union" is a complete sham. Zyuganov has supported Putin's filthy genocidal war 100 per cent.

Within his programme a thinly disguised threat is levelled at the autonomy of all the national minorities: "I will not allow Russian people to be humiliated any more by local princelings who have developed a passion for nationalism. Ethnic Russians will occupy a place and position in the Russian state that accord with their status as a great people, the custodian of our distinctive character and the uniter of the fraternal peoples."

Russian workers at present have no national political party willing and able to expose the chauvinistic lies about the war - one willing and able to oppose it on Marx's principle that no nation which oppresses another can itself be free. Nor do they have a party that can offer them an alternative to the horrors of capitalist restoration - planning for and by the

workers themselves.

They do not even have a party that will defend their democratic rights within the present system, let alone one capable of putting forward the goal of "soviet power", not as a Stalinist dictatorship but as the power of directly elected workers' councils.

Under conditions of genocidal war against the Chechen people Zyuganov - even with his promises of social reform - was no rallying pole for the working class and did not deserve a single worker's vote. All healthy elements within the working class now have to devote their energy to creating a revolutionary workers' party in the years ahead. These will be marked by hard and brutal struggles as Putin's regime sets out to speed up the expropriation of the land and the factories from those who work in and on them.

THE CHECHEN WAR

Putin has presented the fighting in Chechnya as just a mopping up operation. According to our spokesmen, there are only isolated groups of Chechen separatist fighters hiding out in the mountains. But in late February and early March, Chechen ambushes cost the Russians more than 100 lives and decimated two elite commandos units, including an ambush in a suburb of "pacified" Grozny.

It is clear that the Russians are now embroiled in a long-term guerrilla war and that it will be impossible to withdraw their huge army. The cost in men and money will be a massive drain on the state.

Moreover, the high rate of casualties is leading to vicious revenge attacks on the civilian population. The *Observer* reported in March that on 4 February Russian forces killed 363 civilians in the village of Katy-Yurt using "vacuum" bombs, fuel-air explosives banned by the 1980 Geneva Convention. Sergei Dorenko, a well-known presenter on government-controlled ORT, said: "If we were to recognise that there is no civilian population in Chechnya, we could finish the war in two weeks, instead of 20 years or more."

Clearly the nature of the war will fuel genocidal temptations.

STOP RUSSIA EXPO-2000!

**Mass Demonstration
London 19 April at 7pm
Queen Elizabeth II
Conference Centre
opposite Westminster Abbey
Tube - Westminster**

On 19-20 April 2000, Russia's business and political elite will gather in London to meet with western financiers and heads of multi-nationals. Rumours exist that President Putin will be there and will meet Tony Blair.

- Stop the market madness!
- Stop the killings in Chechnya
- Stop Zhirinovskiy and the racists
- Please help with costs by sending cheques payable to "ISWoR (SRE)" to: Stop Russia Expo! Box S, 46 Denmark Hill London SE5 8RZ or telephone Stop Russia-Expo! in London on 07940 915 011.

UKRAINE: TEN YEARS OF MARKET REFORMS

Leonid Kuchma was, before 1989, a Communist Party member and the general director of the top-secret Pivdenie missile factory near Dnipropetrovsk.

He adjusted his ideological clothing in the late 1980s and turned into a critic of the old regime. In 1992 he was appointed prime minister by Ukraine's first post-Stalinist president, Leonid Kravchuk.

A year later he resigned, complaining of the slow pace of capitalist restoration and demanding more and faster privatisation of industry. He stood against Kravchuk in the June 1994 presidential election and won easily, receiving strong support from the industrial and comparatively "Russified" areas in the east and south; his worst results were in the nationalist west.

This support was forthcoming not least because the Communist Party and Socialist Party of Ukraine backed Kuchma against Kravchuk, a fact that they now like to cover up.

Since Kuchma became President, Ukraine has been characterised by continued decline but with a significant acceleration of privatisation.

Between 1990 and 1999 - during nine years of attempting to restore capitalism - GDP fell by 57.1 per cent, the volume of industrial output by 68.4 per cent, agricultural production by 47.1 per cent. The volume of capital investment in the economy collapsed by 85.3 per cent. For the mass of Ukraine's workers reform has spelled nothing short of catastrophe. The poorest families today have to spend around 90 per cent of their meagre income on

food.

As in Russia the main beneficiaries of the "reform process" have been the pre-existing black marketeers and the top former-state bureaucrats. They have shamelessly enriched themselves by privatising (stealing) the factories, mines, shops and houses, built by Ukrainian workers. Between 50 and 60 per cent of GDP is generated by the "shadow economy" that operates outside business and tax regulations.

The majority of industrial firms cannot sell their products. The firms' managers or owners cannot pay for the raw materials they consume; or most of the wages they owe to the workers; and the taxes they owe to the government.

So high is the level of crime and corruption that banks prefer to make money by shifting it abroad rather than provide credit for industrial restructuring or investment.

Ukraine is a moribund workers' state, one in which the centrally co-ordinated plan of the old regime has been abolished but a whole myriad of transitional economic forms, some pre-capitalist, most non-capitalist in character, have emerged to keep the economy running at a much reduced level. More than 60 per cent of production goods in Ukraine today are sold by this means. These methods also act as barriers to the successful imposition of capitalist norms over production of goods and services.

Under this system it is almost impossible to determine which firm is or is not solvent by normal

capitalist means of accounting.

The state and the main oligarchs are the chief owners of the generation of power and its supply to industry. Naturally, they too are owed a fortune in unpaid bills. They have few ways of recovering these bad debts except to try to cut their losses; this includes turning off supplies to the factories.

A free labour market has yet to take root. A majority of Ukrainian industrial workers and public employees, who are effectively left idle at their place of work, are sent on forced holidays but without pay. In turn this means that they are unable to claim the miserly unemployment benefit.

The United States has sought in every way it can to pull Ukraine away from the political and economic orbit of Russia. This accounts for the fact that the country is the biggest recipient of US money after Israel and Egypt. For years it turned a blind eye to mass corruption at the highest levels of government. But the patience of the US government and the IMF is now exhausted.

They have warned Ukraine that continued aid and assistance are now contingent upon the actual implementation of structural and fiscal reforms. The IMF suspended a tranche of \$585 million in March 1999 after Ukraine exceeded a limit on growth in wage and pension arrears, and net international reserves fell. In 2000 \$3 billion of interest on Ukraine's debt falls due. This fact concentrated the minds of all pro-capitalist forces in the run up to last

The demo that broke the poll tax

Ten years ago, on 31 March 1990, 250,000 people marched in London against the "Poll Tax" - Thatcher's flagship policy for her third government. The march came under sustained attack from heavily armed riot police. But the demo fought back and the police took a hammering in what became known as the battle of Trafalgar Square. Less than eight months after the battle the poll tax was withdrawn and Thatcher was replaced as Tory leader. *Bill Jenkins* looks back at this momentous struggle and talks to some of the people on the demo about their memories of the day.

THE POLL tax was introduced in Scotland in 1989 and then a year later in England and Wales. It was specifically designed to pass the cost of financing local services onto the backs of the working class.

The poll tax levied an equal tax on the entire local population, irrespective of income or the type of property you lived in. An unemployed single parent would pay the same as a mega-rich landowner like the Duke of Westminster. No wonder it became an object of such widespread hatred.

The threat of the poll tax led to the formation of mass local anti-poll tax unions. Usually based on local council estates, these bodies unified all sections of the local working class. In turn a federation of these bodies acted as a national organiser of the movement.

From the outset the unions and the Fed were led by the Militant Tendency (now the Socialist Party). Their promotion of the local anti-poll tax unions, through successive campaigns to oppose registration, collection and payment, helped unify and spread the movement.

Workers Power was active in the poll tax committees across the country. We supported all of the methods used to oppose the tax and advocated a general strike to unite them into a movement which could not only destroy the tax but the government as well.

We established committees in many important

centres, including Cardiff and Hulme in Manchester. We participated in many of the huge meetings of trade unionists, such as the All Britain Anti Poll Tax Federation Union meeting of more than 1,200 delegates in Manchester, and participated in the protests which swept Britain prior to the national demo on 31 March.

In the run up to the national demonstration in London the Labour Party and trade unions publicly denounced the march. They turned their back on the biggest protest movement against the Tories since the miners' strike.

The effect of the Poll Tax riot was immediate. The TV was full of images. Shattered police, describing how they had lost control of Trafalgar Square.

The Poll Tax movement itself underwent a crisis when leaders of Militant denounced the riot. On 31 March they withdraw their stewards when the attack began. Then a Militant leader threatened to name names to the police. This disgraceful response discredited Militant in the eyes of thousands of activists, and even though they eventually distanced themselves from Sheridan's remarks they never publicly repudiated them.

This took place in the context of the Labour Party calling for the jailing of protesters. Class War were victimised and witch-hunted for their principled defence of the right to protest. Across the country,

furious meetings of anti-poll tax groups were held in the following week. But there was no sizeable left organisation prepared to challenge the Militant leadership of the Federation.

Workers Power, alone on the left, called for the replacement of Militant as the leadership of the federation. The SWP refused to take the head of the movement and agreed a series of "non-aggression" resolutions with Militant.

Nevertheless, the sheer scale of the battle and the inspiring impact it had on local unions across the country, meant that the non-payment movement grew massively. And everyone who was imprisoned or threatened with bailiffs or court orders knew that hundreds of people would rally to their defence.

The bosses became increasingly worried that the revolt would mean that people would simply get used to not paying. With Thatcher sticking to the policy, the bigwigs of the ruling class decided it was time for her to go rather than risk anarchy in every borough in the land.

In November 1990 out went Thatcher and in came the Community Charge and a 5 per cent hike in VAT.

What the poll tax struggle and the second Battle of Trafalgar really showed is that the courage, determination, imagination and ingenuity of the working class is limitless and all-conquering. Our task is to build a leadership worthy of it.

Sue: Apart from the size of the demo I remember the number of home made banners, sheets and towels, anything in fact, of this that and the other against the Poll Tax from every town you can imagine.

At Trafalgar Square I suddenly heard shouts coming up from Whitehall. The police had attacked the back of the march with heavy duty riot police piling into the crowd.

Loads of people who would not normally do anything, began to fight back. And the whole area turned into a battle ground.

Riot police running into the crowd with batons going right, left and centre, and the crowd picking up everything that could conceivably be used as a weapon against the attack; the attack breaking down and the whole squad of riot police legging it back down Whitehall.

The stewards had disappeared but the improvisation of ordinary people was remarkable. They started organising friends, getting kids and families out of the way and then organising themselves against the police to defend the march.

The police repeatedly tried to smash us up with cavalry charges up and down the road by the South African Embassy. The cavalry would charge and the crowd would part, let them through and hit the cavalry with every conceivable missile.

On the Sunday I can remember Hattersley, Labour's shadow Home Secretary saying "hunt them down like dogs".

Bryony: We came down from Manchester. I can remember thinking it was a beautiful day, the sun was shining and something great was going to happen. The motorway was filled with coaches.

We didn't even make it to Kennington park, but were stopped near the Imperial War Museum. This was simply a feeder march.

As we turned into the main road the whole place was full of people as far as you could see. There was a party atmosphere with banners and people chanting "No poll tax". We walked past the House of Parliament and Downing St, someone started the shout "burn it down, burn it down, burn it down" just for a laugh, but thousands joined in. And a few hours later we almost did!

I was walking past the Whitehall Theatre, just at the entrance to Trafalgar Square when everything changed. We saw the police chasing some



Trafalgar Square, Saturday, 31 March 1990

protesters back up the road. They made it into Trafalgar Square, but the police couldn't follow them. So they tried to block the entrance to the Square.

The coppers had attacked some of the march who had sat down outside Downing Street. The police couldn't hold the march. The line stretched and bowed as the protesters built up behind it. It broke, the police ran back down the road as fast as their legs would carry them. We were only stopped by the cavalry. They came from behind the Ministry of Defence and charged us back into Trafalgar Square. As they did so they recklessly assaulted the crowd, hitting out with their truncheons.

The building site opposite was rapidly dismantled for ammunition. Poles, steel scaffolding cleats, rocks, bricks, batons, everything rained down on the heads of the police. The police could not cope and withdrew. It was the fire on the portakabins opposite the main Square, which distracted the crowd and allowed the cops to regain control of the road. But then round two began!

Ray: It was the biggest demo I have ever seen. As the march moved off we made our way to the very front of the march and our pictures were on the front page of the *Daily Star*!

After a few hours I met up with my brother and we decided that as nothing was happening at all we would go off. Then as we tried to leave the way was blocked by police. They weren't letting anyone out. We were right at the front as the first police cavalry charge attacked the crowd.

When the police started to attack the march, there was a feeling of "How can they do this?" This was no rent-a-mob - but the crowd started attacking the police back.

The police started running at the crowd on their horses and retreating and running at them again. This happened until the police formed up with their shields above their heads and I can remember seeing a rain of missiles coming down on them.

When we were finally shunted out of the square we were walking down Haymarket, and this seven series BMW tried to beep people out of the way. And if you've never seen 30 people standing on top of a seven series BMW I'm telling you its an amazing sight!

And I met an American tourist who asked "Hey, do you guys do this every weekend?"

James: Our anti-poll tax union was one of the biggest. In the week before we had a meeting of

more than 400. We organised a massive lobby of the council who were levying the poll tax. On the day there were 11 coaches just from Cardiff.

The demo took ages to get going as there were literally thousands of people. When we got near Downing Street the demo stopped for ages, there were stewards I recognised as Militant members who instead of taking us up to Trafalgar square shunted us off to the right. So we had to come up via Northumberland Avenue. When we got there we had to make our way to South Africa house, which had been trashed.

There were running battles on the building sites, on the scaffolding, and the cops were losing because they were always below the demonstrators who were pelting them from above.

I remember seeing a police van driving into the crowd at a speed of about 30 miles an hour. Fortunately no one was hurt. Once it had come to a halt it couldn't reverse out, it couldn't go anywhere, it was just surrounded and the demonstrators rocked it and someone got a scaffolding pole and smashed it through the window.

Kath: We left from Leicester and there were loads and loads and loads of coaches. When we got down to the start of the demo I've only ever seen more people in one place at one other time which was in Paris in 1995, and the atmosphere was incredible, completely electric, there were all sorts of people with home made banners, it wasn't like an ordinary demo.

It started to kick off outside Whitehall, which was nothing major but then the police decided to implement their policy for the day which was to attack the demonstration. People suddenly realised that they didn't have to take it and they fought back. I remember the police were driven back down Whitehall, every time the police attacked people realised they could drive them back and they became more confident.

The next thing you saw was a police van with people on top of it, rocking it backwards and forwards with the police inside completely trapped, and that was basically the theme: people gaining more confidence, and they ripped the police apart in Trafalgar Square, no matter what the cops did, how heavily armed they were, there were always people willing to go in unarmed against fully tooled-up riot police and pull people out of it.

When Ken led London

As Ken Livingstone looks set to triumph over Blairite machinations and emerge as London's first elected mayor in May, *G R McColl* looks back at the period when the Labour left controlled the Greater London Council between 1981 and 86 – the famous era of "Red Ken"

KEN LIVINGSTONE will most probably emerge from the 4 May poll as the mayor of London, nearly 15 years after Margaret Thatcher abolished the Greater London Council (GLC) that he led on 1 April 1986.

Livingstone joined the GLC Labour group in 1973 and found himself, by the summer of 1975, in a bloc of nine Labour councillors that formed an opposition to the right-wing leadership under Sir Reg Goodwin.

In the two years between Thatcher's first general election win and the next GLC poll, Livingstone spent his time and energy plotting a "Labour left" take-over of County Hall. In May 1981 Labour did recapture the GLC and Livingstone swiftly replaced Andrew Macintosh as Labour leader. But the Labour group itself remained divided.

The man who would serve for two years as Livingstone's GLC deputy, Illyd Harrington, was definitely not from the party's hard left, but he welcomed the dynamism of the now dominant Livingstone-led faction. In Harrington's words, they "appeared to be fresh, open-minded. These were attractive things to see. We had gone through a long period of appalling local government [in contrast] they appeared to be alive, marvellously alive."

Even prior to Livingstone's leadership "coup", the Tory tabloids had begun a "red scare" offensive, taking their cue from the Conservative Party manifesto which warned voters of the "Marxist threat to London".

The media spotlight on "Red Ken" intensified during his first summer in charge of County Hall. His meeting at the seat of London government with the mother of an IRA hunger striker sent the editors into new fits of rage.

The old Labour right joined in the attack. The then Southwark Council leader, John O'Grady claimed that "the GLC is in a Walt Disney situation". This remark came as word leaked out of a potential 120 per cent rise in borough rates to fund the implementation of Labour's GLC manifesto pledges.

In September 1981 Livingstone renewed an old political alliance with Ted Knight, the Lambeth council leader. They launched a new paper, *Labour Herald*. In its inaugural issue it signalled a left turn in expectation of a new Tory attack on local authority spending powers. An editorial, co-signed by Livingstone, declared that "Labour councils must refuse to vote for cuts in services or rent and fare increases. But they must also refuse to vote for rate increases under the Tories' new system."

By late 1981 the stage was set for the first major confrontation between the Livingstone-led GLC and the Thatcher government. The battle was over public transport fares. The Labour manifesto had pledged at least a 25 per cent cut in tube and bus fares.

The Inner London Education Authority, made up in large measure of GLC councillors, had reneged on a manifesto pledge to slice 10 pence a day off school meals after legal advice, though the GLC actually delivered on its promise to slash transport fares by nearly a third. But a legal challenge by Tory councillors in suburban Bromley left the GLC's "Fares Fair" policy in tatters.

An excerpt from the judgement gives insight into the ruling class' priorities when it comes to local government. The judge, Lord Scarman, concluded that the GLC had pursued the fares cut as "an object of social and transport policy" rather than from "economic necessity". Scarman went on to state that "the GLC had abandoned business principles... a breach of the duty owed to the ratepayers and wrong in law."

Livingstone made political hay out of the Law Lords' ruling against "Fares Fair". But as his biographer Carvel noted: "it did not mobilise the people who were probably worst affected by the Law Lords' judgement: the poor, the unemployed and the housebound women for whom cheap fares had been a passport to greater freedom."

Livingstone refused to call for the considerable industrial muscle of tube and bus workers



The campaign against the abolition of the GLC appealed to the House of Lords



Photo: Bernie Malone

to be used to defend the fares policy. Larry Smith, a member of the TGWU's national executive council, threatened a combined bus and tube strike across the whole of London Transport in defence of the policy - and his members' jobs - that would have "sealed the city like a drum".

There was a widespread mood in favour of a strike in the aftermath of the Law Lords' ruling. But Livingstone ignored it in favour of a media oriented campaign of getting councillors to dress up as judges, ride on buses and refuse to pay the increased fares.

Needless to say the mood for strike action dissipated as the GLC campaign itself petered out. Livingstone blamed the legalistic cowardice of the right wing of the GLC Labour group for the eventual fare hikes, but his "defiance" of the "vandals in ermine" had cost him nothing and enhanced his left credentials into the bargain. Meanwhile, London Transport would pass completely from GLC control in the summer of 1984 as the prelude to the complete privatisation and partial deregulation of London's buses.

Following the "Fares Fair" defeat, media interest switched to and GLC's supposed obsession with backing "zany left-wing causes that alienated 'ordinary' people". Tory strategists were worried that the GLC's help for ethnic minority, women's, and lesbian and gay organisations with grants to make them Labour-loyal would provide Livingstone with a rock solid electoral base. So they cast their opposition to the voluntary sector grant policies in racist, sexist and homophobic terms, branding the GLC as an example of the "loony left".

The GLC's policies actually incorporated quite a few militant activists into the local state, turning them into more or less willing agents of an alternative establishment that dared not bite the hand that fed them. Even so, and whatever Livingstone's motives, the GLC did bring about substantial progressive changes in the make-up of its own workforce and gave an important symbolic recognition to the genuine diversity of London's working class, which had been largely ignored by traditional Labourism and even sections of the far left.

By late 1983, as Thatcher ruled with a 144-seat parliamentary majority, big city Labour-controlled authorities had moved to the top of her hit list. Foremost among her targets was the GLC.

Her Environment Secretary, Patrick Jenkin, developed a two-pronged strategy: restrict the revenue of the large metropolitan authorities through rate-capping legislation; abolish the authorities by an Act of Parliament. He stabbed at local authorities with these prongs just as the biggest class battle in Britain for nearly 60 years began, the great miners' strike of 1984/85.

While some of the Labour leaders in these local authorities addressed dozens of meetings

in support of the miners' defeat, tens of thousands marched to the County Hall car park, but there was no significant campaign of industrial action. Community groups were also kept on the sidelines.

Even Liverpool City Council, ideologically dominated by the "Marxists" of the Militant Tendency, precursors of today's Socialist Party, struck a deal with Patrick Jenkin in the summer of 1984 that bought the council some time and concessions, but did nothing to relieve the miners' isolation. Other councils followed suit in what amounted to a betrayal of the miners.

The GLC itself opted for a witty campaign of advertising and publicity stunts to stave off its demise at a time when class struggle was required.

In the same month as unarmed miners battled against the riot police at the Orgreave coking plant in South Yorkshire, "Red Ken" bowed to shake hands with Queen Elizabeth II at a ceremony to mark the opening of the Thames Barrier. This was the same Livingstone who less than three years before had turned down an invite to the royal wedding and called for the abolition of the monarchy.

In defence of "local democracy", Ken became a chameleon switching from tabloid bogeyman to shameless populist. Not all of his allies on the left of the GLC Labour group were pleased with the thrust of the campaign, but they all, more or less, agreed with the cornerstone of his strategy for resisting abolition: lobbying the House of Lords during various phases of the Tories' legislation uneasy passage through Parliament. The chambers of County Hall witnessed a good deal of winning and dining of Tory peers in 1984.

At the same time Livingstone caved in to the logic of ratecapping and abandoned his leading role in a national campaign among Labour authorities. A group of local Labour leaders had refused to set a rate, with the explicit aim of provoking a financial crisis so severe that the Tories would have to enter into serious negotiations about the estimated £9 billion they had ripped off local authorities in the preceding four years.

The GLC wound up adopting a budget that was nearly three per cent below what the Tory capping limit would have allowed. While Livingstone's deputy, John McDonnell, led a revolt of Labour lefts against Livingstone. He was one of the very few GLC councillors and Labour left leaders not to gallop rightwards in the ensuing years.

Livingstone severed his ties with *Labour Herald* in May, with McDonnell replacing him as co-editor. There would be fewer firebrand speeches at party conferences from Ken and more well paid after dinner speeches to the great and the good.

Throughout this saga the local authority workers were used as stage armies playing bit parts.

Over the space of two months after March 1985, virtually every Labour-controlled authority pledged to the "no rate" position fell in line, leaving only Lambeth and Liverpool to fight alone. Their resistance crumbled thanks to the explicit collaboration of Labour's national leadership under Neil Kinnock with the Tories' demands.

A little more than a year after the Livingstone-led GLC played its crucial role in the ratecapping debacle, the authority itself was no more, drawing the curtain on nearly a century of some form of elected government for the capital as a whole.

The reality behind the myth of "Red Ken" was largely apparent even before March 1985.

Here was a politician capable of taking bold and controversial stands on such issues as Ireland, racism and homophobia. But when his administration faced crunch times - the Law Lords' ruling against "Fares Fair", the challenge of abolition and the Tories' ratecapping assault - Livingstone made his excuses for not fighting. His wit and his ability to box clever with his enemies on television was no substitute for a strategy to save working class Londoners from the ravages of Thatcherism. It was they, not Ken, who really lost out.

Livingstone's failure to mobilise his supporters among the working class and oppressed stemmed from a political philosophy that can be summed as reformist to the core. The path to political change for him has always run through the council chamber and the parliamentary talking shop, to the virtual exclusion of working class action on the streets and at the workplaces.

Yet his political career - from the abolition of the GLC to being blocked as the Labour candidate for London mayor - shows that the reformist path invariably leads to defeat, rotten compromise and new attacks on the working class.

We need a revolutionary alternative - a new revolutionary party - to Livingstone's brand of reformism. Of course supporting him for mayor, as a real reflection of the anger of working class Londoners at New Labour's betrayals, is vital. It is a means of uniting with the workers who look to him, so that he can be put to the test of office.

But it also means using the election campaign to argue with the tens of thousands of trade unionists in the FBU, RMT and elsewhere, who see Ken as their champion, about his real record, and trying to mobilise those same workers into an effective opposition - not only to Blair's New Labour but to any attacks that Livingstone himself launches once he is in office.

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!

Asylum seekers welcome here

BRITAIN'S RANCID press gang is waging a racist war on anyone seeking asylum in the UK. The Roma people from Eastern Europe have been singled out for sustained abuse by journalists working on the principle that the bigger the lie the more people are likely to believe it.

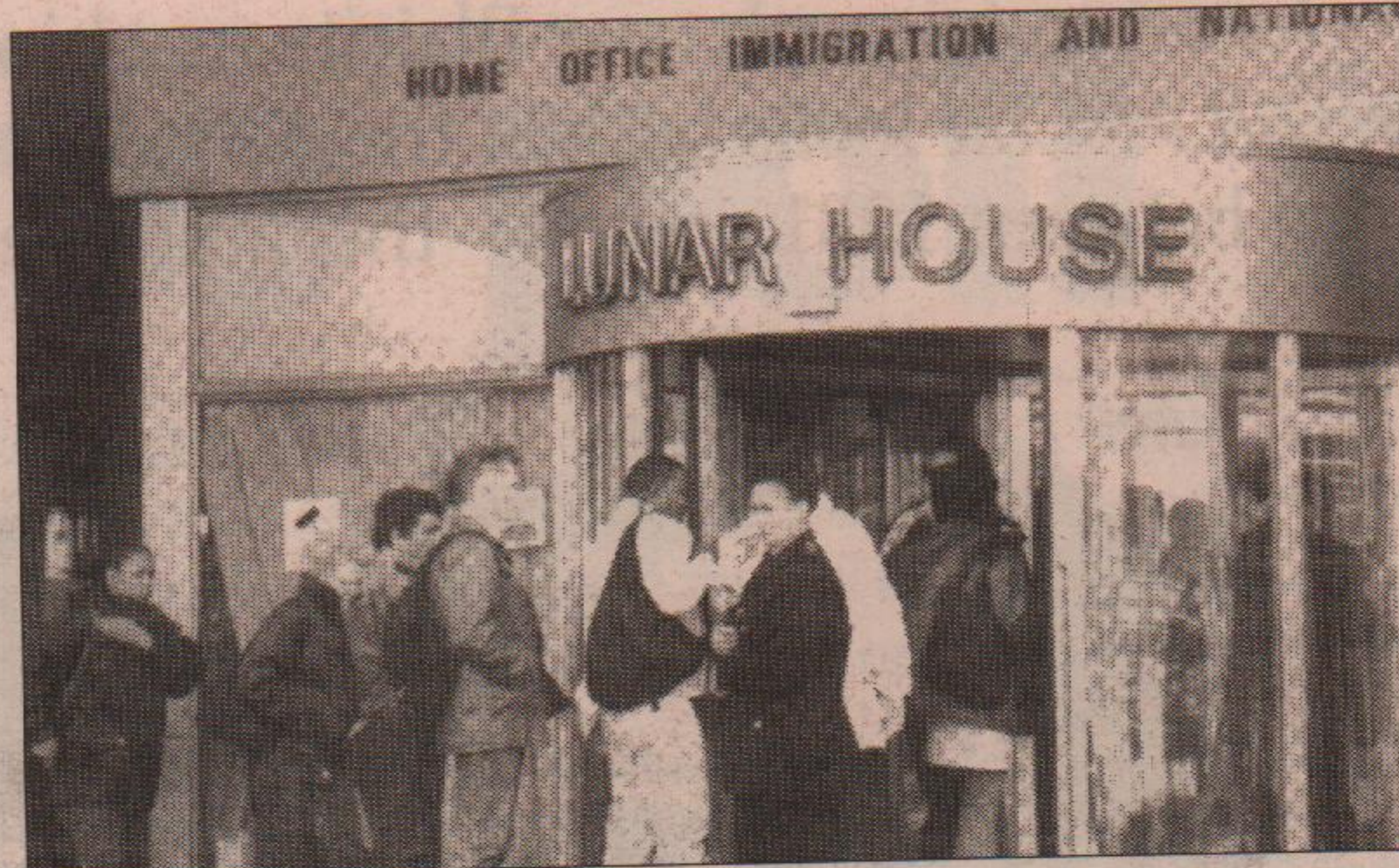
The *Sun*, published by the "foreign" billionaire Rupert Murdoch who consistently escapes UK taxes on his corporate profits, crowed about its campaign on 20 March. The *Sun's* battle cry has been: "Britain has had enough" of gypsy beggars.

Every day the *Sun*, the *Mail* and the *Mirror* pour out bile against asylum seekers in a naked attempt to scapegoat desperately poor people who have fled from grinding poverty and brutal racism. "Respectable" broadsheets such as the *Daily Telegraph* have joined this sickening chorus of racial hatred and chauvinism.

Local rags, most notoriously the *Dover Express* and the *Folkestone Herald*, have run "news" stories and editorials worthy of 1930s Nazi propaganda. The editors responsible for such filth gained their 15 minutes of fame with such headlines as, "We want to wash dross down the drain". Editorials referred to Roma refugees as "human sewage" and "scum of the earth". The *Herald* concocted a story about Roma women "selling sex for the price of a potato".

Such vicious propaganda has encouraged fascists and active racists in and around Dover. A sinister cabal of "local residents" has produced a leaflet subtitled: "Refugees, 33 reasons why we should send them back and close the door".

The authors' "reason 21" beggars



Asylum seekers' queue outside immigration and nationality office

belief: "No medical checks on refugees, with the knowledge of their promiscuity and selling sex for money, who is to answer for the epidemic of venereal disease that will undoubtedly become rife?" All anti-fascists and anti-racists in Kent, indeed all decent-minded people, should unite not only to expose the real scum responsible for this leaflet but to ensure that their operation is physically shut down once and for all.

With a few honourable exceptions on the Labour left and among Liberal Democrats, however, MPs have been either silent or have practically enlisted in the tabloids' latest version of the race war (see box on New Labour). In sharp contrast, the London Socialist Alliance's programme rightly calls for the scrapping of all immigration controls.

For socialists it is absolutely imperative that we turn the tide against the torrent of lying propaganda against

refugees and fight to expose the inherently racist nature of all controls on the free movement of workers. The arsenal of immigration law pits workers against each other and serves to conceal the bosses' responsibility in Britain and internationally for the desperate plight of so many millions of people.

Such a fight against immigration controls must be waged with renewed energy in the organised working class, and the widest possible layers of the labour movement won to supporting asylum seekers against the slew of physical, legislative and ideological attacks.

- Stop the racist lies – shut down the presses
- Smash every racist and fascist mobilisation against asylum seekers
- Defend asylum seekers from physical attack and from all forms of state repression.

NEW LABOUR PARROTING PREJUDICE

THE TORIES will play the race card and attack asylum seekers all the way to the next election. Anne Widdecombe can't appear in public without belching out poison, hatred and bigotry. At every opportunity we should shut this racist lout up with a taste of anti-racist, working class hatred.

But she is not to be outdone by Labour's own racists. In opposition, New Labour, even with Jack Straw as shadow home secretary, was critical of the Tories' 1996 asylum legislation and pledged to repeal aspects of it when elected.

In office New Labour has not only left intact the whole of the Tories' Act, but gone much further. Its 1999 legislation further slashes benefits levels for asylum seekers and introduces a national vouchers system for purchase of the barest essentials, while the likes of Sainsbury's and Tesco's get to keep the change.

The Government has slashed the minimal legal protection once afforded to asylum applicants and opened a new "fast-track" detention centre at a disused Cambridgeshire military base. Jack Straw took personal charge in an effort to sweep out of the country the passengers aboard an Afghan airliner who wound up at Essex's Stansted airport.

In March, as the tabloids whipped up a panic about Roma women begging "aggressively" in London's streets,

the New Labour parasite who doubles as the Home Office's immigration minister, Barbara Roche, used Nicky Campbell's Radio 5 phone-in programme to cheer on the ravings of the *Daily Mail* and *Sun*. As Roche attempted to outdo the strident attacks of Widdecombe, she brandied begging with children "vile".

Of course the real aggressive beggars in Britain – the corporate fat cats who demand and get tax breaks, subsidies for the privatised services they have seized, bail-outs for their big banks – are welcome and adored in New Labour's highest circles.

Workers must rally to the asylum seekers. They should be welcome here. We must fight the systematic and wilfully ignorant scapegoating. What is "vile" is a system that institutionalises poverty and racism and that forces people such as Roma mothers into begging in the first place. But it is precisely this system that hypocrites like Roche and New Labour defend with such enthusiasm.

Whatever lip service Blair and Straw may pay to a "diverse and tolerant" Britain, New Labour has proved every bit as willing as any Tory regime to fuel backward and deadly prejudice. They have chosen to pander to the racist rabble of "Middle England" at the same time as they seek to hide the wretched failure of their own government to repair any of the damage done to the NHS and the fabric of the welfare state by 18 years of Tory rule.

Racist myths

■ "Britain is being swamped"

FACT: Applications for asylum did rise in 1999. The main reasons? Britain, among others, bombing hell out of the Balkans and the intensified conflict between the Sri Lankan state and the Tamil national liberation movement. Compared to its total population, Britain still has fewer applicants for asylum than 11 other European Union states. On top of this the privatised computer system at the Home Office's Immigration and Nationality Directorate, has proved a failure, contributing to a backlog of more than 102,000 applications – some more than five years old.

■ "Britain is a soft touch"

FACT: Until the end of March an adult asylum seeker with a child had to make ends meet on £5.22 a day. Since New Labour's regime for asylum applicants took effect on 1 April, a family of two adults and two children has a weekly income of £90.80 – £40 less than the miserly level of Income Support the state pays to a household with permanent residency.

■ "These gypsies are nothing but tramps and thieves"

FACT: Roma people have faced a long and murderous history of persecution in Europe. In Romania, for example, the gypsy population endured 400 years of slavery, abolished only in 1864. The forgotten victims of the Nazi terror included at least half a million Roma, murdered in extermination camps. Since the collapse of the Stalinist states in the late 1980s, the plight of Roma people has worsened dramatically:

- 300 Roma killed by racist thugs in Romania
- More than 1,200 racist attacks against Roma in the Czech Republic between 1990 and 1997
- In Slovakia and the Czech Republic the authorities admit that at least 30 Roma have been victims of racist murders since 1993
- In northern Bohemia, city officials in Usti nad Labem built a wall in 1998 to create a sealed-off Roma ghetto
- Three in five Roma children in the Czech Republic get swept into the dustbin of "special needs" schools, simply because they are gypsies.

FEEDBACK ■ Contact us on 020 8981 0602

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