

# Workers News



Paper of the Workers International League

No.58 October-November 1996 50p

## BLAIR'S BOSSES' CHARTER

By Steven Jones

TONY BLAIR's mission to destroy Labour as a workers' party cannot any longer be in doubt. His intervention at the TUC congress in September made it clear that, given half a chance, a Blair government would break the link with the trade unions and complete the transformation of New Labour into a purely capitalist party.

Tory posters proclaiming 'New Labour, New Danger' are supposed to panic voters into believing that behind Tony Blair's smooth talk, the red menace still lurks. Nothing could be further from the truth. The real danger Blair represents in the present situation is not to the bottom bosses, fat cats and Middle Englanders who have lived high on the hog for years under the Tories, but to the millions of workers who will vote Labour at the next election.

Almost every day, some part of the old Labour baggage of welfarism is thrown overboard, and replaced by a slick reworking of Tory policy. Anyone who still doubts the direction Blair is heading should read the Labour Party's draft election manifesto, *The Road to the Manifesto*, which was published in July. Billed as a radical 'contract for a new Britain', this mish-mash of soundbites, commitments to sound capitalist economics and bogus calls for individual rights spells out what can be expected of a Blair government. Above all, it is a manifesto for the bosses.

After two years of refusing to commit himself to anything, Blair has finally come up with some pledges – most of them almost worthless. The first – very modest – proposal is to cut school class sizes to 30 or under for 5- to 7-year-olds. But the vast majority of Tory education changes would remain intact, including streaming and selection. Although Blair has claimed he will scrap the nursery voucher scheme, the hated SATS tests are not mentioned. Rather than improving education, New Labour blames working class parents and wants to sack teachers for poor results.

Significantly, Labour's policies on education have been lumped in with the section of the document which deals with the economy, under the empty phrase 'the more you learn the more you earn'. This is ironic considering that Labour now supports the abolition of student grants and the imposition of a graduate tax. Such policies are guaranteed to drive working class people out of education and into low-paid jobs.

Blair's second pledge is on law

and order, promising fast-track punishment for persistent young offenders. Gone is any pretence of 'being tough on the causes of crime'. Meanwhile, shadow home affairs spokesperson Jack Straw, already notorious for his attack on beggars and 'squeegee merchants', has now gone a stage further by proposing US-style curfews on children and a crackdown on 'noisy neighbours'.

The next pledge is to reduce NHS waiting lists by 100,000 by cutting back on red tape. But there is no commitment to fully reverse the Tory health 'reforms'. Indeed, the logic of New Labour's support for the European convergence criteria is that welfare spending will be cut back still further.

Blair's next pledge is to reduce 250,000 under 25-year-olds off benefits and into jobs or training. But since he has given no commitment to repeal the Tories' Jobseeker's Allowance – only vague talk of 'reviewing' it – young people can expect to be forced into bargain basement 'training schemes' or the lowest paid employment. As the document ominously puts it: 'Where there is a suitable offer, people will be expected to take this up.' In other words, Labour is playing the same game as the Tories – blaming unemployment on the unemployed. Copying the Employment Service's jargon, New Labour patronisingly states: 'Rights and responsibilities must go together.'

Blair's fifth pledge captures the essence of his project. He reassures the bosses that New Labour will set tough rules for government spending and borrowing, with the goal of low inflation. Running a mile from Tory 'tax and spend' accusations, Blair plans to run the economy along similar lines to the Tories, with the only major difference being a more Euro-friendly policy.

It's no surprise that Blair's main 'pledge' on industrial relations is to keep the bulk of the Tories' anti-union laws in place, including those covering ballots, strikes and picketing. On other questions of employment law, the document performs a number of reactionary U-turns. Labour is no longer opposed to zero-hour contracts, which allow employers to keep workers hanging around waiting for work without paying them, and rights against unfair dismissal will be further eroded, with no protection against dismissal for taking strike action. Labour's claim to uphold 'minimum rights for the individual at work' amounts to very little. Workers may have the right to join a trade union, but few rights once the union decides to do anything. Indeed, New

Labour's attitude towards industrial action has sunk to a new low with David Blunkett's condemnation of the London Underground strike and Blair's arrogant ultimatum to the postal workers. Labour still supports a minimum wage, but since the figure will be decided in consultation with the bosses, it will be so low as to be almost worthless. It may even be decided on a regional basis.

As expected, there are no pledges to renationalise public services and utilities. The highly unpopular privatisation of the railways will not be reversed, but only modified by some vague form of 'public accountability', with ownership of Railtrack possibly vested in a 'partnership' between the public and private. A large majority of Scots who want their own parliament. In a shift widely seen in Scotland as yet another concession to Middle England, Blair has retreated from promising a Scottish Assembly with tax raising powers to proposing a referendum to decide the issue. Matching this is a retreat on constitutional reform. Instead of abolishing the House of Lords, Blair plans to fill it with his own appointees, leaving its legislative powers unaltered.

Labour's pro-imperialism is stronger than ever, with a clear commitment to Trident nuclear weapons, an entire section headed 'Leadership in the world', and a promise to continue the reactionary 'peace process' in Ireland.

Some on the left like Tony Cliff of the Socialist Workers Party are already speculating that a Blair government will have a two-year honeymoon. But the point is not just to sit back and wait for developments to unfold. Socialists should be putting forward concrete fighting demands now and preparing for the battles ahead. Millions of workers will be voting Labour in the general election, not with the expectation that a Labour government will lead to enormous change, but that it will reverse the worst aspects of Tory rule.

Socialists won't win an audience by simply rubbishing these illusions and refusing to vote Labour. Their role should be to test these illusions out in struggle, by focusing them on a programme of key demands – the repeal of the anti-union laws, the asylum and immigration laws, and all other repressive legislation; the renationalisation of the privatised industries and utilities; the reversing of the cuts and 'reforms' in health and education; a massive job creation programme; a guaranteed minimum wage at a level set by the trade unions;



Striking postal workers on a picket line in central London in July

the scrapping of the Jobseeker's Allowance and an increase in all benefits; for troops out of Ireland and against a bosses' Europe.

We are in favour of building a socialist campaign for a Labour victory to fight for these demands. Such a campaign should not be seen as some kind of alternative programme for a Labour government. Rather, its starting point should be the concrete demands which are being raised by militant sections of workers, and its aim should be to maximise their political impact by taking them into the labour movement.

Most of the left has completely lost its way in relation to Labour. Some are preparing their own little sectarian election campaigns; others are going to abstain. For them, the decisive question is Labour's programme. But the Marxist definition of Labour as a bourgeois workers' party since the turn of the century was never dependent on the virtues of its programme, but on the fact that, despite its capitalist politics, it was a party based on the working class and its organisations. Without underestimating for a second the danger of Blair's reactionary course, this remains the case.

While the Labour left has gone down to defeat after defeat, the trade unions still have a significant collective role within the party. Blair has already clashed with union bosses over issues like full employment, the minimum wage and the party's rela-

tionship to the unions. It is highly likely that at least a section of the trade unions will come into conflict with a Blair government, and that this will have an impact on Labour. This is why Blair has been so desperate to weaken the trade union link, and why he has cut the unions out of the so-called consultation exercise for the manifesto. State funding for political parties looks increasingly attractive to the Blairites as a way of freeing Labour from financial dependence on the unions. Even the cowardly union leaders would face problems if they conceded defeat on this one.

Rumblings of discontent are emerging within the party from the shadow cabinet to the rank and file. Even new members are becoming disillusioned with Blair's autocratic and shallow style. The lack of consultation with members or the unions over *The Road to the Manifesto* has angered many. Labour conference cannot amend the document, and the only participation from members will be a take-it-or-leave-it plebiscite at the end of the process. We believe that a historic battle lies ahead. Blair is qualitatively different to past Labour leaders, in that he is attacking the entire basis of the Labour Party, including its character as a party based on the working class. His project has come a long way in a short time, but it still has a way to go. It can still split the labour movement down the middle. Socialists cannot afford to abstain on such a crucial issue.

### Defend the union link!

# Strike against JSA!

By Benefits Agency and  
Employment Service  
CPSA members

ON OCTOBER 7 and 8 a two-day strike by CPSA members in the Benefits Agency will take place. It is the fourth round of strike action in opposition to government plans to deliver the Jobseeker's Allowance – the new benefit which replaces Unemployment Benefit and Income Support on October 7 – from unscreened job centres.

Any industrial action which obstructs JSA implementation is to be welcomed, but there are many problems for union activists to overcome. The strikes are purely defensive and limited to the question of screens. Although this is an important health and safety issue, given the desperation and anger of many claimants, the union campaign runs the risk of driving a wedge between benefit workers and claimants. Union activists must con-

tinue to forge links with unemployed groups, and fight for the CPSA to oppose JSA on principle as a vicious attack on both the unemployed and those who work in social security and dole offices.

However, the immediate threat to the success of the campaign lies within the union itself. The right-wing 'Moderate' grouping which leads the National Executive Committee has consistently sabotaged the, admittedly weak, campaigns of the Broad Left-controlled section executives in the Benefits Agency and the Employment Service, and would like nothing better than to see the BA SEC defeated now. In the Employment Service, the absence of a serious campaign has enabled the right wing to prevent even a ballot for industrial action being held. The bureaucrats who run the union are more concerned with protecting their inflated salaries than with giving their low-paid members strike pay, or adopting a proper strategy of hard-hitting selective action which would hurt management.

## Postal workers under pressure

Postal workers have been in the forefront of fighting Tory attacks on the public sector. After eight solidly supported one-day strikes over the summer months which brought the postal service to a halt, **Workers News** spoke to **John Ireland**, Merseyside branch secretary of the Communication Workers' Union, about the issues involved and the future of the dispute. Since the interview, the CWU executive has

*What are the main issues of the current dispute?*

Issues such as team working are central. We already work as a team, but now management want to introduce performance targets and bonus payments around individual teams. This would mean members who are old or sick would slow that team down. Management want us to act as bosses and put pressure on each other to work harder, which is totally unacceptable. There is also the fact that management want to separate other staff, such as cleaners and admin staff, from any agreement over job security as a first step to contracting out these areas. We are not prepared to see that happen.

*How solid is the strike?*

It's had 95 per cent support, but management have lied about the figures by including those on leave or sick as being in work. For example, in my divisional area of North Wales and the North West of England, out of 20,000 postal workers only 500 went into work, whilst in the Merseyside district, out of 3,000 members not one crossed the picket lines.

*Management, the Tories, and now Tony Blair have all demanded that you re-ballot on a slightly amended offer. What's your response?*

There is no need to ballot again as our mandate is clear. The fact is that every strike has been well supported, and our argument is that members are voting with their feet. As for Tony Blair, well he is completely against our dispute, and is using the existence of anti-trade union laws to try and put pressure on us to end it.

*Your general secretary, Alan Johnson, also tried to get you to accept an ACAS-negotiated settlement. What are your views on this?*

No one is against talks with ACAS, but at the end of the day we want our demands met. Alan Johnson is accountable to the National Executive, and he is in turn directly responsible

to the membership. It will be the Executive and the members who decide on how this dispute is settled.

*So is there a strong level of rank-and-file control in the CWU?*

Yes, compared to some other unions we have very few bureaucrats. The National Executive is elected every year and its members can be easily removed if the membership don't support them.

*The Tories want to privatise the Post Office. How can this be stopped?*

Well, not by PR stunts alone! Only industrial action can defeat the Tories' plans, and over the last four years 30 per cent of all industrial action in this country was actually in the Post Office, much of it unofficial. So far as privatisation is concerned the union has an official policy to ballot for industrial action if it is attempted.

*What will be your demands on the next Labour government?*

We want the Post Office kept in the public sector, and our union policy is that all privatised utilities should be brought back into public ownership.

*You're a member of the Socialist Labour Party. Has it made any interventions into the dispute?*

Well, the SLP has given support, but it is only a small party. However, I'm speaking at SLP meetings on the dispute organised around the forthcoming TUC and Labour Party conferences.

*Do you think you can win the dispute?*

Yes! The membership are totally behind the strikes, and we had the biggest ever turnout for the original ballot, and the biggest ever 'yes' vote for strike action. We will continue for as long as it takes to win. Management, pressured by the Tory government and supported by the likes of Blair, have dug themselves into a hole and they can't get out without agreeing to our demands.

Sabotage from the right wing is hardly a surprise. That being said, the record of the Militant-led Employment Service section executive amounts to a series of lame excuses. A clear policy passed at CPSA conference in May 1995 to boycott all JSA preparatory work has never been implemented. Not until August this year was a campaign pack issued – and then in such small quantities as to be impractical to circulate to all members. No wonder many members are asking whatever happened to the campaign against JSA.

The left in the union needs to focus its attention on developing a genuinely democratic rank-and-file movement in opposition to the closet Tory union leadership. A new umbrella organisation – Left Unity – was launched at this year's conference, aiming to unite the three left groupings within the CPSA. But, so far, little has been done to build it on the ground, and there are good reasons for believing it is heading towards an unprincipled bureaucratic lash-up between Militant supporters and BL84, with few democratic structures and an electoral programme based on the lowest common denominator. Militant supporters also played the leading role in recommending acceptance of disastrous pay deals in both the BA and the ES, in opposition to Broad Left and conference policy, using the excuse of 'prioritising the struggle against JSA'. In the ES, which has seen no 'struggle' at all, it now sounds like a sick joke. Militant is drifting further to the right, and union activists will have to reject its mis-leadership if they are to make a success of Left Unity and be in a position to defeat the right-wing.

The struggle against JSA will be won only if we have any illusions that a limited campaign of industrial action can stop it. What is needed is a comprehensive campaign involving three key components:

- Wide-scale industrial action in social security offices and job centres;
- Direct action by claimants (occupations, demonstrations, etc), co-ordinated wherever possible with trade union action, but not dependent on it;
- A clear call for the next Labour government to abolish JSA and restore benefit rights.



New Labour, new Scotland... new referendum. Labour chief whip Donald Dewar and shadow Scottish secretary George Robertson

## Labour U-turn on Scottish Assembly

THE DECISION by the Labour Party leadership to make the introduction of a Scottish Assembly dependent on a referendum should be rejected.

A clear majority of Scots, including workers, favour the setting up of a devolved parliament in Edinburgh. Although socialists have a duty to point out that it will be merely another tier of capitalist government, and that it will solve none of the problems of the Scottish working class, they should give this extension of democracy critical support as a limited expression of self-determination.

If there was any doubt about what line socialists should take, it was made clear by the Scottish Labour Party following the announcement in June by the leadership that an assembly with tax-raising powers would no longer be the automatic by-product of a Labour general election victory, and that there would have to be a referendum with two questions: 'Do you want a Scottish Assembly?' and, if so, 'Do you want it to have tax-raising powers?' After a stormy week in Scottish Labour politics in September, Blair was obliged to perform an about-face on the second question

(which proved particularly embarrassing for Blair loyalist and shadow Scottish secretary George Robertson), but has so far managed to make the first one stick.

In fact, Blair will be reasonably content with the outcome. The decision to go ahead with the assembly is still subject to a referendum. Once again, the wishes of the majority of Scots have been sacrificed on the altar of wooing Tory voters in southern England.

What about the issue of tax raising powers? Needless to say, as socialists we are less than enthusiastic about paying taxes! But Blair's attempt to deny a Scottish Assembly such powers is clearly intended to turn what would be an overwhelmingly anti-Tory parliament into a toothless talk-shop. Not only should socialists oppose the referendum diversion, and demand that a Labour government honours the previous pledge by creating a Scottish Assembly without delay, but they must involve themselves at every level in the debate around what the assembly should do, by raising workers' demands against the empty demagoguery of the nationalists. If there is a referendum, socialists should urge a critical vote in favour of an assembly.

## Minimum wage

# Launch a real fight now!

By David Lewis

THE overwhelming TUC vote in favour of setting a figure of £4.26 per hour as the minimum wage should be taken by workers at all pay levels as the signal to launch a real struggle against low pay. And struggle is the operative word, for not only will implementing even the inadequate TUC policy be subject to the usual trade union bureaucratic test of 'what is possible under the circumstances', but setting any specific figure is opposed vehemently by such 'heavyweights' as TUC general secretary John Monks, GMB leader John Edmonds and USDAW leader Garfield Davies. It is also opposed by Tony 'Social Justice' Blair and the rest of the Labour Party front bench, who would probably find it impossible to make ends meet on five times that amount, given the present price of champagne.

Tony is worried about what the

'country' can afford. So, instead of implementing a minimum wage policy when they get into office, New Labour will set up a Low Pay Commission consisting of people who know what the country can afford – employers, trade union leaders and academics – but not, of course, the low paid themselves, who only know what they cannot afford. It is fortunate for the 'country' that it has someone like Tony to worry about it because there are a lot of wild, irresponsible people around who don't seem to give a toss. For example, the hot-heads in the Chartered Institute of Management Accountants found that fewer than a quarter of their members think that a minimum wage of £4.26 would do any harm to their business. And the Confederation of British Industry reckons that it would add only 1.5 per cent to the overall pay bill.

So, seriously, why are the Labour leaders so concerned? There seem to be two reasons. Firstly, they believe that if the low paid get £4.26 an hour then workers on, say, £4.27 an hour

will want more and those on more will want even more and so on, and eventually really high paid workers such as the Chairman of British Gas might have to be paid less or even, horror of horrors, New Labour might have to increase taxes! Well, that would never do, because then Tony and Harriet would be no better than common socialists. Which brings us to the second reason: everyone knows that socialists don't win elections anymore, only Tories do.

The election of a Labour government will set the scene for a confrontation with the trade unions over pay, centred on the public sector. For the unions, the core demand must be neither a minimum wage of £4.26 set by the TUC nor an even lower minimum wage set by assorted employers, trade union leaders and academics, but a fair living wage set by a commission of the low paid and their allies. Joined with the demand for the repeal of all anti-union laws, this would be a powerful step forward by the working class.



## Editorial

### North of Ireland

# 'Peace process' unravels

TWO YEARS down the road, the 'peace process' in the north of Ireland is no nearer reaching a conclusion. Although there remains majority support in both loyalist and nationalist communities for some version of the process, the fact is that no side is satisfied with the present situation, because there are fundamentally different views of what the outcome should be.

The Drumcree and Derry flashpoints of the marching season saw broad sections of loyalism attempting to steer the process away from any concessions to the nationalist minority, while the angry response from nationalist residents' associations summed up the frustration of pro-peace republican activists with the lack of any tangible gains.

The contradictions at work within republicanism were graphically expressed in the *Andersonstown News*, a radical nationalist west Belfast weekly, on August 3. Its editorial argued that it was 'time to scuttle the talks farce', and went on to say: 'Sinn Féin's insistence on all party talks as a way to reach a settlement here was at best naive and at worst stupid. They have been hoist by their own petard.'

This is correct. But since the paper supports the peace process, the editorial's proposal – that everyone should 'get on with making the fundamental changes to society here that are urgently required' – means relying on Britain as an ally, and accepting as good coin the claim that Britain 'has no strategic or economic interest in Ireland'. It gives credibility to the reactionary view that the northern Irish conflict is simply a sectarian squabble between rival tribes, and is an implicit acceptance of the loyalist veto.

The events at Drumcree in July underlined

that this kind of analysis is thoroughly false. It has subsequently emerged that the police mutinied on the night of July 10, when ordered by RUC Chief Constable Sir Hugh Annesley to move the Orangemen from the road. Ulster Unionist leader David Trimble relayed a threat from the UVF that they would shoot if forcibly dispersed. And it was Northern Ireland secretary Sir Patrick Mayhew – not Annesley – who ordered the forcing through of the march. All this points to the collusion of the British state at the highest level with the loyalists, and represented a victory for the most reactionary sections of the British ruling class – the top brass of the military, the secret services and the City of London financiers, represented by the Euro-sceptic Tory MPs – over their rivals among the pro-European Tories and industrialists.

There are strong echoes of both the 1912 Curragh mutiny and the Ulster Workers' Council coup against the Sunningdale power-sharing executive in 1974. Once again, Northern Ireland has become a political football in feuds within the ruling class, used by the likes of Michael Portillo and Michael Howard to move the political agenda to the right. The ascendancy of the 'hawks' was demonstrated in west London on September 23, when an unarmed man suspected of belonging to the IRA died in a hail of police bullets. The choice of John Major's successor as leader of the Tory party may well be influenced by the events at Drumcree.

The significance of Drumcree was not lost on loyalists. As Tommy Kirkham, Lisburn Apprentice Boy and DUP delegate to the Stormont talks, said: 'We're not looking for a confrontation with our own security forces, and they are our own security forces.' Loyal-

ists re-claimed the RUC as *their* law and order force by pushing the march through, and by getting the RUC and British Army (many in RUC uniforms) to launch the savage attacks on the nationalist community afterwards. Of the 6,002 plastic bullets discharged by the RUC, 339 were fired at loyalists and 5,663 at nationalists. One nationalist demonstrator was murdered and several were injured. The Derry 'compromise' which followed Drumcree was a demobilisation by Sinn Féin – in effect, an acceptance of a new status quo after loyalists had reasserted their control over the RUC.

It is clear that Sinn Féin did not welcome militant mobilisations by their supporters demanding to be treated as equals. Ironically, it was the raised expectations in the peace process, which Sinn Féin had promoted, which led nationalist communities to try to enforce some visible accommodation from the state. And this, in turn, made the Orangemen determined to assert that nothing had changed, or would change.

In *An Phoblacht/Republican News* of August 8, regular correspondent Michael Mac Donncha was given a full page to counter the view that there are two equally valid traditions in the north of Ireland – one nationalist and one loyalist. 'What the "two traditions" argument obscures is the real question of political power and who wields it in Ireland and Britain,' he wrote. 'It absolves the British government of its primary responsibility as the sovereign power in the Six Counties and the biggest armed element in the conflict. It insidiously portrays the nationalists and unionists as two sides of the one coin. It talks, as Prionias de Rossa [leader of the Democratic Left] did recently, of "bigots on both sides".'

Together with several other letters and articles, this implicitly repudiates the line followed by Gerry Adams and Martin McGuinness throughout the 'peace process', as well as the strategy of the nationalist community leaders, who wish merely to negotiate with the loyalists to achieve 'consent'. But the debate, although revealing, is a safety valve which allows criticism of the leadership in times of crisis, while it continues to set the agenda. It is a kind of Six Counties version of China's 'Democracy Wall', and it will suffer a similar fate if a new left does not begin to crystallise in the wake of these most recent confrontations.

Rampantly reactionary loyalism drew its own lessons from Drumcree. It pressed home its advantage by burning down the houses of Catholic families in loyalist areas. In response, the nationalist community strengthened its resistance, and a new generation of radicalised youth and militants are emerging, for whom Adams and McGuinness – with their constant appeals for discipline and restraint – have little or nothing to offer. Resistance is being led on the ground by republican activists from the Bogside, the Garvaghy Road, the Lower Ormeau Road and other areas, although they apparently remain Adams supporters.

There is, as yet, little political clarity, but the mass mobilisations, the seething democracy of the residents' groups and the new militancy demonstrated in July and August point to a road distinct from either the military elitism of the IRA, or the blind alley of negotiations. Among such forces, the call for a new Republican Congress can find a response, and give revolutionary socialists the opportunity to argue for mass working class struggle as the way forward.

## Militant and AWL

# Apologists for loyalism

By Dan Gallagher

THOSE LEFT groups which strongly supported the 'peace process' and became promoters of 'loyalist socialism' found themselves on the wrong side of the barricades as the Northern Irish state exposed its sectarian and unreformable nature at Drumcree. Chief apologists for reaction are Militant Labour and the Alliance for Workers Liberty. They have no option now but to tough it out and defend the indefensible. Other groups who either supported a left version of the 'peace process', or sheltered cosily behind 'neither green nor orange' workerism, have beat a hasty retreat back to the relative political safety of support for the nationalists. These include the Socialist Workers Party and its Irish sister organisation, the Socialist Workers Movement, the Spartacists and Lutte Ouvrière. The only left groups in Ireland to emerge with any credit have been Socialist Democracy, a sympathising group of the United Secretariat, and the very small LRCI affiliate, the Irish Workers Group.

Militant Labour distinguished itself by holding a public forum in Belfast in May last year with Progressive Unionist Party leader and UVF sectarian killer Billy Hutchinson on their platform, in which they accepted his claim that he had become a so-

cialist. Not to be outdone, the AWL brought the same death squad leader to their Summer School at the end of June this year. Hutchinson's record includes murdering two Catholics, chosen at random. Not to be outdone, John Major had Billy's PUP comrades to tea at No. 10, including one John White who frenziedly stabbed nationalist senator Paddy Wilson and a friend to death in 1973.

Militant Labour has been led to its current position by a combination of reformism on the capitalist state and workerism. Its position on the state has led it inevitably to accept that it is possible to transform Britain's imperialist role into one of 'pressurising' the unionists to be reasonable. Another important feature of Militant's historical evolution has been its curious objectivism, whereby all struggles involving workers are rationalised as inherently progressive, and therefore require critical support. Rabid loyalist mobs are, after all, mainly composed of workers! Having swallowed the 'peace process' hook, line and sinker, reaction is reeling them to its bank.

This position is no accident. Militant's orientation is clearly to the skilled, better-off sections of workers. In northern Irish terms, this means a primary orientation towards loyalist workers. In the South it explains why Militant's Dublin West by-election candidate, Joe Higgins, gave so much space in his programme to law and

order. And it accounts for Militant's stark admission, made at the founding conference of Youth Against Racism in Europe, that it could not raise the slogan of troops out of Ireland because it would upset Protestant youth in Scotland. In the name of class unity, Militant panders to the backwardness of more privileged layers of workers at the expense of more oppressed ones.

But the Alliance for Workers Liberty is, if anything, even worse. 'Despite the official Tory-Unionist rhetoric which is still occasionally mouthed,' the AWL claims, 'the British state long ago declared in solemn official documents like the Sunningdale Agreement of 1973, and the Anglo Irish Agreement of 1985, that it would not stand against Irish unity if the Irish wanted it. . . . Gerry Adams's studied reasonableness is, in contrast, a fake. The IRA have been altogether more dogmatic and inflexible than the British government.' (*Workers Liberty* editorial, June 1996.) This marks a significant shift towards loyalism, even since February when John O'Mahony made some correct points analysing Major and the unionists' machinations in the peace talks.

In public debate, AWL members have stated that the concept of imperialism is no longer relevant. They strongly oppose Sinn Féin calling on John Major to coerce the unionists into a united Ireland. For the AWL,



Orange Order marchers at Drumcree in July

the rights of the Protestants are paramount. Its political strategy hinges on the *potential* oppression they might suffer in a united Ireland. Needless to say, in the AWL calculations, this greatly outweighs the *existing* oppression suffered by nationalists. And while it is correct to reject Gerry Adams calling on Major to provide a solution, the AWL is overall attacking him from the right.

This fact is underlined by a hilarious interview conducted by Mark Osborn and John O'Mahony with Tony Benn in 1994. Benn was defensive at first, and clearly expected to be attacked for his reformist, pro-imperialist positions by these 'Trotskyists'. But he was evidently amazed when he realised he was being attacked from the right by a group of socialist-loyalists!

Unlike Militant and the AWL, we

do not equate the likes of Billy Hutchinson with the Protestant working class. After all, the PUP polled a princely 3.47 per cent of the votes in the recent Forum elections. It is certainly necessary to appeal to the class instincts of Protestant workers. But this cannot be done by meeting reactionary loyalism halfway. The effect of Militant and the AWL's promotion of Hutchinson's 'socialist' credentials can only be to foster sectarianism and bigotry, while claiming to fight against it. The logic of equating the violence of the oppressed with the violence of the oppressor has driven such groups to become more and more pro-loyalist. Meanwhile, the rationale behind this position – that with the national question off the agenda, class politics would naturally emerge in its place – has come completely unstuck.

**Barry Murphy** looks at the situation in the workers' movement and suggests the way forward in a difficult period

RECENT issues of Workers News have looked at the need for regroupment among revolutionary socialists. Plainly, any regroupment must involve a theoretical reorientation; after all, it has been theoretical disorientation combined with an adverse situation in the class struggle internationally which have accelerated splits on the far left in recent years. A vital part of such a reorientation is an assessment of the nature of the current period, and, flowing from that, an assessment of what strategy and tactics are appropriate. This article attempts to sketch the nature of the current period, putting the situation in Britain in its international context. It takes issue with both the unduly pessimistic and lightmindedly optimistic conclusions of some leftists. In Britain, the likelihood of an extreme right-wing Labour government being elected, the relationship between that government and the trade union bureaucracy, and the conflict between trade unionists and their leaders will bring about a change in the political landscape. Revolutionaries will be able to take advantage of this new situation, but as a small minority in the labour movement for the time being, they will need a combination of tactical flexibility and political independence.

#### The nature of the period

So, then, through what period are we passing? It is insufficient to say simply that capitalism is undergoing a crisis and the working class is picking up the bill, although this is undoubtedly true. It is necessary to identify why the economic crisis is taking its particular form, and what it means in social and political terms. What lies behind the present crisis is the collapse of the post-Second World War political settlement, and therefore the collapse of the historic bloc – the set of alliances – which created and maintained it.

The post-war era has been characterised by mass production and mass consumption. Mass production (result-

ing from the inherent tendencies within capitalism towards monopoly production) created conditions for, and was facilitated by, state involvement and intervention. It was also the basis of the Keynesian economic theories which underlay capitalist economic policies in the 1950s and 60s. These provided the economic conditions for mass consumerism. Governments saw state intervention (often in the form of nationalisation, which had far less to do with socialism than with revitalising unprofitable capitalist industry) and consumerism as ways of maintaining social cohesion. The post-war economic order depended on a set of alliances. Fear of the revolutionary potential of the working class forced the ruling class to rebuild its hegemonic relations by incorporating sections of the working class (the labour aristocracy – the most highly skilled and highly paid sections of the working class – and the labour bureaucracy – the well paid trade union and social democratic leaders) into the set of alliances it needed to legitimise its rule after the Second World War.

This involved significant concessions, such as welfarism and greatly expanded consumer spending, which gained a degree of consent from the working class, while excluding it from power. This project depended on the labour bureaucracy selling it to the working class as a whole, and keeping the rank and file under control. Therefore, the social democratic and Stalinist parties played a key role in maintaining the post-war order. Nor should we forget that the twin project of state intervention and consumerism had a political purpose. During of the Cold War, it was important to convince workers that they did not need communism. Capitalism would educate them, keep them healthy, put a chicken in the pot and send them away on holiday every year – in their own car, of course.

Naturally, within this basic outline, there was considerable unevenness. The United States in the 1950s and 60s enjoyed possibly the greatest consumer boom the world has ever seen, while its welfare system remained primitive, and its working class relatively unorganised. In western Europe, Marshall

Aid developed the infrastructure and revitalised the manufacturing base. In Britain, short-termism was, of course, the order of the day. The ruling class skimmed on modernising the infrastructure and manufacturing base, and continued to rely on the Commonwealth and the colonies as a source of cheap food and a ready market for exports, with the City of London maintaining its parasitic dominance. The extensive welfare system was in part a reflection of the high level of organisation of the working class. Despite the 'People's War' propaganda, the war years had seen a strike wave, which had threatened to undermine both production and the pro-imperialist labour bureaucracy.

By the end of the 1960s, this model of capitalist accumulation through state intervention, whose main function was to regulate the political-business cycle of booms and slumps and resultant crises of overproduction, stagnation and inflation, was beginning to break down. The result was a structural crisis, involving the collapse of the Bretton Woods system of fixed exchange rates based on the primacy of the dollar in 1971, the Oil Crisis of 1973, and the subsequent rapid growth of inflation and unemployment.

The long-term outcome has been a shift from large-scale state investment to deflationary, neo-liberal economic policies; a shift of capital from production to money and finance; and a sustained attack on the gains won by the working class. What we are now witnessing is a conflict within the regime of capitalist accumulation and its associated hegemonic blocs. To overcome these contradictions poses the reorganisation of the social conditions of production, and the construction of a new set of alliances for the bourgeoisie.

What we have seen since the early 1980s, first in Britain and then in France, Spain and other western European countries, is a very definite attempt to reorganise the social conditions of production. There have been wholesale attacks on the rights of workers to organise, the tearing up of union recognition agreements, the use of mass unemployment as a weapon to force down wages and intimidate those in work,

'casualisation', the introduction of 'new working practices', 'new management techniques', the compulsory privatisation of public services, and so on. Underlying this assault is the drive towards the construction of international trading blocs. Of the three (the European Union, NAFTA and East Asia), the EU is the least profitable and the least competitive, precisely because of its relatively high wages and social provision. The convergence clauses of the Maastricht Treaty require a further attack on workers' living standards.

In Britain, this is causing a series of specific political problems for the ruling class. For instance, the national question is being posed more sharply in Scotland and Wales, where the destruction of whole sectors of the economy has fuelled a distinctively national response. The Tories are seen as an English party – and a southern English one at that! – which has wasted Scotland's oil on short-term consumer boomlets to featherbed English voters, and has created a giant and corrupt quangocracy in Wales in order to turn it into the sweatshop of Europe. Great Britain was a creature of Empire, and England in decline holds little appeal for many Scots and Welsh, some of whom look to the EU for a place in the sun.

Another big problem for the ruling class is the EU itself. Without going into detail on the split in the Tory party, the EU, although thoroughly capitalist, nevertheless poses a threat to the British ruling class's historic bloc, founded on the Empire and Commonwealth, with its strong aristocratic and imperialist influences. The British economy, dominated by the City and with strong *rentier* tendencies is particularly 'colonial'. Re-orientation towards Europe requires a re-orientation of this historic bloc and therefore of the Tory party.

The final element in all this is the collapse of Stalinism. The replacement of the repressive and decayed Stalinist regimes, not with workers' democracy but with a deformed version of state-capitalism, is undeniably a set-back for the international working class. In global terms, there is no longer any sort of counterweight at the level of state power

to imperialist control and exploitation of the planet. While the imperialist might not be able to press home their victory in the way that they would like it is nonetheless a victory. Many workers were rightly suspicious of the Soviet Union as it was, but saw it as proof that it was possible to create a non-capitalist society. Now that seems impossible, and workers are bombarded with lies about capitalism being simply 'human nature'. Capitalism is everywhere and it seems all-powerful.

In Britain, the events of the past 17 years have had a calamitous effect on the labour movement. The post-war historic bloc, of which the trade unions were a part, has broken up. Once, the trade union leaders were in and out of Downing Street all the time. But Thatcher threw the beer and sandwiches into the gutter, and the bureaucrats out into the cold. The bureaucrats cannot properly defend their declining power base, partly because they have capitulated to the anti-trade union laws and partly because they themselves have become 'new realists'. They accept the capitalist agenda – 'flexibility', single union deals, no-strike agreements, etc. – and they are tied to the Labour leadership, which wants a tame rank and file, both before and after it takes office.

The anti-union legislation passed by the Tories attempts to shackle the unions by means of a dual strategy. It strengthens the law against all effective forms of rank-and-file action, but it also strengthens the bureaucracy against the rank and file. The bureaucracy has a hand the demoralising and time-wasting rigmarole of strike ballots, and even if there is a vote for strike action, the leadership can use the threat of sequestration to prevent any effective solidarity action. Trade union membership has declined from over 12 million in 1980 to less than 7 million today, while strikes reached a 100-year low in 1994 with only a small upturn since then.

#### Reinventing the labour movement?

That things are bad is not in doubt. The important question is, just *how* bad are they, and this means returning to the crucial question: through what period are we passing? We are in a period of a reactionary offensive against the working class, its organisations, and the gains it has made. This offensive is based on the politics of neo-liberalism – a 'free' economy and a strong state. The situation is bad, but it is not *that* bad and nothing comparable to the defeat of the German and Spanish working class in the 1930s. In Britain, strike action is on the increase, albeit from a very low base, and the Tories' attempt to whip up an anti-union hysteria among the 'public' by talking of strike bans for certain public sector workers has not got off the ground. Of course the situation has been more positive elsewhere, with huge strike waves in France and Belgium, and significant actions in Italy and Germany.

However, the situation has disoriented many would-be revolutionaries. Some, such as a current within *Socialist Outlook*, advocate effectively abandoning the organisations of the labour movement in favour of what they describe as 'new social movements' – anti-road protests and the like. Workers Power, incredibly, makes two errors in one when describing the situation as a revolutionary period (wrong!) opened by a counter-revolutionary situation (wrong again!). The situation is neither revolutionary, nor is it counter-revolutionary. Others are advocating a restructuring or refunding of the labour movement – the building of new workers' parties. It explains why some activists have resigned from the Labour Party and joined Scargill's Socialist Labour Party (something examined in detail in

## US unions launch Labor Party

A LABOR Party has finally been formed in the United States after a convention held in Cleveland, Ohio, from June 6 to 9. Initial support for the launch came from five trade unions, and the convention was eventually attended by nearly 1,500 delegates. Nine national unions now support the Labor Party, including the Oil, Chemical and Atomic Workers (OCAW) and the United Electrical Workers (UE) – the two unions that established Labor Party Advocates in 1991 – the International Longshoremen's and Warehousemen's Union, the Maintenance of Way Employees, the United Mine Workers and the American Federation of Government Employees. In addition, the party is supported by hundreds of union locals, representing nearly two million workers from 46 states – about ten per cent of all unionists in the US.

A number of important unions were not represented, and the party is not officially backed by the AFL-CIO (the equivalent of the TUC), which, together with the bulk of its affiliated unions, still supports the Democrats. However, the launch does seem to have attracted some tacit support from the AFL-CIO, whose leaders probably see the new party as a means of putting

pressure on the Democrats without actually breaking from them. While OCAW leader and co-chair of the new party Robert Wages described the conference as 'the most important event in the labor movement in 40 years', it is clear that so far Labor represents only the embryo of a mass workers' party.

The conference did correctly call for mass recruitment and political actions which go beyond the electoral process. But the decision not to contest this year's elections is a setback. By not standing candidates, the Labor Party has missed a big opportunity to show its political independence from the two main capitalist parties – indeed there were still calls to support 'progressive' Democrats. This issue provided the most controversial debate, and the conference was full of infighting. The bureaucratic leadership around OCAW official Tony Mazzocchi resorted to various manoeuvres, but was not entirely successful as opposition from the rank and file grew. Obviously Labor will not be a revolutionary party. But socialists should fight to ensure that it stands for workers' self-organisation and for a class struggle programme.

Whether or not the Labor Party

remains a radical appendage of the Democrat Party will ultimately be the issue which determines its future. Although Clinton has steadily moved to the right, with a vicious new welfare law and the abject failure to deliver on the pledges on health care made in 1992, the Democrats have been making verbal overtures to workers. In his speech to the Democrat convention in Chicago endorsing Clinton, Teddy Kennedy attacked the Republican-controlled Congress over health care, the minimum wage and big business tax-dodging, and defended teachers against presidential candidate Robert Dole.

While their main fears will be the support won among blue-collar white workers by the Republicans after 1980, and the appeal of Ross Perot's demagoguery, Democrat strategists are also aware of the potential for the growth of an independent workers' party. The AFL-CIO, for its part, has mounted its most impressive campaign for years in support of 'labor-friendly' Democrats.

The constitution and statements of the Labor Party are full of populist ideology. The constitution agreed in Cleveland reads: 'We are the keepers of the American Dream of equality, opportunity and fairness. . . . We are the

people who build and maintain the nation but rarely enjoy the fruits of our labor.' This attachment to the American nation is reflected in the fact that there is no commitment to cut military spending, and only a call to reform NAFTA – despite the fact that it was the Democrats' U-turn on NAFTA that played a key part in convincing some trade unionists that a new party was necessary. Wages described the stance of the new party as 'somewhere between the old British Labour Party and the European Social Democrats', adding that 'we are not promoting public ownership of capital'.

Nonetheless, the party's manifesto still puts the British Labour Party's to shame and includes demands for a 32-hour working week, a minimum wage of \$10 per hour, the repeal of the anti-union laws, national health care, affordable child care and free education, and positive action in defence of the black and gay communities.

This at least gives socialists something to get their teeth into. And with the gap between rich and poor widening, and workers' living standards, housing conditions and welfare provisions under attack, these will certainly be among the key battles of the future.



# es do today?

Workers News Nos. 56 & 57). This is an avoidance of the struggle against the existing bureaucratic leaders of the working class movement, especially as millions of workers are about to vote Labour, not out of confidence but out of desperation. It lets the leadership off the hook, and abandons the rank and file, which, however confused and demoralised it is at present, will sooner or later move into struggle. What, then, are our perspectives for the coming period?

## Blair's project

Even the most hard-bitten opponent of Blair's New Labour project has trouble keeping track of the leadership's rush to the right. But Blair is not just about changing this or that policy. He wants to change the entire class character of the party. The scrapping of the almost wholly ornamental Clause 4 was a gesture towards the ruling class, a warning to the labour movement, and a sign of things to come. Blair's logical next step is to attack the trade union link. This would represent an attack on Labour's roots in the working class, with the aim of ending the association of the party with workers' organisations and relaunching it as the party of the 'enlightened' pro-European bourgeoisie. So far, Blair has had it easy. The ground was prepared by New Realism, the attacks on trade unions and the union leaderships' effective acquiescence to these attacks in the 1980s.

Up to now, Blair has been unable to break the link with the unions. Indeed, he had to depend on the trade union leaders to get his replacement Clause 4 through. The fact that the ruling class has less need for the trade union bureaucracy does not mean that its time is up. In relation to their rank and file, the trade union leaders are still strong. But the provocations launched by Blair and Blunkett at the TUC congress in September over the trade union link and the anti-union laws are a clear indication of what is to come. In government, the temptation for Blair to turn to state funding for political parties as a means to escape the financial embrace of the unions will become ever stronger. But this in turn could provoke a split in the Labour Party itself.

After 17 years of the Tories, the working class is desperate for a Labour government, even if it does not hold out great hopes in it. Revolutionary socialists must prepare now for the election of a Labour government, and the consequent raising of working class perspectives. A Labour government will give sections of the working class more confidence in raising their demands. They will see themselves as having brought Labour to office and will want something in return. There will not necessarily be a huge upsurge of militancy straight away. But, sooner or later, some kind of challenge to New Realism and the New Labour 'modernisers' is inevitable, as a reaction to Blair's anti-working class policies.

The trade union bureaucracy will be in a tricky position. It will need to police its members, and will want to keep a Blair government in office. But it will also be under pressure to defend its power base, the membership. The TUC saw a swathe of right-wingers, including general secretary John Monks and John Edmonds of the GMB, forced to criticise Blair's arrogant attempt to hijack the congress and please the Tory media by distancing himself from even the most elementary trade union principles. If Blair continues the Tories' attacks on the welfare state, public sector unions will be forced to fight back. Blair will be in the uneasy position of both confronting the trade union bureaucracy at the same time as relying on it. In this situation, revolutionaries must be prepared to relate to the angry rank and file, and to exploit the weak-

nesses of the compromised leadership.

## What is to be done?

First of all, who are we aiming at? We must come to terms with the fact that revolutionaries cannot at present address the entire class. Instead, we need to relate to the vanguard. What is the vanguard? The vanguard consists of the most militant and class conscious workers, together with the socialist-minded or subjectively revolutionary students and intellectuals. It is this vanguard which we must address in our press and in our political activity. We must seek to win the best of them. Through our relationship with the vanguard we must aim to win the young militants emerging from the next wave of struggle. How can we win the vanguard to revolutionary politics, given that revolutionaries are in a small minority? Socialist propaganda is important, but it cannot do the job on its own. Thus we need to develop a tactic by which we can fight for the broadest possible unity in action on any given question, while keeping the right to fight for our own politics. In other words: march separately, strike together! This is the method of the united front.

The united front's purpose is not to make common cause with reformists and bureaucrats, but with the rank and file. However, the bureaucratic leadership of the working class is the one the class presently looks to, and our whole analysis of the current period means that we have to relate to the working class primarily through its existing organisations. Imperfect as they are, we cannot sidestep them. Therefore our purpose is not just to 'expose' the leadership or to denounce it from the sidelines.

In order to relate to the vanguard, tactical alliances with bureaucrats will be necessary. If these alliances are conducted in the right way, they will help win the most militant workers away from the bureaucracy, towards revolutionary socialism. Therefore, we must use all our powers of persuasion to get left bureaucrats to lead struggles. Generally, they will not do so unless they are convinced that the union will be destroyed or seriously weakened, or unless they are convinced that an alternative leadership is breathing down their necks, resulting from a desire amongst the members for a fight. In other words, they will only fight if they fear the loss of their privileged positions. Pressure from the rank and file, combined with a political input from revolutionaries or union militants, puts the bureaucrats under pressure. If the struggle is won, then the class, or that section of it, gains in confidence, and the position of the rank and file *vis a vis* the leadership will be stronger, with more opportunity for intervention by revolutionaries, who will have been seen to have led the pressure for a fight in the first place. If the struggle is lost, then revolutionaries can argue that their tactics would have achieved a better result. If they fail to fight at all, we call for the membership to sack them. The task is not so much a propaganda one of 'exposing' the bureaucrats in print, but of forcing them to 'expose' themselves in action!

Of course, this tactic can only really be successful when there is pressure from below created by a movement in the class, and it is this movement which we aim to build and lead. This cannot be reduced to a sectarian 'party building' stunt. As revolutionaries, we have no interests outside those of the class, and all actions and slogans must be judged by the yardstick of building the struggle. This is in contrast to the bureaucrats, who maintain their relationship with the bourgeoisie, while concealing it from their members. In most cases, the union leaders' aim is not to win, but to bring about a 'settlement'



Health service workers' demonstration in December 1993

to keep the members happy and to prove to the ruling class how indispensable they are for keeping their members under control.

There are of course occasions when a trade union leadership is driven beyond these boundaries towards an all-out struggle against the employers or the state, or both. The obvious example is the 1984-85 miners' strike. Even in cases like this, we do not confuse our politics with those of reformism, however left. Left bureaucrats, even those who actually want to win, continue to fight with the conservative methods of the bureaucracy. They will not want the struggle to get out of their control. They will not call on the ranks of other unions for support, over the heads of the leaders. They will continue to respect the sectionalism of the trade union movement, and the artificial barriers, erected over long decades of class compromise, between the industrial and the political.

So the united front is most certainly *not* about maintaining a friendly relationship with 'important' bureaucrats, however left wing, but neither is it simply a rank-and-file movement. The united front is all about fighting for the unity of the working class and mobilising workers in action. It is a tactic in relation to the mass organisations of the working class, and its aim is to secure the broadest possible agreement around specific actions, to take the working class forward to win. Such victories are not possible unless revolutionaries seek to engage in broader alliances which command wide support and influence. Likewise it is ultra-left to try to impose demands on a united front which only succeed in cutting revolutionaries off from the majority. In fact, while the majority relate to those leaders, we do everything we can to maintain a united front with the reformists and bureaucrats, until the vanguard itself breaks from these leaders. Therefore, while 'only' a tactic, the united front is a tactic which approaches strategic importance as part of the struggle for the leadership of the working class. It is directly entwined with questions of class politics and class leadership. Revolutionaries aim to win this struggle for leadership, based on the superiority, in theory and practice, of revolutionary politics over the politics of the existing leadership. How, therefore, in the present unfavourable period, is it possible to harmonise the struggle for revolutionary leadership with the method of the united front?

The essence of the united front tactic is the political independence of the working class. As Trotsky pointed out in his attempt to convince the German Communist Party to propose common struggle with the Social Democrats against Hitler: 'March separately, but strike together! Agree only how to

strike, whom to strike, and when to strike! Such an agreement can be concluded even with the devil himself... On one condition, not to bind one's hands.' Therefore, the united front immediately and unavoidably poses questions of leadership, programme and tactics. The united front is meaningless for revolutionaries if it does not involve a political struggle against the mis-

leaders. Unfortunately, this point is not grasped by the majority of today's would-be Trotskyists. Some avoid the united front tactic altogether, hoping simply to increase the size of their organisation by recruitment in ones and twos, or by building 'rank-and-file' bodies which refuse to challenge the leadership. Others, such as *Socialist Outlook*, have been rather good at building alliances with left bureaucrats, but within those alliances have abdicated any responsibility to fight for revolutionary politics, on the basis that this would be 'sectarian'. A fear of the political wilderness, or of being seen as windbags, mean that revolutionaries simply become activists, doing the left-reformists' jobs better than the left-reformists themselves. A relatively sophisticated justification of this position is that the present low level of class struggle means that there is no point in raising transitional demands, and there is no point in the united front tactic either, because it is only applicable in conditions of mass struggle.

This misunderstands the united front tactic. True, it was developed and refined in conditions when there were mass Communist and social democratic parties, but there is no reason why the tactic, in its essence, cannot be fought for in a strike, or in a struggle against job losses, or, for that matter, in the struggle against the replacement of Clause 4. It also misunderstands the transitional method and the dialectical relationship between propaganda and agitation. The transitional method involves both. It does not simply consist of agitational demands. In the 1960s and 1970s, it might have been correct to call, in the context of the car industry, for a sliding scale of wages, in the expectation of getting the ear of a relatively large number of workers. That is obviously not the case now. However, the transitional method also has a propagandist, educative aspect. Why can we not direct this at the relatively small number - at present - we call the vanguard? This question was nicely summed up by the American revolutionary James P. Cannon, referring to the Russian Marxist Plekhanov: 'Propaganda he defined as the dissemination of many fundamental ideas to a few people... Agitation he defined as the dissemination of a few ideas... to many people. Propaganda is directed towards the vanguard, agitation to-

wards the masses.'

In practical terms, what does the transitional method involve? The whole point is to make sure that demands are not divorced from the struggle, but start from the actual consciousness of the class, and pose the question of how to go forward. Sectarian propaganda has never done this. Nor has opportunism. We have to analyse the potential for class struggle at every conjuncture, and then fight for the political demands which will develop that potential to its maximum. An ultra-left line, way ahead of where our allies are, will not advance the class struggle. On the other hand, because we are interested in elaborating a line that will win, we cannot simply support any bloc or alliance. It is our task, as revolutionary Marxists, within the various campaigns in which we are involved, to tactfully point out what differentiates us from the other left, or even right-wing Labour forces involved. Not to raise our programme, or aspects of it, which go beyond the spontaneous or reformist consciousness of most workers is, in effect, a liquidation of revolutionary politics. The transitional method attempts to give us an understanding of how demands should be fought for, and the consequence of winning those demands. Rather than remaining tied to the present conjuncture, it takes consciousness and action forward. It has a dynamic method which forms a bridge between the present demands and the socialist demands of the revolution.

That is why we encourage the development of strike committees, or support groups involving community organisations or user groups. If the movement has developed enough, we should seek to push these further in the direction of workers' self-organisation, as the working class gains more confidence in its own strength, and in its ability to fight. More radical propaganda demands will come to the fore as the struggle develops. Because we are Marxists and seek to mobilise the working class to overthrow capitalism, we keep that goal always in our sights. Therefore, we must always seek to move every struggle forward in that direction, however small that movement might be.

If revolutionaries fail to fight for the united front and the transitional method now, however unfavourable the political conditions, they will leave the reformist mis-leaders unchallenged when the working class begins to recover its confidence, when it starts to fight back against the anti-working class policies of a Blair government. Therefore, it is not only essential that revolutionaries attempt to unite; it is also essential that they unite on the basis of a correct understanding of the period we are passing through, and, consequently, of a correct understanding of what they should be doing.

## Leninist-Trotskyist Tendency

# Discussions under way

## Tragic death in Sri Lanka

It is with great sadness that we learned of the death of Samadhi Peiris, the only son of Comrade Sirimal Peiris. Samadhi died as a result of a massive bomb blast on a commuter train in the suburbs of Colombo on July 24. So far, no organisation has claimed responsibility for the explosion in which about 80 people died. Samadhi had already shown an interest in politics and was on good terms with the comrades of the Workers Voice group. He was a staunch opponent of all forms of racism and chauvinism. Our deepest condolences go to his family and friends.

## Workers Republic

We welcome the publication of the first issue of a new journal, *Workers Republic*. It has been produced by the Committee for Revolutionary Regroupment, a group of former supporters of *Socialist Outlook*, and announces its aim as 'promoting a project of real revolutionary regroupment'. The CRR comrades state that 'it is no secret that many of us are sympathetic to the WIL, having worked with them on Bosnia and union activity', but advocate a wider fusion process among Trotskyists. For our part, we share the view of *Workers Republic* that the United Secretariat (USec) is headed on a course of 'liquidation of revolutionary politics and opportunist regroupment on a minimalist basis', despite containing many subjectively revolutionary militants. *Workers Republic* contains a number of interesting articles on the comrades' experiences in the USec, on British perspectives, the united front and the transitional method, the Socialist Labour Party, Ireland and Blairism. It can be ordered from: CRR, 96 Melrose Avenue, London NW24JT, price 75p

## Conference in Jamaica

Comrades for a Workers Government in Jamaica (CWGJa), a sympathising group of the LTT formed in 1994, is scheduled to hold its first conference in October, following the successful launch of a pilot issue of its journal, *Liberation*, last year. This follows a long period in which there have been no avowedly revolutionary organisations in Jamaica, following the demise of the state capitalist Revolutionary Marxist League and the ultra-Stalinist Communist Party of Jamaica in 1987, and the disbanding of the pro-Moscow Workers Party in 1990. Among the topics to be discussed are the prospects for revolutionary socialism in Latin America and the Caribbean and the fight against neo-liberalism and structural adjustment. We look forward to CWGJa becoming a section of the LTT and contributing fully to its development.

Over recent months, a number of formal and informal discussions have taken place between representatives of the Leninist-Trotskyist Tendency, of which the WIL is the British section, and the Liaison Committee of Militants for a Revolutionary Communist International – a grouping of ex-members of the League for a Revolutionary Communist International/Workers Power. The two tendencies agreed to publish the following joint statement, briefly summarising areas of agreement and disagreement on the topics discussed so far.

1. On June 29-30, 1996, a meeting took place in London between representatives of the Leninist-Trotskyist Tendency (LTT) and the Liaison Committee of Militants for a Revolutionary Communist International (LCMRCI). The discussion was focused on the following points:

- The nature of the period
- Bosnia and the national question
- Revolutionary regroupment

2. Both tendencies agreed that the present period is characterised by a reactionary neo-liberal offensive which has been developing unevenly throughout the imperialist and the semi-colonial world. Former dictatorships in Latin America, Africa and South-East Asia have been replaced by the facade of democracy, behind which the living standards, rights and organisations of the working class have been under sustained assault. Meanwhile, the collapse of Stalinism in 1989-91 resulted in 'democratic' counter-revolutions (as distinct from militarist or fascist counter-revolutions) in eastern Europe and the ex-Soviet Union. From the point at which these states stopped defending post-capitalist property relations in practice, they ceased to be workers' states.

Internationally, the working class has suffered a chain of setbacks as its Stalinist, social democratic and nationalist leaderships have capitulated to the policies of neo-liberalism, but overall it has not suffered bloody defeats on the scale of the 1930s, and in a number of countries (including France, Germany, Bolivia and Brazil) it has shown a renewed fighting capacity.

3. On the war in Bosnia, there were significant differences between the two tendencies. The LTT defended the existence of a multi-ethnic Bosnia as the only realisable form of self-determination and as the only progressive solution to the national question in Bosnia, without giving any political support to the Izetbegovic government. It defended the Bosnian Muslims against the weight of ethnic cleansing directed against them, and until they were safe from extermination, while opposing the creation of the Muslim-Croat Federation and the subsequent ethnic cleansing of the Krajina Serbs. The LCMRCI considered that throughout the inter-ethnic conflict, and especially since the creation of the US-backed Croat-Muslim Federation in 1994, it was clear that

every side had reactionary aims. They wanted to destroy the multi-national degenerated workers' state and create ethnically-cleansed bourgeois states. The main task was to unite workers of every ethnic group against imperialism. Both tendencies opposed all imperialist attacks on the Bosnian Serbs, defending them despite their reactionary chauvinist leadership, and were for the defeat and expulsion of Nato/UN forces. Both were in favour of multi-ethnic workers' councils and militias, the construction of a Trotskyist internationalist party, a proletarian revolution to overthrow the pro-capitalist regimes in Zagreb, Belgrade, Pale and Sarajevo, and the creation of a multi-national socialist federation in the region.

4. On more general issues surrounding the national question, the LCMRCI defended Marx and Engels' theory of the so-called 'non-historic' peoples of eastern Europe, while the LTT considered this was wrong and was in broad agreement with the positions outlined by Roman Rosdolsky in his book *Engels and the 'Nonhistoric' Peoples: The National Question in the Revolution of 1848*.

5. On regroupment, the two tendencies agreed that it is necessary to attempt a discussion and regroupment process with all forces that are in favour of a Leninist-Trotskyist internationalist approach to centrism. With a view to narrowing the differences between the LCMRCI and the LTT, it was agreed to carry out common work in Britain wherever possible and to establish a framework for a written international discussion.

August 1996

## Archive

# Papandreou and the Trotskyist movement

THREE TIMES prime minister of Greece, founder of PASOK and a dominating figure in post-war Greek politics, Andreas Papandreou died on June 23 this year. A number of obituaries mentioned in passing – often inaccurately – his youthful association with revolutionary politics and his imprisonment under the Metaxas dictatorship in the 1930s. The *Guardian*, for instance, claimed that: 'Unlike his peers, he kept out of the limelight in Greece – and set sail, aged 20, for the US after a brief spell in prison for his opposition to the right-wing Metaxas dictatorship.'

Born on the island of Chios in 1919, Papandreou was in fact closely associated with Trotskyism in his youth. He first became acquainted with its ideas in 1933, when he may have read Trotsky's writings on Germany which were in his father's library. At that time in Greece, Trotskyists of one sort or another were as strong as the Stalinists, whose unions were obliged to negotiate united action with those led by the left oppositionists.

He was arrested in 1939 on the orders of Maniatakis, Minister for Public Security in the Metaxas dictatorship, but due to his father's intervention he was released on condition that he repudiated communism and went to the United States, where he resumed his studies. All ten of those arrested along with him, apart from Menelaos Megariotis, signed declarations repudiating communism. The signing of such declarations brought automatic expulsion from the Greek Trotskyist movement at the time, although Papandreou's declaration does at least show an attempt to shield some of his comrades, including Cornelios Castoriadis, who later became influential on the French left under the name of Paul Cardan.

Despite his evolution into a bourgeois democrat, Papandreou remained a lifelong friend of Michel Pablo (Raptis), a major figure in post-war Trotskyism, who, despite rejoining the United Secretariat in 1994, was given a state funeral in Athens in February this year. Below, we publish for the first time in English, Papandreou's statement of capitulation, which summarises his political evolution up to his arrest.

I, the undersigned, Andreas Papandreou, the son of Georges Papandreou, born in Chios and at present domiciled in Athens, a student of law, aged twenty years, declare that in 1933, when I was in the third year of high school, after a speech made by a classmate on the subject of Fascism, I had occasion to discuss its opposite, Communism. I was already of democratic sentiments, and I wanted to understand this doctrine better. I studied it, ended up allowing myself to be convinced, and towards the end of 1933 and the beginning of 1934 I published a Communist journal, *[The New] Course*, in which I popularised the ideas of *The Commu-*

*nist Manifesto*. I published two numbers of this periodical, but the state and my school intervened. The journal was confiscated by the administration of the high school, but I was not interfered with by the law, which eventually concluded that my case was harmless. In 1935 I duplicated leaflets in favour of democracy, but before I could distribute them they were confiscated by the high school, and I was sent down. Towards the end of 1936 I carried on no further militant activity in order the better to study Communism, and I became convinced that the Third International had failed and that the Fourth International was showing the way.

About the beginning of 1937 I met in a student club a certain Grigoriou, a student who belonged to the new Organisation of the Communist-Internationalists of Greece (EOKDE). He attempted to acquaint me with the ideas of the Fourth International. I was at that time reading *Proletarios*. Since Grigoriou soon had to go abroad, he introduced me to a certain Aristogeiton, whose name I learned after his arrest to be in fact Demosthenes Vourzoukis. He proposed to complete my training. I also met a teacher, Epaminondas Giannakos, who also taught me about the Fourth International. It was then, in December 1937, that my father discovered that I was in possession of *Proletarios*. He persuaded me to cease all activity, which I did. But I did not obey him for very long. At the beginning of summer 1938 I went into a clinic at Asimacopoulos to be operated on for appendicitis. When I was convalescing in this establishment, I learned from reading *Free Speech* of the arrest of the men whom I had met, and I decided to rejoin the Communist movement once again.

Even though I had been deprived of any link with the organisation, I attempted to recruit to it, to begin with in the milieu of my closest friends, thinking that I could convince them the more easily because they were closest to me. But, it is necessary to emphasise, I came up against a brick wall, and they countered me by appealing to my family. My closest relations at that time were with Kirkos Kirkou, Cornelios Castoriadis, Ioannes Kontogiannis, Christos Karabelas, and Christos Valias. At the very time when I found myself alone and without contact I was invited by telephone to a meeting with a very conspiratorial person, who only told me that he would be at the meet-

ing place. I met this person at the appointed place, who told me that he was called Christos Soulas, and had escaped from Acronaupia prison. Before being arrested again and put away for a long time, he put me in touch with Megariotis, and I began to collaborate with him.

It did not take long for me to realise while working with Megariotis that he was leading the movement. On account of the situation our organisation was clandestine, and positions were not appointed formally, but it was clear that Megariotis occupied the post of General Secretary of the organisation's Central Committee. I very quickly became the closest person to him. We had many meetings and conversations about the political situation, about what positions to take up, etc., and I assumed responsibility for editing and printing our duplicated journal and leaflets, as well as the task of leading the youth. My relations with Megariotis can be accounted for by the idea that I was a member of the Central Committee, being in charge of publications and

the youth. I was also responsible for our overseas links. I thus carried on a many-sided activity in the service of Communism.

In any case, I am sorry for all these activities. It is clear to me that Communism runs counter to our moral principles, and that it can only bring ruin.

Consequently, I definitively and irrevocably renounce and condemn Communist ideas, and I declare that in future I will live in accordance with Greek morality and traditions.

Athens, 7th July, 1939  
Andreas Papandreou

Further information on this period is contained in Loukas Karliafitis, *Trotskyists and Archeiomarxists in the Concentration Camps of the Metaxas Dictatorship*, Internationalist Publications, Athens; and *Revolutionary History*, Vol. 3, No. 3, Spring 1991. Special thanks go to Al Richardson, editor of *Revolutionary History*, for translating Papandreou's statement from French.

## SUBSCRIBE TO

## Workers News

	6 issues	12 issues
INLAND.....	£3.50	£7.00
Europe, Ireland.....	£5.30	£10.60
Africa, Middle East, Asia, Americas.....	£7.90	£15.80
Australasia, Far East.....	£8.60	£17.20
Surface rate (worldwide).....	£4.70	£9.40

Name..... Encl £.....

Address.....

Send to: Workers News, PO Box 7268, London E10 6TX



# From Trotskyism to sabotage

## Revolutions in My Life

By Baruch Hirson  
Witwatersrand University  
Press, Johannesburg, 1995

### Review by Vusi Makabane

BARUCH HIRSON is a renowned South African writer and political activist, long associated with Trotskyism. In this autobiography he answers a crucial question which has probably puzzled many who know about him. Why, after dedicating his political work to building a revolutionary leadership among black workers in South Africa, did he turn to the sabotage for which he was eventually imprisoned? After all, the Marxist understanding of sabotage is that it is 'excitatory terror', which is an incorrect substitute for working class mobilisation. In this interesting and provocative book, Hirson does much more than simply answer this question. He deals with the story of his life from the 1920s, through his trial and imprisonment,

to his exile in Britain in the early 1970s.

Strangely enough, Hirson cut his political teeth in Johannesburg in a Zionist youth movement called Hashomer Hatzair. However, in discussions within the group, he became a consistent defender of Trotsky against those who supported Stalin. This led him to take a growing interest in the activities of the Fourth International Organisation of South Africa (FIOSA). His position as a left Zionist became increasingly untenable and the inevitable happened. He broke with Hashomer Hatzair and joined FIOSA at the end of 1943.

Hirson contributed to FIOSA's monthly paper, *Workers Voice*. But he found that, despite the round of paper sales and meetings, the group was ineffectual: 'We were never shown a programme, never offered a plan of action and never directed towards basic literature on South Africa' (p. 145). Most significantly, as mainly white activists, they failed to influence or make contact with the black working class. This was remedied when he joined the Workers International League and soon after became its full-time organiser. The

group's political work brought it into contact with nearly half the African unions in Johannesburg, and by late 1945 it seemed that the WIL was making significant progress, with its membership increasing to more than 50. But then the group started to collapse dramatically.

This crisis was precipitated by a few members who argued for a change of orientation - away from the African trade unions and towards the formation of Marxist study groups. Hirson, who argued vigorously against this turn, was in a minority. When the leaders of the majority resigned, the group was in tatters. All this happened in the context of the defeat of a strike organised by a timber union with which the WIL had very close links. Thus, by the time of the far more important Rand strike of 1946, the group was no longer functional.

It is significant that the crisis in the WIL took place against a background of hostility from both Stalinists and nationalists in the wider African trade union movement. At the national conference of the Congress of Non-European Trade Unions (CNETU) in August 1944, the Communist Party of South Africa had argued against the

formation of a national black trade union body, although this was the very point of the conference. And when the important and influential black trade unionists Khoza and Phoffu organised report-back meetings on the Rand, they were expelled from CNETU by the nationalists.

By recalling these important events, which occupy only a part of the book, Hirson has performed an important service to Trotskyists in South Africa today. Such information is not well known and could otherwise be expunged from the official history sanctioned and peddled by the present regime. It is a pity, though, that it is only being revealed now. When Trotskyism was revived in South Africa in the 1980s, this history would have been invaluable to the comrades who had to experience at first hand the treachery of the Stalinists and nationalists.

Hirson's turn to sabotage occurred in the context of the National State of Emergency which the Nationalist government promulgated after the Sharpeville Massacre in 1960. At the time, Hirson was working in the Congress of Democrats (COD), the white liberal arm of the Congress move-

ment, where it seems that he succumbed to the pressure of the nationalists. By way of an explanation he states that 'we considered a move to sabotage' and that 'similar ideas were being discussed by members of the ANC and CYL [Congress Youth League]' (p. 298). With hindsight he writes: 'The new course we were adopting would take us away from the workers who were essential for the building of a socialist society' (p. 301). Betrayed by one of his comrades, he was arrested in July 1964, and after standing trial, was sentenced to nine years' imprisonment. By resorting to sabotage, Hirson and his comrades had embarked on a course of political liquidation - an unfortunate legacy to leave to the Trotskyists who would succeed them in the 1980s.

*Revolutions in My Life* is well written and thoroughly researched. It can be appreciated on a number of levels - as politics, history and autobiography. It is a storehouse of information and is structured in a very interesting way, with each chapter opening with a short 'digression' about the author's harrowing experiences of prison. Politically flawed, it is nonetheless highly recommended.

## When Saturday comes

### Jim Dye looks at the relationship between sport and capitalism

THE START of the new football season was eagerly awaited by fans after the excitement of Euro 96. Football is now more popular than ever, but like all commercialised sport it is a tightly controlled business, in which the fans come second to the financial interests of the fat cat directors and shareholders, and the needs of the global TV networks.

Nothing better showed the contradiction between the cultural enjoyment of sport by workers and the exploitation and manipulation of this by the capitalists than this year's Atlanta Olympics. Sport trailed a poor third to nationalism and advertising, and the games in fact became a race between global manufacturing giants such as Nike and Reebok to get 'their' athletes onto the winners' podium. And who better to make nationalism the only thing to matter than the United States, whose media put disgusting jingoism at the top of the agenda. Behind the scenes stood the sport 'fixers' such as lawyer-turned-president of the International Amateur Athletics Association, Primo Nebiolo, who has made a career out of sleaze and corruption scandals.

Sport acts as a mirror of society, and politics are never far below the surface. When US sprinters Tommie Smith and John Carlos raised their black-gloved fists in a Black Power salute on the winners' podium at the 1968 Mexico Olympics, it was a marvellous representation of the mass upsurge of political struggle then taking place in American ghettos, as black men and women asserted their rights against the racism of US society.

Modern sport is a cultural creation of capitalist society. Cricket, one of the oldest surviving sports, originated in a pre-industrial age and retains an older appreciation of time, with full games spread over several days and played around the vagaries of the weather. Nevertheless, it has been altered by modern capitalism, becoming like most other sports a vehicle for nationalism. At the same time, exporting it on the coat-tails of imperialism to the colonies contradictorily added an anti-imperialist flavour to this most English of games, especially in the West Indies. Other games have also been adapted to the role of the capitalist state; whereas some, usually older, professional sports maintain a largely non-nationalist make-up (golf, tennis, and cycling, for example), others act to reinforce nationalism. It is no accident that European fascists have for many years made infiltration of football matches

a priority, and use internationals to both facilitate closer relations between fascist groups from different countries and then, in a typically bone-headed contradiction, beat the shit out of each other.

But there is more to popular sport than this. For example, workers look to football not just for enjoyment and a distraction from their problems, but as a way of coping with alienated existence by attaching themselves to certain teams which become 'theirs' and give them a sense of belonging. But when Alan Shearer, with all his exciting talent, was signed by Newcastle for a record fee of £15 million, the massive profits of those at the top became exposed yet again. In an area hit hard by recession and unemployment, Newcastle FC, like clubs around the country, has exploited the passion of its fans, who have no real control.

However, fans have often organised themselves to try and combat this, and it should be noted that in some clubs the supporters have also acted against the fascists. In these post-Hillsborough days, organisations like the Football Supporters Association (FSA) and local fan clubs have demanded better facilities, as well as respect between rival supporters. Racism, while still a major problem, particularly in lower divisions, is far less prominent in many top clubs these days, with Everton and Chelsea perhaps showing the biggest changes in their fans' attitudes. Through efforts like the setting up by the FSA of multi-lingual local 'embassies' during Euro 96 to help foreign supporters, the fascists and jingo nationalists have often been forced back into the shadows. Marxists need to intervene actively in these processes, but arm-chair philosophical fetishism needs to be rejected. (See, for example, the article by Phil Sharpe in the *Weekly Worker* of July 4 on Euro 96, where it seems clear that Sharpe hasn't got the slightest understanding of the passion football arouses in many workers, and probably has never even been to a game!)

Sport will only truly be 'ours' after the revolution. Until then, when football like everything else really will 'come home', we can exploit the tensions within capitalist society that it illuminates.

### Workers News Book Bargains

The following titles are available to readers of Workers News at half the published price:

Marx/Engels, *Collected Works*, Volumes 2, 5, 6, 7, 8, 12, 13, 16, 17, 18, 38 and 39 - £12.50 plus £3.45 postage per volume

Marx, *Theories of Surplus Value*, Volumes 1 and 3  
£7.50 plus £2.75 postage per volume

Lenin, *Collected Works*, Volumes 1, 2, 4, 5, 8, 23, 35, 36, 39, 41, 43, 44 and 45 - £5 plus £2.55 postage per volume

David Riazanov, *Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels. An Introduction to their Lives and Work* - £3.50 plus 93p postage per volume

Overseas postage rates supplied on request. Send cheques, payable to Workers News Books, to:

Workers News, PO Box 7268, London E10 6TX

## Prinkipo Press

REVOLUTIONARIES AND THE LABOUR PARTY	£1.50
BEHIND THE CRISIS IN MILITANT	£1.25
CLASS STRUGGLE IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR: The 1944 Police Raid on the RCP by Jack Gale	£2.45
DOCUMENTS ON POLAND 1980-81 (In German)	£2.00
FOR THE POLITICAL REVOLUTION IN CHINA! Articles and Documents 1989-90	£1.50
HOW THE BOLSHEVIKS ORGANISED THE UNEMPLOYED by Sergei Malyshev	£2.45
NEGOTIATIONS IN SOUTH AFRICA and the Struggle for a Revolutionary Democratic Constituent Assembly	£1.50
REVOLUTION AND COUNTER-REVOLUTION IN NICARAGUA (in German)	£2.00
REVOLUTION AND COUNTER-REVOLUTION IN POLAND (in German)	£1.50
ROUMANIA AND BESSARABIA by Christian Rakovsky	£1.50
SOUTH AFRICA AT THE CROSSROADS: Draft Theses on the Present Situation	£1.50
THE WRP AND THE 'REVOLUTIONARY SITUATION' (1978) by Jack Gale	£0.80
WHAT NEXT? AND OTHER WRITINGS FROM 1917 by Leon Trotsky	£2.50

Send orders to Prinkipo Press, PO Box 7268, London E10 6TX  
All prices include postage and packing

## Workers International League

The WIL is the British section of the Leninist-Trotskyist Tendency. Together with comrades in South Africa, Belgium, Germany, Canada and Sri Lanka, we fight to rebuild Trotsky's Fourth International. We are for the overthrow of capitalism and its replacement with a worldwide federation of workers' states, based on workers' democracy and planned economy. Only by workers taking power can the unemployment, poverty, starvation and war bred by capitalism be ended.

In Britain, it is necessary for revolutionaries to fight within the mass organisations of the labour movement, as well as participate in the struggles of all those oppressed by capitalism. We aim to build rank-and-file opposition to the trade union and Labour bureaucrats who stand in the way of any serious struggle to defeat the Tories. Only in this way will a genuine revolutionary party, rather than a sect, be built.

We support all struggles against imperialism, without endorsing the politics of any nationalist leaderships. In wars waged by imperialist powers such as Britain against oppressed countries, and in inter-imperialist wars, we are for the defeat of our own ruling class.

In the countries of eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union, which are no longer deformed/degenerated workers' states, we are for the defence of those gains of the working class that still exist. The remaining deformed workers' states in Cuba and Asia must be defended against imperialism, and the Stalinist bureaucracies overthrown before they too open the door to capitalist restoration.

For more information about the Workers International League and the Leninist-Trotskyist Tendency, write to:  
WIL, PO Box 7268, London E10 6TX



## US ATTACK ON IRAQ

# Get out of the Gulf!

Joint statement by the Leninist-Trotskyist Tendency, the Committee for Revolutionary Regroupment and the Liaison Committee of Militants for a Revolutionary Communist International

IN EARLY September, the United States launched another series of cruise missile attacks on Iraq and extended the no-fly zone in the south of the country, following a build-up of Iraqi troops in the northern Kurdish areas. The US action, which took place amid the growing misery, sickness and starvation of millions of Iraqis as a direct consequence of the sanctions imposed by the UN after the 1991 Gulf War, was cynically explained as an attempt to prevent a 'humanitarian disaster'. It was nothing of the sort: Its aim was to limit the ambitions of Saddam Hussein, demonstrate the superiority of US firepower, and protect the strategic interests of imperialism in the region. It also had the side-effect of enhancing Clinton's chances of being re-elected as US president.

We condemn this brutal 'clean' attack, with its 'smart' bombs and its 'collateral damage' (the murder of defenceless civilians), and support military resistance by Iraq against the US air force's B-52 and Stealth bombers and the armada of US warships massed in the Gulf.

We reject as gross hypocrisy the claims that the attack was intended to defend the human rights of the Kurds. The US has given long-term assistance to Turkey, which has persecuted its own Kurdish minority in the most vicious manner. No cruise missiles were launched when Turkish troops entered Iraqi Kurdistan last year in an attempt to wipe out PKK guerrillas! None of the imperialist powers is in favour of self-determination for the Kurds, who are the largest 'stateless nation' in the world. Indeed, the intervention of the Iraqi army in support of one faction of the Kurdish leadership is in line with the imperialist policy of keeping the Kurds divided among themselves. The emergence of a united and militant Kurdish movement for self-determination would undermine the present balance of power, and provide an inspiration for the oppressed throughout the region.

US interests were threatened by a number of recent events in the area:

1. The election of an Islamic government in Turkey which began to develop closer ties with Iran in particular, but also with other fundamentalist governments and movements in the region. This government was perceived as more 'anti-Western' than any Turkish government in the post-war period.

2. The UN-brokered 'food-for-oil' deal with Iraq, due to have come into effect later in September, which would have led to the lowering of the price of oil on the world market, cutting into the profits of the huge oil corporations. It would have helped to stabilise Saddam's regime by providing the Iraqi people with urgently needed

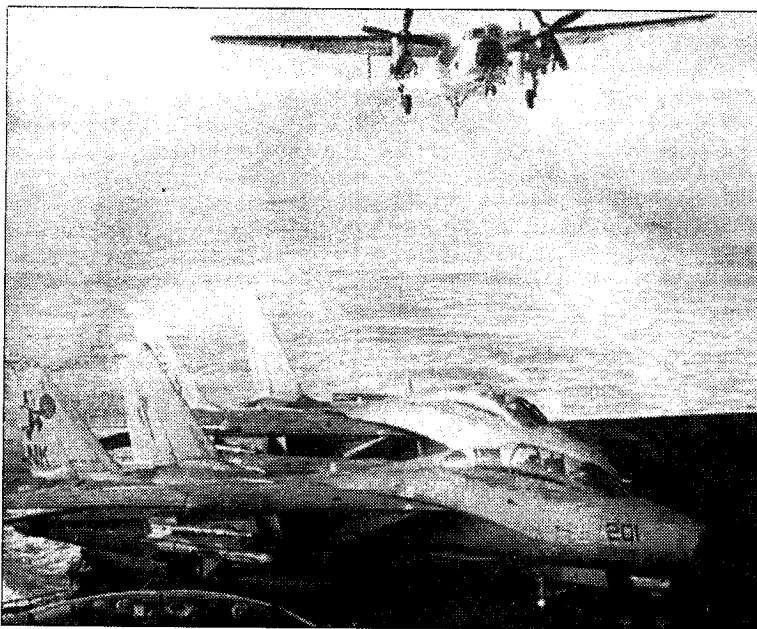
food, medical and other vital supplies, and would also have benefited Turkey, as the oil would have flowed through its territory in a jointly-constructed pipeline.

3. Indications that Saddam was strengthening his control and that Iraq could emerge as a dominant power in the region, thus threatening Kuwait, the Gulf petro-monarchies and Israel, the main bastion of imperialist influence in the Middle East. The movement of the Iraqi army into the northern Kurdish areas around Irbil was

the region do not want to support the principle that the US can bomb dictatorships which massacre their rebellious minorities.

- (d) There are differences among the imperialists over how best to deal with regimes they oppose. This can be seen in the opposition to the US embargo on trade with Cuba and the new US bills on Libya and Iran. Some governments think that military action will lead to an increase in anti-Western feeling in Iraq and will therefore strengthen Saddam. They wish to pursue their own agendas in the Middle East and fear that the US action will further destabilise the area and undermine the progress they have made.

The Kurdish 'safe haven' in northern Iraq was set up by the allied



A US aircraft carrier in the Gulf during the most recent conflict with Iraq

seen as the beginning of the re-unification of the country, and was the cue for the US attack.

4. The bombings also have wider implications – the US wants to show who is boss in the region. The attacks serve as a warning to Iran to curb its expansionist ambitions, and demonstrate to PLO chairman Yasser Arafat and Israeli prime minister Binyamin Netanyahu, who were meeting for the first time on September 4, that the peace process is the only viable option. The intention is to make it clear to the PLO that it must continue its capitulation, while encouraging Israeli 'hawks' to keep the process on track by reassuring them that they have US protection.

However, major fissures appeared in the alliance that the US used to launch the Gulf War and which it now sought to revive. Only Britain and Kuwait fully supported the action. Jordan, Saudi Arabia and Turkey refused to allow the US to use their air bases for the attack. The reasons for these splits are:

- (a) There is no immediate threat to the oil wells.

- (b) Saddam's troops are being deployed within Iraq and are not threatening neighbouring regimes.

- (c) The reactionary governments of

coalition in 1991 after the Gulf War. Iran, Iraq and Turkey have no interest in seeing the creation of a Kurdish state, and are using the Kurds for their own expansionist ends. But the Kurdish political scene is dominated by groups that are kow-towing to, and being armed by, these very states! None of the Kurdish bourgeois factions has the interests of the Kurdish people at heart, nor their right to a country and self-determination. Central to the problem are the Aghas – the Kurdish landlords – who operate a clan system which viciously oppresses the poor peasantry. The different clans use both imperialism and the neighbouring regimes to assist them in their reactionary communal conflicts.

The Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK), led by Jalal Talabani, is traditionally strong among the people who speak Sulaymaniyah dialects in the south-east of Iraqi Kurdistan, while the Kurdish Democratic Party (KDP), led by Massoud Barzani, is rooted among the Kurds who speak the northern dialect. Following the Gulf War, Barzani and Talabani have amassed considerable fortunes through punitive taxation and by siphoning off Western aid money. The KDP, for example, obtained between \$100,000 to \$250,000 a day by taxing the trucks

from Iran and Turkey that, despite the embargo, deliver goods to Iraq. But while the warlords have become rich, the general economic situation in Kurdistan has become worse and the four million Iraqi Kurds have become ever more impoverished. The struggle for control of Iraqi Kurdistan between the KDP and the PUK has been intensified by the UN embargo.

Talabani's PUK is getting support from the Iranian mullahs, and in the past has received backing from both Israel and the US. Saddam claims Iranian troops were directly involved in the fighting alongside the PUK. Barzani's KDP, which has also received arms and money from the CIA and the Zionists, is now in alliance with Saddam, whose Ba'athist party has maintained an unremitting hostility to Kurdish self-determination, and carried out the notorious gas attack on Halabja in 1988.

KDP forces, backed by Iraqi advisers, captured the two most important cities in Iraqi Kurdistan held by the PUK – Irbil on September 1 and Sulaymaniyah on September 10. Despite Talabani's appeals for US help, no warplanes attacked either the Iraqi army units or the KDP in northern Iraq. The US attack was restricted to targets in the south, which is rich in oil and is near Kuwait and the other Gulf petro-monarchies. The KDP has been organising its own dictatorship in northern Kurdistan, and is now set to extend its influence to the south-east. It is willing to help Turkey against the PKK guerrillas and Saddam against the PUK, and it is rumoured that Barzani is prepared to formally recognise Baghdad's sovereignty over Iraqi Kurdistan. For its part, however, the US is prepared to keep lines open to the KDP, in an attempt to avoid the consolidation of the Saddam/KDP alliance.

Barzani is a major obstacle to any expression of Kurdish self-determination and workers' self-organisation. Socialists and anti-imperialists should fight for the freedom of all political parties and for the overthrow of Barzani's fiefdom by workers' and peasants' councils and militias. The raising of democratic demands, including full rights for trade unions and workers' parties and for a Kurdish constituent assembly, will be vital weapons.

We defend the Kurds against military attacks from Iraq, Iran or Turkey. But we do not give any political support to either of the warring Kurdish factions. Kurdish self-determination will not be achieved by any of these corrupt, self-serving bourgeois nationalist leaderships.

The Kurds will only resolve their social and national problems within a socialist federation of the Middle East, in which they could achieve self-determination, including the right to create an independent and united republic. This requires the building of an internationalist revolutionary workers' party, which must unconditionally defend the democratic and national rights of every oppressed mi-

nority in the region, including Armenians, Assyrians, various other oppressed Muslim and Christian peoples, Oriental Jews, Marsh Arabs, Bedouins, etc, in conjunction with fighting for the expropriation of the bourgeoisie, landlords and imperialists. We stand for the creation of workers' and peasants' councils and militias throughout the region.

In this context, a central task of revolutionaries in the Middle East must be the smashing of the capitalist state of Israel – imperialism's main policeman in the region. While supporting every Palestinian struggle for self-determination, we recognise the importance of breaking the Israeli Jewish working class from its Labour Zionist leadership as an important element in this task.

In the conflict between Iraq and the US and its allies, we are unconditionally for the military defeat of the imperialists. Imperialism can have no role other than to oppress and exploit the masses, and a US victory in Iraq would strengthen its hand in the Middle East. The task of overthrowing Saddam Hussein belongs to the Iraqi and Kurdish masses, not to the US armed forces. We place no confidence in the bourgeois opposition to Saddam either inside or outside Iraq. We stand for the right of workers' and peasants' organisations to fight for their own demands, for a constituent assembly, and for the building of a revolutionary workers' party in Iraq. The struggle against the hated Ba'athist regime must become the springboard for the fight for workers' power in Iraq and throughout the region.

We call on workers' parties, left groups and all anti-imperialist forces to organise demonstrations and pickets outside US embassies around the world.

- Stop US attacks on Iraq – for the military defeat of US forces!
- End all UN sanctions against Iraq!
- Imperialism out of the Gulf!
- For the right of self-determination for the Kurdish people!
- Iraqi, Turkish and Iranian troops out of Kurdistan!
- For workers' and peasants' militias to expel imperialism from the region!
- For the overthrow of Saddam Hussein and the ruling classes of the Middle East!
- For a socialist federation of the Middle East!

September 13, 1996

**Revolutionary History**  
Vol.6, Nos.2-3, Summer 1996  
**Essays on Revolutionary Marxism in Britain and Ireland**  
from the 1930s to the 1960s  
**Price £5.95**  
Available from: Socialist Platform Ltd, BCM 7646, London WC1N 3XX