

Workers News



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CLASS ACTION TO DEFEAT POLL TAX



THE TENTH anniversary of the killing of Hackney teacher Blair Peach by the Metropolitan Police Special Patrol Group was

marked by a demonstration of about 3,000 people through Southall, west London, on April 23.

Peach died during a

police charge on a demonstration in Southall protesting against a National Front meeting. The police admitted that he was

probably killed by a blow from a truncheon, but no officer has ever been charged.

UNITED action by the working class – not individual protest – is needed to defeat the poll tax, which came into operation on April 1 in Scotland and is due to be introduced in England and Wales next year.

Instead of taking the issuing of poll tax demands in Scotland as the signal for a fight, the leaders of the Scottish Labour Party and Scottish TUC moved swiftly to bury independent working class action under a 'popular front' with church leaders, Scottish nationalists, Greens, Democrats and rock musicians.

Twenty thousand workers marched against the poll tax through the streets of Edinburgh on April 1. They did not do so to see a poll tax payment book being torn up by STUC general secretary Campbell Christie, to hear NALGO Scottish District Council secretary Chris Barter tell them to claim rebates whether they were entitled to or not, or to hear Wet Wet Wet in a 'Rock Against the Poll Tax' concert. They marched because they want to fight the poll tax and the Tories who stand behind it. Workers must demand of the Labour and trade union leaders that they break from the joint campaign with anti-working class parties and other organisations and initiate class-wide action against the reactionary tax.

The drive by the official leaders of the working class in Scotland to divert opposition into harmless channels is matched by the thoroughly bogus campaign launched in April by Kinnock and the national leadership of the Labour Party. Kinnock is not interested in stopping the poll tax; the purpose of his campaign is to get a clear lead in national opinion polls. To this end, he enlisted the services of novelist Fay Weldon and actress Juliet Stevenson, and started a newspaper-based petition. Local events included a 'tax hold-up' in York to commemorate the highwayman Dick Turpin and the delivery of an official poll tax registration card to the Thatchers' private house in Dulwich.

Such contemptible stunts are an insult not only to the working class who will bear the brunt of the tax, but to those Labour Party members who helped raise more than £80,000 in five days to fund an anti-poll tax campaign.

At the same time as it tries to bury the campaign against the poll tax in a plethora of 'photo opportunities', the Kinnock leadership is bringing forward proposals to replace it with not one, but two new taxes – a local income tax and a property tax. This promises to be even less popular and will serve to undermine workers' resistance to the poll tax and

By David Lewis

encourage a mood of resignation.

While Kinnock and the rest of the Labour leaders are telling workers to wait until the next general election in 1992, the Tories (assisted by the Labourites in local government) are using every weapon in their armoury to ensure registration and enforce payment. Poll tax collection officers have unprecedented powers to seize the property and earnings of anyone who does not pay. The Labour-run Central Region Council in Scotland froze the bank accounts of over 30 people who failed to pay fines for not registering. Draconian measures are being introduced to ensure that the maximum number of people are registered for the poll tax – taking information from all available sources. In England, this will include having access to lists of schoolchildren's parents, in spite of previous government assurances that those lists would be used only within the education system.

Seen in this light, calls for individual non-registration are at best a waste of time, and at worst a cover behind which eventual acceptance of the poll tax is being prepared. In Scotland, the government claims a 95 per cent registration rate; the Labour-controlled Strathclyde Regional Council had raised this to 98 per cent by April 1.

The poll tax is a major attack by the Tories on the working class. It is aimed at shifting the main burden of local authority financing on to workers, pensioners, the unemployed and youth, and at breaking up working class strongholds in the inner cities where the tax will be highest.

To fight back, it is essential to unite the whole working class. Local government unions must refuse to co-operate with the poll tax regardless of which political party runs the council; Labour councils must be forced not to collect the tax and workers who cannot pay must be defended from victimisation. The fight against the poll tax must be linked up with the fight against cuts – in this way, a basis will be established for Councils of Action which will unite workers, tenants, the unemployed, pensioners and youth in a fight to bring down the Tories.

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All out to defend dockers' jobs!

DOCKERS must organise a national strike covering every port without delay. The entire membership of the Transport and General Workers' Union (T&GWU) and the other transport unions must be mobilised in their support against the abolition of the National Dock Labour Scheme. This struggle must be extended into a political offensive to bring down the Tories, force Labour to nationalise the docks and restore job security for dockers.

Only such a policy can defeat the plans of the Thatcher government and the port employers to break trade unionism on the docks in preparation for the operation of the single European

market in 1992.

Kinnock and the entire T&GWU and Labour leaderships have given the clearest message to the Tories that they will not lift a finger to defend the jobs of the 9,400 registered dockers employed under the Dock Labour Scheme. When abolition was announced in parliament on April 6, not a single Labour front-bencher rose to defend the dockers. Shadow Employment spokesman Michael Meacher pathetically warned the Tories that they were endangering the British economy by provoking a strike. Former prime minister James (now Lord) Callaghan told the Lords that he hoped there would not be a strike, advising that the docker was 'the most independently-minded, lively and often bloody-minded man you can get'. Appeals by Labour

'left' Eric Heffer for a commitment for a future Labour government to restore the national scheme fell on deaf ears.

Neil Kinnock, addressing the Parliamentary Labour Party on April 12, warned to the theme that the Tories were hell-bent on destroying the 'national' economy. Interviewed on the Jimmy Young show the following day, he stated that Labour would not support 'illegal' strike action.

Challenged by Employment Minister Norman Fowler on April 17 as to whether he would support a strike, Meacher gave a further grovelling performance: 'I believe the only people who want a dock strike are the government. I don't believe the employers want a dock

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EDITORIAL

Ten years of the Tories

THE TEN years since May 1979 have seen the most sustained attack on the working class in Britain since the Second World War. With an almost missionary zeal, the Tory government of Margaret Thatcher has undertaken to remove every democratic right won in past struggles and break the power of organised labour.

The desire of the Tories to atomise the working class – expressed most clearly in the prime minister's statement in February this year that 'There is no such thing as society. There are individual men and women and there are families' – does not originate in Thatcher's personality. Nor is her ability to outmanoeuvre rivals in the Tory party and remain the unassailable leader into her third term of office a sign of unique practical and intellectual skills. The reasons for Thatcher's elevation to the leadership of the Conservative Party, and the consolidation of her power through successive Cabinet reshuffles and 'resignations', lie in the pressing requirements of British capitalism.

During the 1950s and 60s, the rapid decline of British capitalism relative to other capitalist states was masked by the world-wide expansion of credit based on the strength of the American economy. But the sheer volume of paper money generated served to undermine the very economic strength which had made it possible. The recognition of this was the ending of fixed exchange rates between different currencies, and between the dollar and gold, in the early 70s. With this protection removed, the British economy was exposed to the full force of international competition – including that of countries newly-industrialised in the post-war period which rested on cheap labour.

It was the emergence of this crisis which determined the two attempts to enforce anti-union legislation in 1969 and 1971. The first was Labour's 'In Place of Strife', withdrawn in the face of widespread opposition in the working class; the second was the Heath government's Industrial Relations Act. Both sought to overturn the immunity under the law which trade unions had gained through the Trades Disputes Act of 1906; Labour and Tory leaders alike knew that the only hope of surviving a future of intensified competition lay in curbing the ability of the working class to fight for improved wages and conditions.

The fate of both Heath and his Industrial Relations Act – thrown out by the actions of workers through their unions – only hardened the resolve of the Tories to prepare and push through legislation at a later date. An important part of these preparations was the Ridley report, drawn up whilst the Tories were in opposition in the 1970s, and which became the blueprint for defeating the miners' strike of 1984-85.

Thatcher's victory in the 1979 election, prepared by the continued attempts of the Labour administrations of Wilson, and then Callaghan, to off-load the economic crisis on to the working class, marked the ascendancy of the most ruthless wing of the Tory party. Thatcher represents the 'unsentimental' breed of Tory more closely associated with banking, finance and the monopoly capitalists than with small and medium-sized concerns. In its first significant (and symbolic) act, the new government abolished exchange controls in October 1979, exposing British industry to 'market forces' on a world scale. Holding the pound at its high level, Thatcher raised interest rates and forced the weakest companies to the wall. The intention was to provide the spur for cutting costs; to force British industry to be competitive.

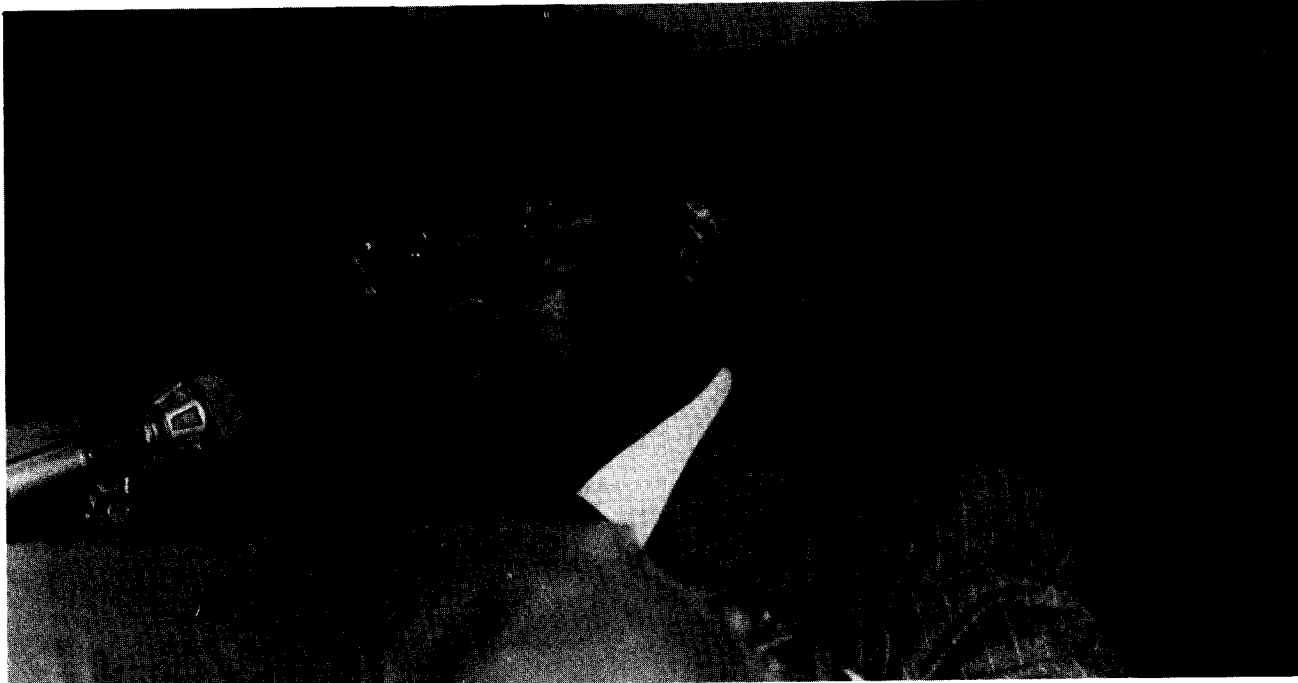
Measures such as these, however, along with extensive privatisations and cuts in public spending, cannot reverse the historic decline of British capitalism. Whilst a considerable budget surplus has been built up over the last two years, the much-vaunted 'leaner, fitter' industry, despite increased productivity, produces much less than it did in 1979. Its share of world trade in manufactured goods has shrunk from eight per cent to six-and-a-half per cent today.

For this reason, top of the agenda for the Tories was and remains the destruction of the defensive organisations of the working class, which remain an impediment on the road to the creation of profit. The four rounds of anti-union legislation already enacted, and the fifth which has recently been outlined in a Green Paper, are designed to place any fight against employers or government outside the law, and finally to render trade unions ineffective.

That the Thatcher government should have been allowed to get so far with this is the responsibility of the leaders of the Labour Party and the TUC who, having conceded trade union immunity from prosecution without a fight, now refuse to take any action which might lead to union funds being sequestered.

The class struggle in Britain has reached a critical stage. The Tories, driven by the twin scourges of the deepening world economic crisis and the relatively weak position of British capitalism, are bent on reducing the working class to the status of slaves. The reformist leaders, linked inextricably to the capitalist system, can only appear more and more openly as policemen over the working class.

The way forward for the working class rests in the construction of a new leadership, forged in a relentless struggle against every attack launched by the Tories and every act of betrayal and cowardice by the TUC and Labour Party leaders.



HIDIPO Hamutenya, SWAPO secretary for information and publicity, addressed a public meeting in London on April 19. Referring to the recent fighting in Namibia, he called for an independent commission of enquiry to investigate which side fired first. He stated that SWAPO was confident that the United States would prevent South Africa wrecking the 'peace process' on the grounds that it

was keen to remove Cuban troops from southern Africa. Hamutenya hoped that 'friendly governments' (including Britain!) would send observers to Namibia to supervise free and fair elections.

SWAPO was relying on 'the British sense of fair play' (!) to mitigate South African attempts to rig the forthcoming election, he said.

UN lets S.African dogs off the leash

By Martin Sullivan

TEN DAYS of fierce fighting on the Namibia-Angola border at the beginning of April, in which over 260 SWAPO fighters were killed by South African forces, have underlined the warning made by Workers News last December – that the United Nations-sponsored independence settlement is a trap for the masses of Namibia.

The agreement signed in December 1988 over the heads of the Namibian people by representatives of Angola, Cuba and South Africa, and closely backed by the United States and the Soviet Union, offers only a cosmetic independence, in which South Africa will continue to dominate the country economically and militarily.

The confidence vested in the agreement and in the role of the UN by the bourgeois-nationalist leadership of SWAPO has served to further undermine the struggle for national liberation. At meetings in Zambia and Sweden last year, SWAPO went out of its way to assure South African and Namibian busi-

ness interests and big farmers that it had no intention of implementing any substantial nationalisation measures or land reform. In February this year, SWAPO met representatives of the giant, De Beers corporation, which controls diamond mining in Namibia, and on April 21, attended a conference sponsored by *Business International* magazine, where it announced that an independent Namibia would seek membership of the IMF and the World Bank.

SWAPO's willingness to co-operate with the UN Transition Assistance Group (UNTAG) has been matched only by the UN's willingness to co-operate with South Africa. On April 1, the day that serious fighting broke out in northern Namibia, United Nations officials met with South African Foreign Minister Pik Botha and British Prime Minister Thatcher and agreed to permit South African troops backed by police to be deployed against SWAPO's fighters. Thatcher, who had flown in from the last leg of her African tour in Zimbabwe, denounced the SWAPO 'incursion': 'We condemn it totally,' she said.

Although, under the terms of the peace settlement, only 1,500 South African troops were supposed to be in Namibia on the day UN transitional arrangements came into force, the Angolan border very rapidly became a free-fire zone. South African armoured columns, supported by helicopter gunships and fighter-bombers, were joined by 2,000 members of the hated Koevoet (Crowbar) paramilitary police. This operation had the explicit authorisation of UN Secretary General Perez de Cuellar, in what he termed in a confidential memorandum a

'strictly limited and temporary suspension of the requirement for some units of the South African military to be confined to base'. All UN 'humanitarian' aid to SWAPO had been cut off on March 31 – the day before the outbreak of fighting.

Meanwhile, trade unionists reported attacks and provocations against civilians throughout Namibia. Sam Nujoma and the SWAPO leadership, far from championing their own guerrilla forces, distanced themselves from them. On April 2, SWAPO called upon the UN to separate the two sides and confine them to bases. Two days later, Nujoma appealed to the UN to send the full complement of troops originally planned for 'peacekeeping' duties.

A crucial factor in the drawn-out 'peace' process is the Soviet bureaucracy and its allies. The Soviet Union voted against a motion of no confidence in Perez de Cuel-

lar on the UN Security Council, and it was Angola and Cuba who signed an agreement with South Africa on April 9 to ensure the withdrawal of SWAPO forces to Angola. Cuban Stalinist representative Carlos Aldana is reported to have told Pik Botha: 'There is no word, in your language or mine, to describe what SWAPO have done.' This calculated act of betrayal is fully in line with the growing warmth of relations between Moscow and Pretoria. It is also applauded by the black bourgeois regimes in southern and central Africa. Kenneth Kaunda of Zambia has praised the South African role in Namibia, while Mozambique has strengthened ties with South Africa.

The fraudulent imperialist and Stalinist-sponsored 'independence' deal must be repudiated by the workers and peasants of Namibia. Only the expropriation of South African and multinational capitalists can secure a genuine independence.

Strike closes 11 Indian ports

ON APRIL 23, leaders of India's 125,000 dock workers called off an indefinite strike which had paralysed 11 of the country's major ports for six days. The port employers used emergency powers to draft in the armed forces in a concerted effort to smash the strike which was called after wage negotiations broke down. Reports indicate that only a handful of dockers, under threat of sacking, scabbed on the strike.

The dock unions are affiliated to the trade union federation of India's ruling Congress (I) Party, the Com-

munist Party of India (Marxist), the Communist Party of India and the Hindustan Mazdoor Singh.

In the ports of Calcutta and Goa, dockers are reported to have been involved in sharp clashes with the army and navy who attempted to take over the unloading of ships.

As the strike ended, the final settlement was not clear, but dockers' leaders had indicated that they were prepared to call the strike off if the employers would agree to a 28 per cent wage increase in line with other recent settlements in the public sector.

FUNDS

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Death of 'reformer' Hu provides focus for student discontent

THE DEATH of China's disgraced Stalinist leader Hu Yaobang on April 15 brought with it an upsurge of student unrest. By April 22, the day of Hu's funeral, an estimated 150,000 students had rallied in Beijing's Tiananmen Square, protesting against the failure of the most recent 'liberalisation' measures adopted by the Stalinist leadership.

By Ian Harrison

Student demands focused on calls for a public re-assessment of Hu's role as a protege of Deng Xiaoping and his dismissal from office in 1987. Posters on university campuses denounced the Communist Party's control of radio, television and the press. Throughout the week, students called for a purge of corrupt party officials and the resignation of Deng Xiaoping, together with the introduction of legal measures to protect individuals from the bureaucracy.

The party leadership is expected to respond to pressure from the students, and the intellectuals supporting them, by forcing Zhao Zhiyang to resign as party secretary and take personal responsibility for the failure of the economic reforms. As with the sacking of Hu Yaobang, the party leaders hope that by dismissing one of their own, the rest will be

protected and the students pacified.

Hu Yaobang was dismissed from his official position at the point where mass student demonstrations began to draw in support from factory workers with their own grievances against the bureaucracy. According to a number of press reports, significant numbers of workers have rallied in support of the current wave of student agitation, following a year of unprecedented strikes in China against government economic policies. Inflation has now reached 36 per cent and is set to rise still higher, threatening workers' living standards.

Since Hu was dismissed, over 80 million rural workers made redundant by the break-up of agricultural communes and the collapse of the construction industry have migrated into the coastal cities seeking work. Official statistics released in February reveal that the urban workforce is calculated to be 135.7 million, of whom 20-30 million are 'underemployed'. Alarmed by the growth of working class opposition to government policies, the bureaucracy has decided that this is not the time to enforce the new bankruptcy law on inefficient companies, which would drive unemployment figures still higher.

The emergence of student demonstrations, supported by factory and railway workers, follows hard on the heels of national disturbances in Tibet and reports of growing unrest among the Uigher Muslim minority. They have been fuelled by the disastrous zig-zags in economic policy introduced by the party leadership since 1978.

Deng Xiaoping's call to the peasantry to 'enrich' themselves and break up the base of communal agriculture led to the disruption of food supplies to the main cities and the mushrooming of cottage industries. Investment in rural construction and the establishment of new economic trading zones bled the centrally-planned economy of vital resources. Today, the vital transport and energy-producing sectors of the economy are stagnating, while production of consumer goods under the control of regional party bosses abounds.

The government's response to growing food and fuel shortages has been the drastic cutting of cheap credit - a move which has devastated the rural economy. Peasants have retaliated with the wholesale slaughter of livestock, grain hoarding and subsistence farming. Regional party bosses have resisted attempts by central government to reassert control over so-called 'privatised' industry by withholding taxes, starving the



Students demonstrating in Beijing last month

central government of money.

Temporarily, the students' demands attempt to find a champion in the corpse of the Stalinist 'liberal' Hu. But, as in the Soviet Union, this movement cannot be led forward by any 'dissident' section of the bureaucracy. On the contrary, it must be directed against the entire Stalinist apparatus.

Japan's government swamped by scandal

By David Lewis

CONTINUING developments in the Recruit scandal promise to bring to an end the 35-year domination of Japanese politics by the Liberal Democratic Party, which has ruled since it was founded in 1955.

Since last year, the LDP and many of its leading figures have been accused of corrupt links with the Recruit conglomerate. In a country where large amounts of money are required to keep the wheels of politics turning, Recruit and the LDP have been setting some kind of record.

Prime Minister Nobura Takeshita recently admitted accepting 151 million yen (£670,000) over three years. Two days later, Shintaro Abe, the general secretary of the LDP, admitted that his wife had been paid 300,000 yen a month by Recruit.

Earlier this year, Justice Minister Takashi Hasoegawa resigned after it was revealed that Recruit bought six mil-

lion yen worth of tickets to one of his fund-raising parties.

Takeshita's predecessor as Prime Minister, Yasuhiro Nakasone, is thought likely to be the first major politician to be jailed for his Recruit connections. He is one of more than a dozen leading members of the LDP to have been arrested for accepting Recruit shares at a knock-down price prior to their flotation on the stock market.

Apart from Takeshita and Nakasone, 20 other top government politicians made an average of 66 million yen profit when they resold their shares.

The present political arrangement in Japan was set up as part of the post-war economic recovery programme by the United States to head off revolution. With the shaking of its economic foundations, the political house is beginning to crumble.

Milosevic moves to crush Kosovo revolt

SERBIAN party chief Slobodan Milosevic, having barely wrapped up phase one in his struggle to become supreme leader and reunite Yugoslavia's bitterly divided constituent republics - only this time under complete Serbian hegemony - has already embarked on phase two.

By Daniel Evans

Phase one was designed to strengthen the domination of Serbia (the largest of the republics) by ending the autonomous region status of Vojvodina and Kosovo and bringing them back under the control of the central bureaucracy in Belgrade. It also included a purge of party leaders in the republic of Montenegro by Milosevic supporters and a strengthening of his influence in Macedonia.

Phase two is intended to take the struggle to the constituent republics of the north and more specifically to the republics of Slovenia and Croatia.

The background to the instability of the Stalinist Yugoslavian regime is an economic crisis of crippling proportions after years of shackling Yugoslavia to the policy of 'socialism in one country'. Self-interested bureaucratic cliques have developed along nationalist lines, aggravating the unevenness of Yugoslavia's economic development.

Widespread working class unrest in 1987 and 1988 in

response to an IMF-dictated package of austerity measures, with which the bureaucracy sought to make the working class pay for the economic catastrophe, brought with it the 'dangerous' possibility of a united struggle of workers in all republics and the emergence of free trade unions. Enter the populist demagogue Milosevic with his trumpcard of Serbian chauvinism and anti-corruption campaigns with a bid to rise above the contending class forces - the working class on the one side and the enlarged petty-bourgeoisie and counter-revolutionary elements on the other.

The unrest of Serbian workers was channelled, in the guise of holding the federation together against 'splitters', into chauvinism, to the point where many including miners who took part in sit-ins supported the virulent campaign against the ethnic Albanian population in Kosovo. This campaign culminated on March 28 with the constitutional removal of Kosovo's autonomous status. The ensuing unrest led to at least 29 deaths in Kosovo as the masses took to the streets and clashed with the army units sent in by Milosevic.

Ethnic Albanians make up 90 per cent of the population of Kosovo (the poorest region of Yugoslavia with one in three unemployed) and they have been made

scapegoats by the Belgrade bureaucracy for decades. Racist press stories and economic and cultural oppression have been a hallmark of this campaign.

Now Milosevic is turning to Croatia and Slovenia, but with the added problem of having already demonstrated his intentions in Kosovo.

Slovenia and Croatia are smaller, but richer, republics and the balance of forces in these two republics is not identical with that in Serbia. A smaller working class and more vocal petty-bourgeoisie has meant that the leaderships in these two republics have had to shift further to the right to keep control. In Slovenia, bureaucrats even talk of the error of socialism and of independently joining the EEC.

At a Central Committee meeting of the federal party on April 15, Serbian delegates clashed with the Croats as the former sought

JORDAN has become the latest country to be convulsed by protests against IMF-imposed austerity measures. On Tuesday April 18, security forces in the southern Jordanian town of Maan opened fire on thousands of workers, peasants and youths who were protesting against the swingeing price rises introduced two days earlier.

Banks, government buildings, businesses and cars

emergency status for a Congress scheduled for December this year - a device which would give the Serbs more delegates.

The task of defeating Milosevic's plan to shore up the Stalinist regime falls on the Yugoslavian workers, particularly those in Serbia. Their illusions in the leadership have meant that a sincere desire to maintain the unity of Yugoslavia has been guided down a very reactionary path. They must reject chauvinism and come to the defence of the persecuted Kosovon Albanians.

Central planning of the economy will only succeed if the most thoroughgoing working class democracy is introduced. Stalinism, which excludes workers from the political arena and acts in its own self-interest, is directly responsible for the precarious state of Yugoslavia today. The Trotskyist programme of political revolution to overthrow the bureaucracy is urgently required.

were attacked during the demonstrations, which spread to other parts of the south the following day and to Salt, 20 miles from the capital, Amman, on Friday. By Sunday, when Jordan's ruler, King Hussein, returned from a visit to the United States to take charge of the crisis, cancelling a planned stopover in Britain, the death toll had reached at least eight and about 100 had been injured.

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THIS MONTH, seventy years ago, the final act of the German revolution of 1918-19 took place. On May 3, 1919, ultra-reactionary *Freikorps* troops supporting the Social Democratic government of Ebert, Noske and Scheidemann took Munich and overthrew the three-week-old Bavarian Soviet Republic. In the course of the next few days, counter-revolutionary terror reigned and over 1,000 workers were murdered. On June 5, after a mockery of a trial, Communist leader Eugen Leviné was shot by a firing squad. His last words were 'Long live the World Revolution'.

The German revolution broke out on November 4, 1918, with sailors' mutinies in Kiel. In the next five days, the movement spread to all the major cities of Germany, with workers' councils springing up everywhere. On November 9, the Hohenzollern dynasty was forced to abdicate and the treacherous coalition government of Social Democrats

COMRADES, friends! You know how those few persons that dared express themselves publicly in opposition were calumniated and menaced in that period of mass hysteria. Not a day passed on which I was not the recipient of the most savage imprecations and insults. Little by little, an increasing section of the population began to recognize the correctness of our position, and now we are lauded and praised. But this merit is, indeed, not our own, for a considerable number of plain working men remained steadfast from the very outset, in spite of the war mania. It was this section which supported us and this section which deserves all the praise.

What is the nature of this revolution? It is in great part a military insurrection directed specifically against war. It was kindled directly by the fears of the sailors that the Admiralty might continue the war of its own authority after the collapse of the land fronts. There developed from this the mutinies of the troops stationed in the interior of Germany. The working classes have for a long time been pressing forward stormily. Even bourgeois circles have co-operated within and without the army, but these are very undependable, very suspicious elements. The soldiers must not forget how important is the part played by the workers. The troops at the front were not actively engaged in the revolution.

What is the basis of power of the present revolution? We must first ask, what revolution do we mean? For the present revolution has a number of very different contents and possibilities. It may continue to remain what it has been thus far: a reform movement in favour of peace, a bourgeois movement. Or it may become what it has not been thus far — a proletarian Socialist revolution. The proletariat will, even in the former instance, have to furnish the most important prop, unless the revolution is to be degraded into a farce. But the proletariat cannot content itself with this bourgeois-revolutionist content. Unless all the achievements that have been made thus far shall again be lost, it must march on to the social revolution: the day of settlement between capital and labour. This turning point of the world's history has arrived.

Has the proletariat the power in its hands today? Workers' and soldiers' councils have been formed, but they are by no means the expression of a fully clear proletarian class consciousness. Their members include officers, many of them of noble birth. The workers' councils include members of the ruling classes; this is disgraceful. Only workers and proletarian soldiers, or those men and women who have distinguished themselves by a life of self-sacrifice and struggle for the proletariat, should be elected to the workers' and soldiers' councils. No others must be put into responsible posts at this time. This obvious assertion of authority must be made to the ruling classes, who have imposed their will upon the proletariat for so long a time. Only the proletariat itself can liberate itself. . . . The composition of the councils up to this time lays bare the root of the evil, namely, the masses of the workers and soldiers are not yet sufficiently enlightened either politically or socially.

Do the workers' and soldiers' councils at present really hold the political power? Not only the economic and social positions of authority, but many of the positions of political authority have continued to remain in the hands of the ruling classes. And what they had lost of these positions they have again succeeded in recovering with the aid of the present Government; the officers have again been restored to their commands, the old bureaucracy has again assumed its functions — under supervision, to be sure, but under a supervision whose effectiveness is necessarily more than dubious, for the supervising proletariat is often circumvented by the wily bourgeois in the turn of a hand.

The social position of authority held by the higher education possessed by the ruling classes was a source of great problems also for our comrades in Russia. Members of the ruling classes are for the present in many cases indispensable as auxiliaries and specialists. They are obliged to put themselves in the service of the Revolution; but to entrust them with power would mean a serious jeopardising of the Revolution.

Now the Generals are returning from the front to the interior with their huge armies. They deport themselves like Caesars at the

(SPD) and Independent Social Democrats (USPD) headed by Ebert installed.

The role of the Social Democrats was first to muzzle, then destroy the revolution. Following the defeat of the 'Spartacus Week' in January 1919, the SPD newspaper *Vorwärts* issued its infamous appeal for the murder of Spartacus League leaders Rosa Luxemburg and Karl Liebknecht: 'A hundred proletarian corpses all in a row; Karl, Rosa and Company, none on show! None on show!' Three days later, on January 15, Luxemburg and Liebknecht, whom Lenin described as 'the finest representatives of the Third International', were murdered by government-controlled *Freikorps* fascists. In March, Rosa's close comrade Leo Jogiches, who had assumed leadership of the newly-formed Communist Party, was also killed.

The crushing of the German revolution remains an indissoluble stain on the history of social democracy.

Liebknecht rallies the sailors

Karl Liebknecht (1871-1919) was an outstanding leader of the left wing of the SPD prior to the First World War. In December 1914, he was the only member of the Reichstag to vote against war credits and went on to lead the internationalist opposition to the imperialist war. Jailed for his activities in 1916, he was released on the eve of the revolution in October 1918.

He founded the German Communist Party together with Rosa Luxemburg, and led the attempted seizure of power during 'Spartacus Week' in January 1919. The following rarely reprinted speech entitled 'Proletarian Revolution and Proletarian Dictatorship' was delivered to the Naval Committee of 53 on November 23, 1918.

head of their legions, forbid the raising of the red flag, abolish the soldiers' councils, etc. We may expect many acts on their part, possibly even an attempt to bless us once more with the noble Hohenzollern dynasty. If these huge armies were permeated with a revolutionary spirit, they could not be abused in the infamous manner in which they are now being abused. But the first and foremost duty of the 'Socialist' Government is to disseminate this spirit among the troops at the front, a duty this Government has basely neglected, waving the red flags zealously instead, and sowing hatred against 'Bolshevism', and thus handing over the masses of the soldiers the more defencelessly to the mortal enemies of the Revolution — the military officers — whom this Government had itself restored to their commands. The ingenious plan that is being pursued is that of flooding Germany with a new counter-revolutionary danger by means of the troops from the front, who, as a result of the armistice conditions and its consequences, are again imbued with chauvinistic spirit. This plan must be opposed ruthlessly, the Generals must at once be eliminated, the authority to give commands abolished, all the armies organised democratically from the bottom up. We are told this is impossible because of the difficulties of demobilisation. Far from it! Let us have confidence in the revolutionary self-discipline of the German soldier masses. Once they are fired with the enthusiasm of revolutionary zeal, they will solve with ease practical problems that seem impossible of solution in normal times. Faith can move mountains; where there is a will, there is a way. But, first of all, I ask: Is a proper retirement of the German troops more important than the Revolution? Is

it not outright madness to hand over to the mortal enemies of the Revolution — for the sake of 'order' and 'peace' — means of power capable of menacing the very existence of the Revolution? However we may regard the question: the restoration of the power of command was an axe-stroke into the heartwood of the Revolution. It is to this step that we owe chiefly the loss of the achievements of the Revolution of November 8 [1918], for the power which the proletariat swiftly secured on that day has for the most part returned to the hands of the ruling classes.

We may now ask: What is now to be done? What is the duty of the proletariat in this situation?

It cannot be the duty of the proletariat to conclude with the foreign imperialists a peace that is unworthy of them as men, a throttling peace. Such a peace is not only intolerable, but it is a momentary peace only, necessarily productive of new wars. The goal of the proletariat must be a peace of well-being and freedom for all nations, a permanent peace. But such a peace can be based only on the revolutionary will, on the victorious acts of the international proletariat, on the social revolution.

Can the proletariat content itself with merely eliminating the Hohenzollerns? Never! Its goal is the abolition of class rule, of exploitation and oppression, the establishment of Socialism. Our present Government calls itself Socialist. Thus far it has acted only for the preservation of capitalist private property. The Socialisation Commission appointed by this Government, which to this day has not once met, is in all its membership a commission to oppose and retard socialisation. And yet we need quick and energetic action, not delay. To be sure, the socialisation of society is



'Spartacus Week', January 1919

erman ution 1919

bodies of all governments that do not dare take up the struggle with capitalism, and preach instead to the workers - day by day - peace, order, the wickedness of strikes.

The extermination of capitalism, the establishment of the Socialist order of society, is possible only on an international scale - but, of course, it cannot be carried out at a uniform pace in all countries. The work has begun in Russia, it must be continued in Germany, it will be completed in the Entente powers.

Only the path of social world revolution can lead us out from the terrible dangers which threaten Germany by reason of the food and raw materials situation. Nor does the German proletariat build its hopes in this connection on Wilsonian promises of mercy, but on the rock of the international proletarian solidarity.

There are two alternatives for liquidating the war - the capitalist-imperialist alternative, and the proletarian-Socialist alternative.

The former will afford for

a moment a peace unworthy of men, a peace that will give birth to new wars. The second offers a peace of well-being and permanence. The former will preserve the capitalist order of society; the second will destroy it and liberate the proletariat.

The German working class today has the power in its hands, or at least it has the strength to seize and hold this power.

Shall it give up this power; shall it bend the knee before Wilson; shall it capitulate at the command of hostile imperialists to its mortal enemies within the country, to the German capitalists, in order to be given a hangman's peace? Or shall it not rather - as we demand - oppose with equal ruthlessness the imperialism within the country - in order thus to attain a proletarian Socialist peace!

What proletarians, what Socialists, can find this peace so difficult? The social revolution must come in Germany, and from it must come the social world revolution of the proletariat against world imperialism. This is the only solution also for all the urgent and terrible individual problems which face the German people today.

One must grasp the full compass of the capitalist world with its far horizons and perspectives today, in order to recognise the folly of all doubts as to the possibility of these goals. Those are the doubts under which is hidden the petty spirit of opportunist politics.

The Navy has done great things in this Revolution, and will do even greater things if it pursues the course it has begun, and refuses to permit itself to be influenced by the lies that are being circulated concerning Bolshevism, etc! Do not forget how we were persecuted before, and how we turned out to be right in the end. The more enemies we have, the more honour shall we win!

I admit that only enthusiastic zeal can achieve great results. We need conviction and confidence; we need clearness as to means and ends. Shall we recoil from our task because it is a difficult one? We behold the shining star which indicates our course; the sea is dark, stormy and full of reefs. Shall we give up the goal for this? We shall keep our eyes open and avoid the shoals - and shall reach our goal - in spite of everything!



Karl Liebknecht addressing an anti-war rally

Leviné's last speech

Eugen Leviné (1883-1919) was born in Russia and took part in the 1905 revolution as a member of the Social Revolutionary Party. He joined the Spartacus League in 1918, and became a founder member of the Communist Party. Despite serious misgivings, he took charge of the Munich Soviet Government in April 1919. Below we reprint extracts from his famous court-room speech.

I LOOK UPON this Court as the representatives of that class I have always regarded as my political adversaries. Perhaps I could account for my actions before Communists; but how could I defend myself before my adversaries for actions which they must regard as directed against their very existence?

I found myself in a similar situation in Russia; I refused to plead and was acquitted for lack of evidence. I shall not pursue the same tactics now; I propose to explain my motives.

I am not defending myself because I expect a more lenient sentence from you. Had I wished this I rather ought to be silent. My Counsel, who are closer to you both politically and as individuals could conduct my defence far more effectively. I am addressing the Court now for the same reasons which made me defend myself so resolutely throughout the whole proceedings. Both in the Press and among the public the most monstrous rumours have been spread about the Soviet Republic, about me personally, about the entire course of events, and I do not wish to let the rumours go by unopposed. The Munich workers have known me only for a short time and some of them may be gnawed by doubts as to whether I am really worthy of the confidence they have placed in me. As I am no longer free, I must use this trial to set everything out clearly.

My second reason is that I am a member of the Communist Party, and this is the most hated and most maligned party in Germany. I regard it therefore as my duty to proclaim in public the motives by which the members of the German Communist Party work, wish to work, strive to work. I owe it to the workers on the Executive Committee and to over twelve hundred members of the Factory Councils with whom I have grown close through our day to day collaboration, even if they ultimately repudiated me. I owe it to them, too, to clear their names.

It was the tragedy of the Munich masses that they still had too little political experience. They were well aware that to achieve victory the entire proletariat must

act as a body; but they believed that this body could have various programmes and that it was quite sufficient for the Social-Democrats, the Independent Socialists and the Communists to conclude a formal agreement.

This was actually one of the reasons for the defeat of the Munich Soviet Republic. When the proletariat is united in its will and purpose, it is invincible, but not when unity is established in a merely formal organisational way.

Why, having gained power, do we build a Red Army? Because history teaches us that every privileged class has hitherto defended itself by force when its privileges have been endangered. And because we know this; because we do not live in cloud-cuckoo-land; because we cannot believe that conditions in Bavaria are different - that the Bavarian bourgeoisie and the capitalists would allow themselves to be expropriated without a struggle - we were compelled to arm the workers to defend ourselves against the onslaught of the dispossessed capitalists.

This is how it has been in the past and this is how we shall naturally always act in the future, whenever we succeed in attaining power. We did not call on the workers to take up arms out of pleasure in bloodshed. On the contrary, we would be only too happy if the hitherto privileged classes would refrain from embarking upon a hopeless struggle - for one day the struggle will be hopeless. I should like to draw your attention to the fact that the victory of the proletariat in November also passed without bloodshed. In Berlin, for example, the first shots were fired at six o'clock in the evening from the Royal Stables when a group of officers opened fire on defenceless pedestrians out of annoyance at the course of

events. . . . We all regard the events of the early days of May not as a proletarian offensive but as an unmotivated bloodbath into which the White Guards plunged the Munich working class.

In the opening stage of the Soviet Republic we had to prevent the propaganda of the bourgeois Press. We were not in a position to introduce mere censorship and were therefore compelled, it is true, to close down the newspapers.

You say that is terror. Yes, it is terror. The same terror practised by the Hoffmann Government in suppressing the *Rote Fahne*. The same terror which affords me no other opportunity of justifying myself before my Party comrades than to appeal to the President of this Court to let me state my case.

The Prosecution has spoken of the internal peace which I have endangered. I did not endanger it, because internal peace does not exist. As long as the word 'socialism' merely heads the newspaper of the various governments there can be no internal peace; and as long as there are shareholders who could double their fortunes in the five years of war without doing a stroke of work, the workers will try to claim their share of that increased wealth and the shareholders will not allow it. And the more the economic conditions deteriorate in the aftermath of the war, when the prisoners of war return to find no work, no homes, no clothes and the little there is cannot be justly distributed because there is no Communist Republic, the internal struggle will continue. And if it assumes forms of which I and my friends do not approve, the struggle will go on as an inevitable phenomenon against which there is no appeal.

During the last six months I have no longer been able to live with my

family. Occasionally my wife could not even visit me. I could not see my three-year-old boy because the police have kept a vigilant watch on us.

Such was my life and it is not compatible with lust for power or with cowardice. When Toller, who tried to persuade me to proclaim the Soviet Republic, in his turn accused me of cowardice, I said to him: 'What do you want? The Social-Democrats start, then run away and betray us; the Independents fall for the bait, join us, and later let us down, and we Communists are stood up against the wall.'

We Communists are all dead men on leave. Of this I am fully aware. I do not know if you will extend my leave of whether I shall have to join Karl Liebknecht and Rosa Luxemburg. In any case I await your verdict with composure and inner serenity. For I know that, whatever your verdict, events cannot be stopped. The Prosecuting Counsel believes that the leaders incited the masses. But just as leaders could not prevent the mistakes of the masses under the pseudo-Soviet Republic, so the disappearance of one or other of the leaders will under no circumstances hold up the movement.

And yet I know, sooner or later other judges will sit in this hall and then those will be punished for high treason who have transgressed against the dictatorship of the proletariat.

Pronounce your verdict if you deem it proper. I have only striven to foil your attempt to stain my political activity, the name of the Soviet Republic with which I feel myself so closely bound up, and the good name of the workers of Munich. They - and I together with them - we have all of us tried to the best of our knowledge and conscience to do our duty towards the International, the Communist World Revolution.

In defence of the theory of permanent revolution

IT IS frequently written that the years 1924-28 marked the right-turn of the Comintern in the first phase of its degeneration. As an overall characterisation this is absolutely correct. But it is necessary to examine the contradictory appearance of this right-turn during the year 1924. To do otherwise would be to ignore one of the abiding characteristics of centrism – that opportunism frequently cloaks itself in ultra-leftism.

For most of this crucial year, ultra-leftism predominated, despite co-existing with the international overtures to 'peasant' parties begun in 1923. Writing in 1928, Trotsky summed up the relationship between the two false lines: 'The Left illusions of 1924 rose thanks to the Right leaven. In order to conceal the significance of the mistakes and defeats of 1923 from others as well as from oneself, the process of the swing to the Right that was taking place in the proletariat had to be denied and revolutionary processes within the other classes optimistically exaggerated.' ('The Third International After Lenin', New Park, p.94)

Striving to obscure the fact that it was Stalin-Zinoviev who had 'curbed the Germans' and called off the German revolution in October 1923, it was necessary to heap the blame on to Brandler and Radek, link Trotsky to them, and claim that they collectively represented a right-wing petty-bourgeois tendency in the Comintern.

In keeping with these factional requirements, Zinoviev maintained during the first half of 1924 that the immediate upward curve of revolution remained the perspective for Germany. 'The arming of the workers and the technical preparations for the decisive struggle must be doggedly continued,' ran an ECCI statement of January 21 on the German events. (J. Degras: 'The Communist International', Vol. 2, p.78). Writing to the Ninth Congress of the German Communist Party (KPD) on March 26, the ECCI stressed that the set-backs were a minor matter: 'The mistakes in estimating the tempo of events commit-

PART 12

By Richard Price

ted in October 1923 created many difficulties for the party. They are nevertheless merely an episode. The basic estimate remains unchanged. The revolution is approaching . . .' (Degras, p.87)

In their 'estimate' of the social democracy, the same documents prefigure the wild sectarianism of the Third Period. In January, the leaders of the SPD are described as 'nothing but a fraction of German fascism wearing a socialist mask' (Degras, p.77). In April, Zinoviev declared in a letter summoning the Fifth Comintern Congress that 'united front tactics remain correct for an entire epoch' (Degras, p.89).

If the struggle for power is imminent, why should the united front tactic stay on the agenda for 'an entire epoch'? If, on the other hand, social democracy is a 'fraction' of fascism, why a united front at all?

The baiting of the Left Opposition paralleled the 'leftist' tub-thumping, and the wave of slander which greeted the publication of the 'New Course' saw the beginning of the systematic distortion of party history, which was now presented as revolving around the axis of 'the struggle against Trotskyism' since 1904. Chief among the accusations directed against Trotsky was that he was stirring up the party and student youth against the 'Leninist Guard', and that he had consistently 'underestimated the peasantry'. Max Eastman wrote at that time with barbed irony: 'It is not likely that Trotsky, who organised the peasants in the Red Army – and he is the only Marxian in the world who ever did organise peasants – would be the one to underestimate them.' ('Since Lenin Died', p.115)

As Zinoviev and Kamenev would admit to Trotsky two years later, the charge of 'underestimating the peasantry' was entirely fabricated by the triumvirate. The levelling of such a charge, however, was not merely a squalid backstage plot; it reflected a bending to class forces hostile to the workers' state, both within the Soviet Union and internationally.

As Trotsky remarked, the accusation of communists wanting to rob the peasant was the stock-in-trade of 'reactionary agrarians, the Christian Socialists and the Fascists' ('My Life', Penguin, p.538). The concessions to the richer peasants at home and the building-up of the peasantry as a revolutionary class on the world arena would have the most far-reaching effects upon Communist Parties all over the world.

With Trotsky ill and having been placed under strict discipline, Stalin was emboldened to threaten the opposition with suppression at the Russian party's 13th Conference in January 1924. To provide the triumvirate with a docile 'block vote', 240,000 raw members – the so-called 'Lenin levy' – were enrolled in the party between February and May 1924.

Although Trotsky was able to defend himself at the 13th Congress which followed in May, he remained bound, under threat of expulsion, not to reopen a public struggle. His speeches from this period however, without overstepping the bureaucratic strictures placed upon him, continued to defend the essential ideas of the Opposition. 'Perspectives and Tasks in the East' (April 21, 1924) considers the prospect of the Kuomintang unifying China, and concludes – in opposition to the official line that it could defend the interests of workers and peasants – that this would lead to an extension of capitalist development. 'Through What Stage Are We Passing?' (June 21, 1924) is both an exposition of the law of uneven and combined development and an implicit criticism of the line of the Comintern's Fifth Congress (then in session), particularly in relation to the German events.

Trotsky played no active role in the Fifth Congress of the Comintern, which met between June 17 and July 8, 1924. He had, however, written its manifesto, which included a clear message to the communists of Asia: 'The parties of national liberation and petty-bourgeois utopias are melting into the void. The revolutionary movement is penetrating deeper and reaching wider and wider masses. A strong, centralised, revolutionary party is required to take control of this movement and deal British imperialism its death blow.' (Degras, p.110)

The Congress was dominated by the German events and the struggle against Trotsky. Its fundamental tasks should have been 'first, to call this defeat clearly and relentlessly by its name, and to lay bare its "subjective" cause, allowing no-one to hide behind the pretext of objective conditions; secondly, to establish the beginning of a new stage during which the masses would temporarily drift away, the social democracy grow, and the communist party lose its influence; thirdly, to prepare the Comintern for all this so that it would not be caught



Trotsky reviewing troops in Red Square, November 7, 1924

unawares and to equip it with the necessary methods of defensive struggle and organisational consolidation until the arrival of a new change in the situation'. ('The Third International After Lenin', p.77)

Zinoviev, by contrast, maintained that 'the objective situation is still revolutionary', reiterating that social democracy had become 'a wing of fascism'. Varga, delivering the report on the world economic situation, stubbornly refused to recognise any 'stabilisation' in capitalist economy. Under such circumstances it was necessary to present 'Trotskyism' as a 'petty-bourgeois deviation' and an extensive resolution on this theme was passed (see *Communist International*, December 1924-January 1925). Relatively little time was allotted to the national and colonial question. But here, most clearly, was seen the reverse side of the 'leftist' rhetoric. Manuilsky's report accelerated the growing adaptation to bourgeois nationalism, raising the perspective not only of communist parties entering, to establish the beginning of a new stage during which the masses would temporarily drift away, the social democracy grow, and the communist party lose its influence; thirdly, to prepare the Comintern for all this so that it would not be caught

China and Java, this policy had been carried out without the sanction of any previous Comintern Congress, and in defiance of the line of both the Second and Fourth Congresses.

No decisions on the national and colonial question were passed by the Fifth Congress; five resolutions which had been prepared were referred to the presidium – possibly the result of differences between Stalin and Manuilsky.

The course towards the Kuomintang (described by *Pravda* at the time as a *sympathising* party of the Comintern) was paralleled on an international scale by overtures to the Croatian Peasants' Party (in reality a bourgeois party) and in the disastrous attempt to form a Farmer-Labor Party with supporters of Republican senator La Follette in the United States. The grossly inflated claims made at the Fifth Congress for the Peasant International (Krestintern) were buttressed by all sorts of 'orthodox' genuflections to previous Comintern Congresses; but the new line of inflating the 'revolutionary peasantry' everywhere was expressed in the conception of a 'workers' and peasants' bloc' in which 'the interests of the two great exploited classes are identical' (*Communist International*, December 1924-January

1925, p.101). In Italy, this turn to the peasantry was carried out directly at the expense of the Communist Party's influence in the working class. As cadres were turned into the south of the country, it was reported in November 1924 that peasants made up as much as a quarter of the party. Boasts that the PCI led an 'Association for the defence of the peasants' numbering 75,000 members obscured the relative decline of its position in the industrial north (see A. Davidson: 'The Theory and Practice of Italian Communism', Merlin, pp.151-2). In June 1924, it was reported that the Japanese Communist Party, having been outlawed, had been reconstituted as a 'Workers' and Peasants' Party'.

The entire activity of the Comintern leadership on the peasant question during 1924 had sharply departed from the Bolshevik line of 'carrying the class struggle into the village', i.e. of seeking a basis of support for proletarian dictatorship among the rural poor. Instead, by placing an equals sign between the working class and the peasantry, it began compromising internationalism with the narrow horizons of the village petty-proprietor.

To be continued

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Labour's political police

HERE is a book which should find its way on to the shelves of every aspiring Labour bureaucrat. Eric Shaw's theme is the problem of successive generations of Labour leaders in maintaining 'managerial control' over the left wing of the rank-and-file.

He writes entirely from the standpoint of the Labour bureaucracy, sounding like a headmaster who has swallowed a sociology textbook. Shaw clearly believes that members are responsible to the leaders, but that the leaders are responsible solely to the 'electorate', the parliamentary party or their 'consciences'.

'A party,' he lectures us, 'also requires an apparatus of

control, that is, organisational means to monitor or scrutinise the activities of constituent units and ensure compliance with rules or authorised directives.' Did you know that Labour Party activists have 'remunerative', 'purposive' and 'solidaristic' modes of involvement? Well, now you do!

But it's worth ploughing through this type of garbage because the book is perversely readable, not least because the author has spent a lot of time rooting through Labour Party archives. He offers 'particularly grateful' acknowledgments to three significant figures in the history of anti-Trotskyism - former general secretary Jim Mortimer, who in the 1930s, along with fellow-Stalinist

Discipline and Discord in the Labour Party

by Eric Shaw

Manchester University Press £11.95

Review by Richard Price

Ted (now Lord) Willis, led the baiting of Trotskyists in the Labour League of Youth; Lord Reg Underhill, arch-witch-hunter of the 1950s; and Ian Mikardo, who played a role in the purging of the Young Socialists in 1964.

Of particular interest is Chapter Six, 'Labour's response to Trotskyism, 1951 to the late 1960s'. In addition to brief case histories of purges of members of the 'Group' and the Socialist Labour League in Norwood, Islington, Streatham and

Paddington, Shaw gives some details of the sources of intelligence used by the witch-hunters, ranging from MI5 and the Special Branch to trade union officials and ex-Trotskyists. He accepts unquestioningly the right of parliamentary agents and regional organisers to maintain detailed secret dossiers on individual members, and even to hand over their addresses to the police. He also shows that in the course of purging constituency parties, Labour officials frequently broke the

rules - as in the case of Streatham CLP in 1959 which was suspended and Gerry Healy excluded on the personal authority of the Regional Organiser.

Shaw justifies the operation of what he calls 'social democratic [i.e. bureaucratic] centralism' on the grounds that it was directed against factions operating with their own internal discipline and 'ideologically offensive' views. As Trotsky remarked, the only factions recognised by reformist leaders as legitimate are their own.

Further chapters bring the struggle against the left up to date with the revival of 'centralism' under Kinnock and its use against *Militant*. However, in contrast to the time spent on various

'Trotskyist' groups, little reference is made to the extensive 'entryism' practised by Stalinists in the 1940s.

Shaw does make some perceptive remarks. He writes that *Socialist Outlook* (the paper of the Healy entry group from 1948-54) 'diluted its message in order to extend its influence'; he notes that although the state capitalist *Young Guard* group (forerunner of the SWP) was investigated in 1962, it was not proscribed, since it was seen as a counterweight to the SLL-controlled *Keep Left*; and he emphasises the role of the 'soft left' in assisting the anti-*Militant* drive under Kinnock.

All-in-all, a reactionary but useful guide to Labour Party internal 'democracy'.

Class lines drawn in West Virginia

DIRECTED by John Sayles and photographed by Haskell Wexler, *Matewan* portrays a very important chapter in the history of the American working class - the struggle to unionise the miners of West Virginia.

It is that very rare thing - an American film which places the class struggle centre stage and which treats it in a partisan manner. Even in Michael Cimino's fine 'Heaven's Gate' (which dealt with the cattle barons' war against immigrant farmers in Johnson County, Wyoming, in 1891), the main characters were ambivalent and lay on the margins of the action.

Not that Sayles goes in for any corny idealisation of the miners. Basing his film upon detailed research and shooting it entirely on location in the area where the titanic West Virginia Coal Wars of 1920-21 took place, he explores all the bitterness and tension of a long-running strike against wage cuts and for union recognition.

The mineowners of West Virginia operated with a rarely-surpassed viciousness. In the mining towns or 'camps', they owned literally everything. Fixed deductions

were made for board and lodging, fuel, tools, washing facilities, lighting and medical care. The only shops, amusements and even churches were owned by the companies. Private detectives were employed to spy on and terrorise miners and their families suspected of union activity. Public officials were frequently paid directly by the employers.

Against this background, the *Matewan* strike of 1920 began. Black and Italian miners brought in to break the strike walked out in solidarity when they realised the nature of the 'jobs' on offer. The company responded by evicting the miners and their families, using a provocateur in their ranks and bringing in the infamous Baldwin-Felts detective agency. Events escalated irrevocably to a shoot-out between the miners, supported by the local police chief (an examiner) and the mayor, and



Union organiser Joe Kenehan (Chris Cooper, right front) with a group of miners and the local police chief in a scene from 'Matewan'

the Baldwin-Felts men - the direct prelude to the Coal Wars.

Sayles brings the best out of a fine cast, with excellent performances all round, especially from Chris Cooper as union organiser Joe Kenehan, James Earl Jones as black miners' leader 'Few Clothes', Will Oldham as 15-year-old Danny, a miner and lay preacher, and Kevin Tighe as the brutal detective

Hickey. Despite the improbable pacifist opinions which Kenehan is saddled with, 'Matewan' is a film which knows which side it's on and deserves the strongest recommendation.

● A useful background to the events covered by the film is Winthrop D. Lane's 'Civil War in West Virginia', written in 1921 and issued in Britain by Journeyman Press.

Sowing the seeds of confusion

Speed-The-Plow
by David Mamet
National Theatre

Review by
Robert Williams



Charlie Fox (Alfred Molina, left) and Bobby Gould (Colin Stinton) in 'Speed-The-Plow'

DAVID MAMET claims that Hollywood is 'a sinkhole of depraved venality'. Having trained in the early 70s as an actor-playwright in Chicago's relatively genteel theatre world, Mamet seems to have been ill-prepared for the harsh dollar cult he subsequently encountered.

During production of his first screenplay he was thrown off the set by its producers (later, to his glee, the film flopped), although he has since established himself as a bankable asset with 'House of Games' and 'Things Change', American

tales of petty criminality and mistaken identity.

'Speed-The-Plow' may have begun as Mamet's revenge on Hollywood. It is the third of his plays to be staged at the National, following 'American Buffalo' in 1978 and 'Glen Garry, Glen Ross' in 1983 (a Pulitzer prize-winner). Both of these earlier plays were set

in Chicago; they have ingenious plots, richly inventive dialogue and small casts of (all-male) opportunists bent on making a fast buck by any means available. They also have resolutions which make no demands upon the ethical or political attitudes of their audiences.

In this last respect at least,

'Speed-The-Plow' should have been different, since Mamet initially sought to pit the vice of making bad films against the virtue of making good ones. Does Bobby Gould (Colin Stinton), a newly-promoted producer now number two in the studio hierarchy, offer his boss the trashy, but money-spinning, 'buddies-in-prison' script which fell into the lap of his co-producer Charlie Fox (Alfred Molina)? Or does he take on a book about radiation and the 'end of the world' - a guaranteed commercial flop if ever there was one - on the advice of his new and seductive secretary, Karen (Rebecca Pidgeon)?

This play is a fable, but one with a difference, since both the scripts on offer to Gould are dire. 'Speed-The-Plow' races along, with Mamet's ear for dialogue as brilliantly attuned as ever, but the moral furrow is hard to follow.

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TUC: running up the white flag in the health service

LABOUR and TUC leaders are in full-scale retreat over the Thatcher government's proposals for breaking up the National Health Service. Since the proposals were published in January in the White Paper, 'Working for Patients', not one serious policy statement has been issued by Labour or TUC headquarters attacking the Tory plans.

The government has followed up its broadside on the NHS with a further eight working papers detailing how the NHS is to be dismantled. In March, a further increase in prescription charges from £2.60 to £2.80 was announced, making a total of eleven so far

during the ten years of Thatcher. Each month brings with it announcements of further drastic cuts in the NHS, such as the decision to abolish 18 hospitals in the Birmingham area - all without comment from Walworth Road or Congress House.

In February, NUPE and NALGO leaders issued a substantial briefing to health service members outlining the government's attacks. While the document analyses in some detail the impact on general practitioners' services, there is not a single mention of the focus of attacks - the trade unions organising in the NHS! The strongest words NUPE and NALGO leaders can find in defence of health workers is

that 'different rates of pay between self-governing hospitals and NHS hospitals will further exacerbate an already serious staffing situation'. While the defence of wages is undeniably of concern to every worker, the central focus of attack is the destruction of national trade union organisation and jobs. On these questions NUPE and NALGO leaders remain silent - and not accidentally so - for they are resolutely opposed to a fight to defend their members.

In March, the TUC Health Services Committee met to

By Ian Harrison

consider the White Paper and agreed to recommend the following action to health service unions: to talk to leading members of the Tory and opposition parties; to liaise with the BMA; and to print leaflets for mass distribution. The committee recognised that the White Paper 'has considerable implications for NHS employees' conditions of service, but . . . agreed at this stage no decision should be taken on the extent of any TUC involvement in preparing advice on these issues'. Every health worker and

trade unionist who seriously wants to fight the government proposals for the NHS should stop and think what this means. While the government's plans have been known since January, the TUC leaders cannot decide 'at this stage', to prepare 'advice on these issues'!

In the coming weeks health service unions will convene their annual conferences and discuss motions endorsing the TUC leaders' retreats. Health workers will be encouraged to discuss the Tory plans but not to formulate a programme for the defence of jobs and national negotiating machinery.

As an immediate step, workers in the NHS must organise local joint trade

union committees to link up the fight nationally against privatisation, cuts and closures.

Trade unions and Constituency Labour Parties must bombard Congress House and Walworth Road with resolutions demanding that a future Labour government re-nationalise hospitals which 'opt out' of the NHS, and restores all services which have been cut and the trade union right to collective bargaining. ● Occupy hospitals threatened with closure! ● Nationalise the drug industry under workers' control! ● Mobilise the working class to bring down the Tories! ● Build a revolutionary leadership in the trade unions!

Fight abolition of dock scheme

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strike and I know the dockers don't want a strike.' He went on to call upon the Tories to 'intervene'.

Meacher's remarks are an insult to the 3,000 dockers who defied union instructions and took strike action in 11 ports the day after the announcement of abolition.

Ron Todd and the 'Broad Left' T&GWU leadership have loyally toed the Kinnock line. Their role has been to seek every avenue to delay action and wear down the dockers' determination to defend their jobs.

While Kinnock and Meacher were appealing to the Tories to 'intervene', Todd was engaged in the grotesque charade of coaxing the employers into talks in order to comply with the definition of a trade dispute under the terms of the anti-union laws.

The employers, who stand to save £20 million per year through abolition, declined Todd's proposal that they act against their own class interests and draw up a new national agreement along the lines of the existing scheme, and turned down the offer of arbitration through ACAS.

With the T&GWU leadership seeking 'conciliation', the National Association of Port Employers has been preparing battle plans for the last 18 months. A confidential document made public on April 8 specifies the diversion of trade to ports not covered by the Dock Labour Scheme, the use of the courts against sympathetic action and a carefully-planted propaganda war.

It is time to face reality squarely. The attempt by the T&GWU leadership to confine any action to the 'scheme' ports will not only fail to appease the judges; it will prepare the ground for dockers to be isolated and defeated in the same way that printers and seafarers have been betrayed. Dockers must be under no illusion that Todd, Morris and Co., who called off solidarity action in support of the miners, have any intention of fighting to defend their jobs. The T&GWU leaders' sights are firmly set on smoothing the path of Kinnock's reactionary 'policy review', and they are more than prepared to sacrifice their own members to do so. The struggle to defend jobs and unions in the ports must go hand-in-hand with a struggle to replace the T&GWU leadership.

ACTORS attending their union's AGM in London on April 16/17 voted overwhelmingly to defend author Salman Rushdie. The successful emergency motion, moved by members of the Workers International League, was originally excluded from the agenda by the right-wing Equity leadership. It was opposed by the WRP News Line group which managed to muster only a handful of votes against.



Dockers from scheme ports around the country lobby a meeting of the National Docks Committee of the T&GWU on April 11

Tories step up attack on the closed shop

IN ITS fifth round of anti-union laws, the Tory government plans to attack workers' rights further by targeting the closed shop. The Green Paper published in March, Removing Barriers to Employment, seeks to make it a crime of discrimination for an employer to refuse employment to someone on the grounds of non-membership of a trade union.

From a stated position in 1982 of willingness to go to jail in the fight against such laws, trade union and Labour leaders now have almost nothing to say, let alone any real campaign of opposition to them. Gleaning the press for reaction to the Green Paper, we find that TUC general secretary Norman Willis accused the

government of 'inventing' problems with industrial relations to attack trade unions, while Michael Meacher, Shadow Employment Secretary, described the Green Paper as 'a totally unnecessary and gratuitous set of proposals'.

The government - despite pressure from many Tory MPs, including a motion signed by 193 of them - are not outlawing the closed shop altogether. In the words of Employment Minister Patrick Nicholls: 'It is like trying to ban a state of mind. This is a down-to-earth, practical approach.' The Tories will not go down the road of the Heath government of the early 1970s, which outlawed the closed shop completely, choosing instead to systematically attack workers' rights,

By Jon Bearman

piece by piece.

Ten years of Tory rule has seen the elimination of many closed shop agreements, particularly in the nationalised industries such as shipbuilding and British Rail Engineering. The number of workers in closed shops fell from 5 million in 1978 to 2.6 million last year, with an equal number in both pre- and post-entry closed shops. Those affected by the latest proposals are seafarers, printers, journalists on newspapers and in broadcasting, actors and T&GWU members in road haulage and London's wholesale food markets. The legislation will also for the first time cover professional bodies such as

the British Medical Association and the Royal College of Nursing.

The Green Paper plans to give the individual scab the support of the law in taking employers to an industrial tribunal, thus putting the pressure on employers to end closed shop agreements. It also aims to eliminate loopholes in existing legislation which allow very limited secondary action. Even threats of secondary action could be outlawed, such as that which deterred the Ford Motor Company from setting up a single-union factory in Dundee last year. 'Regardless of whether they are lawful or unlawful under the present law, there is no good reason why any threats of this kind . . . should enjoy immunity.' In addition, the

law requiring pre-strike ballots is to be extended to include those working under 'contracts of service', i.e. free-lancers and the self-employed.

Meanwhile the Conservative Trade Unionists, who have provided many of the ideas for previous Tory assaults on the unions, see the proposals as insufficient and have put forward a further set of proposals to the Department of Employment. These include statutory controls on union mergers, ballots in unions before affiliating to the Labour Party and bringing the TUC under the Fair Trading Act, 1973 - with the intention of ending the TUC Bridlington agreement which forbids unions from poaching members from one another.