

Workers power



For Internationalism, Socialism and Workers' Revolution

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Tories gamble with our health:



The whole system's mad

“We do not think there is a public health problem with British beef. We have said so and the scientists have said so. What has happened is collective hysteria, partly media, partly opposition, partly European.”

These were John Major's words amid the crisis. They insult our intelligence.

Which scientists have given beef a clean bill of health?

The Tories have excluded public health experts from their hand-picked SEAC committee. They have prevented

independent scientists from seeing vital data about the timing of the current CJD outbreak.

But even the hand-picked SEAC scientists have said there is a problem. SEAC head John Pattison, a Tory appointee, said:

“We are seriously con-

cerned about what is going to happen next, that is why we have asked for intense surveillance so we can measure the scale of the problem over the coming months and years.”

The Tories tell us we were only at risk before the offal ban, between 1986 and 1989. But many scientists believe it

is “possible but not proven” that BSE is widespread amongst cattle who do not exhibit symptoms. Research is needed to find out how common BSE is in apparently healthy cows, with the slaughter of every herd where BSE has been detected.

The Tories refuse to finance such research, or the mass slaughter that might result.

The ruling class simply cannot be trusted to look after our health.

These are the people who brought us thalidomide; who

built tower blocks caked with deadly asbestos; who refuse to ban tobacco advertising; who ignored findings of enquiries into disasters such as the Clapham Junction rail crash, the Kings Cross fire, the sinking of the Marchioness and the Zeebrugge ferry.

Under capitalism we will only ever be catching up with their lies, deceit and callousness, long after many have died.

We need to scrap the mad profit system that gambles with our health.■

**Never
Trust a
Tory!**

—Page 7

Ibrahima Sey

Racist cops kill asylum seeker

IN THE early hours of Saturday 16 March, twenty police officers arrived at a house in Manor Park, East London in response to a call about a domestic dispute. They eventually arrested 29 year old Ibrahima Sey, an asylum-seeker from Gambia, and took him to Ilford police station.

Within a few hours Ibrahima lay dead at King George's Hospital in Ilford—a victim of police brutality and CS gas. He had become the fifth black man to die at the hands of London's killer cops since the murder of Shiji Lapite in Stoke Newington in December 1994.

After Ibrahima peacefully surrendered to the police, they allowed a friend to accompany him to the station, but then insisted on separating the two men in the station yard. Police officers handcuffed Ibrahima, who had offered no previous resistance, and then forced him to the floor.

Other officers restrained his friend and obstructed his view of Ibrahima, who cried out to him from the ground. At this point, one of the cops sprayed Ibrahima with CS gas. Police detained Ibrahima's friend for five hours without charge in the interview room after the incident. As in the case of Shiji Lapite, the victim's family first learned of his

death through the media.

The police wasted little time in weaving a tissue of lies around the truth. The swift verdict from the initial autopsy supposedly showed that Ibrahima had suffered from hypertensive heart disease, which caused his death after an unspecified "period of exertion".

Statements to the media from the Association of Chief Police Officers (ACPO) denied that Ibrahima's death had any connection with CS gas, and declared that the trial use of the CS spray

would continue in 14 areas in England and Wales.

At present, we cannot know for certain that the gas actually killed Ibrahima outright. For that very reason it is vital that a second autopsy takes place, with the medical experts accountable to the Sey family. The funding must be made available to allow the use of the best toxicological methods to assess the contribution of the CS spray to Ibrahima's death.

The ACPO has shown consistent con-

tempt for scientific findings. It repeatedly ignored a substantial body of medical evidence from the US about the toxic effects of CS and pepper sprays, and even disregarded the testimony of a police inspector who sustained serious injuries, including 50% burns to his eyes in a demonstration of CS gas last summer. The type of CS gas currently on trial in Britain is several times more potent than that issued to police forces in the US.

In response to Ibrahima's murder, the Newham Monitoring Project (NMP) has launched a memorial campaign in conjunction with members of his family. So far, the campaign has staged an angry, 200-strong picket of Forest Gate police station, the home base of the cops involved in the arrest and killing. This was followed by a militant demo of 1,000 on 23 March from Forest Gate to Ilford police station.

The demo attracted both African-Caribbean and Asian youth, as well as many white teenagers, unified in their hatred of a police force that harasses and criminalises them. The air was electric with chants of "British police: murderers". Several Unison and NUT union banners were also on the demonstration. The campaign received financial support from the GMB and Unison. NMP's Piara

Powar said:

"This is only the start of a long, hard fight for justice for Ibrahima, his widow and two young children, who will never know their father."

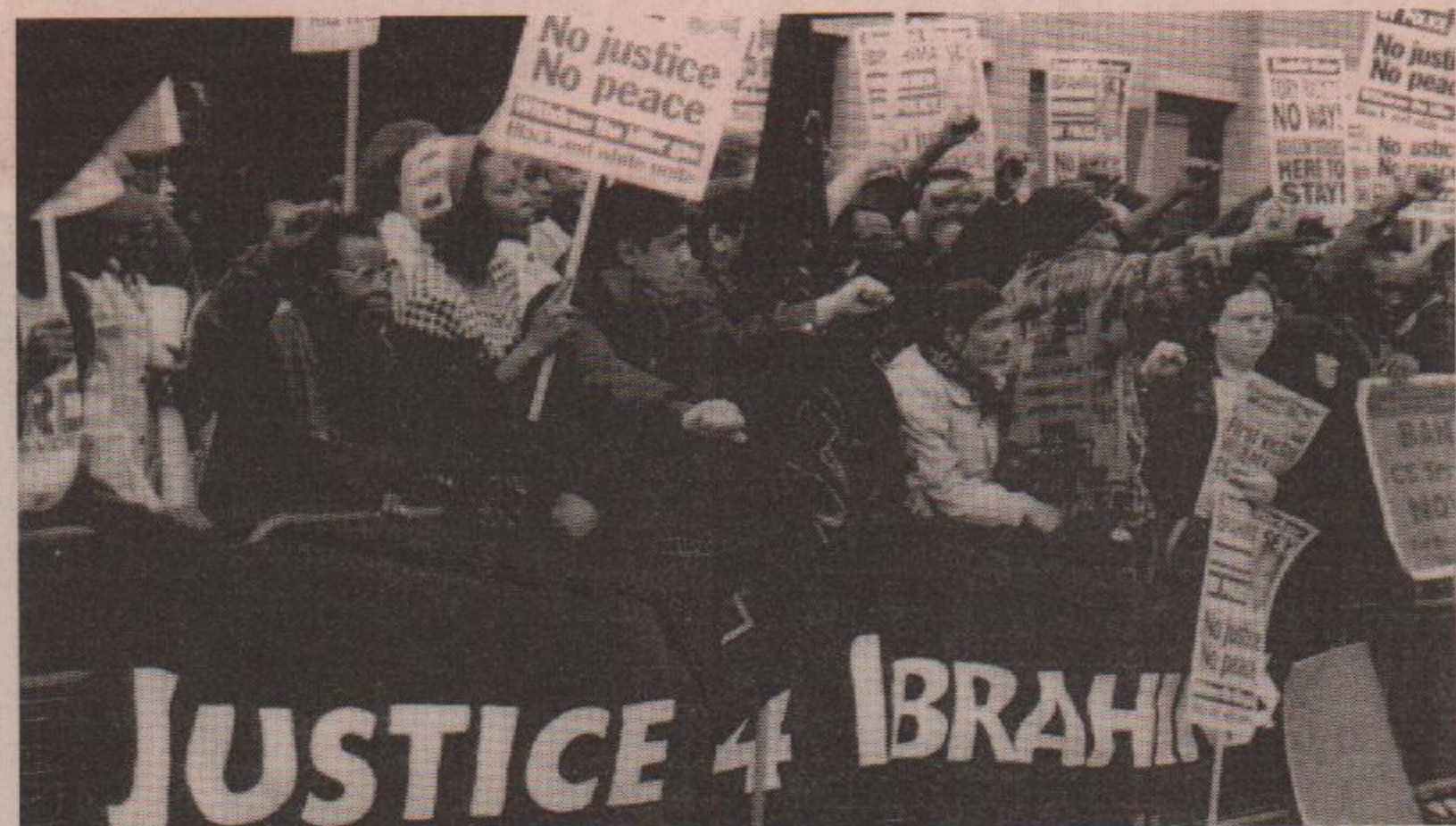
The campaign demands

- the immediate suspension of the officers responsible for Ibrahima's death,
- a ban on the use of CS gas
- an independent inquiry into this killing, rather than a predictable white-wash by the Police Complaints Authority.

Such an inquiry should be based on accountable representatives of the labour movement and local black communities and scientific and medical experts appointed by them.

The murder of Ibrahima Sey highlights the need for a militant national campaign that links together the numerous local struggles provoked by deaths in custody and by a racist police force and criminal justice system. It shows the urgent need for organised self-defence against all racist violence, and labour movement based monitoring of police activities. ■

Contact the Ibrahima Sey Memorial Campaign, c/o PO Box 273, Forest Gate, London E7 8NW, Tel: 0181 552 6284.



Demonstrators besiege Ilford police station 23 March

Free Satpal now!

SATPAL RAM, unjustly jailed for murder after defending himself against racist attack, is being subjected to a sustained campaign of violence and degradation in prison.

Satpal's appeal against wrongful conviction was turned down in November 1995, despite the fact that:

- Satpal was attacked by six white racists and defended himself after sustaining serious stab wounds in the attack
- Most of the prosecution evidence came from the group who had attacked Satpal
- Satpal's plea of self-defence was arbitrarily changed by his legal counsel, only 40 minutes before the trial
- No interpreter was provided at the trial, preventing the evidence of Bengali speaking witnesses from being heard.

For fighting tenaciously to clear his name Satpal has been subjected to an unbelievably brutal regime in prison. At Long Lartin prison Satpal was kept in solitary confinement, with no change of clothes and no access to legal documents, for weeks after his refusal to squat for anal inspection during strip searches.

Satpal was denied proper meals, physically attacked by prison officers on 5 occasions and on one occasion subjected to a violent anal examination.

After this Satpal was transported to Bristol prison in a body belt, and again strip searched and attacked by the officers who travelled with him, on arrival at Bristol.

The Free Satpal Campaign is demanding immediately that Satpal be released from segregation in Bristol, that he is given immediate access to his legal documents and personal possessions and to

proper food and bedding. They are calling for a criminal investigation into the attacks on Satpal in Bristol and Long Lartin. ■

Satpal writes:

"I was brought here in a body belt after being set about by several prison officers at HMP Long Lartin. I am once again in solitary confinement here at Bristol. At the moment I am still recovering from my ordeal. . . I want you to know that if anything happens to me while I'm down here these people are directly responsible: Respect, love and power: Satpal"

Fax protests now, quoting Satpal's prisoner number (E94164) to: Mr Dixon, Governor HMP Bristol, Cambridge Rd., Horefield, Bristol BS7 8CS Fax: 0117 924 4228

Contact the campaign at: 101 Villa Rd, Handsworth, Birmingham B19 1NH

Hackney

Stop all deportations!

THE NUMBER of people facing deportation is set to increase rapidly as the election approaches. The Tories are playing the race card to divide and rule us. In the east London borough of Hackney alone there are currently six campaigns against deportation orders.

What unites many deportation cases is the callousness of the Home Office, the arbitrary nature of the government's actions, and the pettiness of the reasons given for the deportations.

Mircea Illyin, is a Rumanian refugee. Mircea fled Rumania in 1991 after six years of repeated arrests, beatings and torture. The Home Office has now decided it is safe for him to return.

Mircea's fear of being returned to Rumania was so strong that he was willing to kill himself rather than be deported. He is currently in hiding, after police attempted to forcibly deport him in November. Police retreated after Mircea threatened to kill himself.

The response of the Home Office? Parliamentary Under Secretary of State Timothy Kirkhope said:

"Although he threatened to jump off the balcony he did not do so. It is unfortunately not unusual for illegal entrants facing removal to threaten to harm them-

selves. When they do so in the majority of cases it is an attempt to persuade us to allow them to remain and the consequences of permitting such attempts to succeed are only too obvious."

It's like Catch 22: the only way to convince the Tories to let you stay is to kill yourself.

Wale Croft, who came to Britain from Nigeria seven years ago, and her husband Vincent both work for Hackney Social Services. Their crime? Because of poor legal advice they got married in Britain. They later discovered that they should have left the country, then got married and applied to return. The Home Office is going to deport Wale because she broke their rules. As for Vincent, the Home Office minister David MacLean is clear:

"I sympathise with the position in which Mr Croft finds himself. . . but the real issue is that Mr Croft chose to marry someone from Nigeria."

Obviously, for the Home Office marrying someone from Nigeria is a crime.

Rabi-ul Islam is a teacher in Hackney and a member of the National Union of Teachers (NUT). He came to Britain to study. Whilst here, he was sacked from his job at Dhaka Engineering University

and his wife and two children were evicted from their house. They joined him in Britain. Since then Rabi has worked in London schools as a Science Technician and in 1993 he trained as a Science teacher. Speaking four languages, Rabi is an asset to the many schools across east London which have a high proportion of students whose first language is not English.

There is a shortage of Bengali-speaking teachers; there is a shortage of Science teachers. The government has been recruiting teachers from Bangladesh. Yet whilst Rabi was training as a teacher, the Home Office issued a deportation order on him.

Rabi's crime? He had come to Britain as a student. He should have gone back to Bangladesh and been recruited there!

All three campaigns are being supported by local unions. Mircea's wife Margaret and Wale and Vincent are members of Unison and their campaigns are being supported by Hackney Unison.

Rabi's campaign is being organised by the local NUT. Winning significant labour movement support will be vital to winning these cases.

But winning these individual cam-

paigns will not stop the stream of racist deportations.

To do that we need to fight to scrap the laws which lead to deportations—the laws which say some workers are allowed in Britain and some aren't. The laws which say if you have £150,000 you can stay in Britain, but if your life is under threat you can't.

Union members should demand that their union leaders fight against the immigration laws, not just giving conscience money for individual campaigns. The battle to scrap all the immigration laws is the only way to ensure that there will be no more families torn apart, no more refugees forced to live in fear and hiding, and no more deaths at the hands of police and immigration officials. ■

For further details contact: Mircea Illyin & Wale Croft Campaigns, c/o Unison Rabi-ul Islam Campaign, c/o NUT Both at 217 Mare Street, Hackney, London

STOP ALL DEPORTATIONS!
Public meeting
18 April 7.30pm
Hackney Town Hall

Maimed by police

AMER RAFIQ was a twenty one year old student working part-time as a waiter at a restaurant in Rusholme, Manchester. It was here that after finishing work he was picked up by officers of the notorious Tactical Aid Group. Amer was thrown into the back of the police van. His apparent crime was to have committed a motoring offence, though no charges have been brought. Several minutes later he arrived at the local police station, Platt Lane, minus one eye and with only a 50% chance of being able to use his other. The local community has responded angrily, organising a demonstration of over 2,500 people—the largest local demonstration against police violence for many years.

The TAG units have been responsible for some of the worst police violence in Manchester, and their harassment of Asian youth during the Muslim Eid festival has become almost as traditional as the festival itself. The officers concerned have yet to be publicly identified, and have been placed on desk duty. A campaign has been established in response to Amer's beating, demanding that these officers be brought to justice for their savage attack.

The campaign, led by youth, is attempting to build a broad-based campaign and gain support amongst the local labour and trades union movement. This support is vital if the campaign is to succeed. Racist police harassment should not be left as a problem for the black communities.

Every local trade union and labour movement organisation must support this campaign for justice. The campaign has already taken a step in the right direction by breaking off contact with the police and calling on other community liaison groups around the city to do the same.

The community needs to organise the type of disciplined stewarding that enabled the March demonstration to pass off without police harassment. This needs to be organised with the support and participation of the local labour movement.

Send Messages of Support, Donations and get your organisation to affiliate to the Amer Rafiq Defence Campaign. Contact them at: The Amer Rafiq Defence Campaign, PO Box 47, Newton Street, Manchester M1 1HW

● SWP disgraces the left: Letter page 15

in this issue

The Blair revolution?

Helen Watson exposes the nightmare vision of Labour in power if Labour MP Peter Mandelson gets his way, centre pages

Italian elections

The third General Election in four years are unlikely to resolve the crisis of bourgeois politics, argues Marco Zito, page 12



K is for Kollantai

This month's A-Z of Marxism looks at the unique contribution made by this Russian socialist to the fight against women's oppression, page 9

Next month:

200 issues of Workers Power!

On May day we publish issue 200 of Workers Power. To mark this milestone WP 200 will carry a four page pullout on the politics and practice of Workers Power since the first issue in October 1978.

Plus: Scotland, Nationalism or Socialism; L is for Rosa Luxemburg; Where is the SLP going?

Workers Power Public Meetings in April:

Tories and the beef crisis

Wednesday 10 April, 8pm
Calthorpe Arms, Grays Inn Road, London

Is the SLP the answer to Blair's New Labour?

23 April, 7.30pm Union Club,
723 Pershore Road, Selly Park, Birmingham

Their Europe...

AT THE Inter Governmental Conference (IGC) in Turin last month it was all broad smiles and handshakes. But away from the cameras, for the next 15 months, the European heads of state will be squabbling and back-stabbing over Europe's future.

Britain's Tories are already squealing. Last month the European Court ruled against Britain's policy of no maximum length to the working week. It stated that British workers have the same right as other European Union (EU) workers to refuse to work more than a 48-hour week.

The Tories naturally saw this as interference with the "right" of British bosses to pay some of the lowest wages for working the longest hours in Europe.

Then came the EU Commission ban on British beef exports. Jumping to the defence of the commercial interests of the National Farmers' Union—a big Conservative Party backer—Stephen Dorrell denounced the EU for its "outrageous and totally unjustified decision".

The furore, both over working hours and BSE, sums up what the British Tories hate about the EU: it has the power to override the "British national interest".

Major's problem is that, over the next year, the leaders of Germany and France aim to strengthen this power and broaden its application.

Germany is keenest on sticking to the timetable agreed in 1991 for a single currency (the "Euro") by 1999. It is the most insistent that each member state surrender more and more political power to EU institutions and integrate domestic, defence and foreign policies.

But Germany's Chancellor Kohl is not inspired by a noble vision of Europe without borders, nationalism and war. The German capitalists want to expand the powers of the EU because they know that the only way they can safeguard their own economic power and interests.

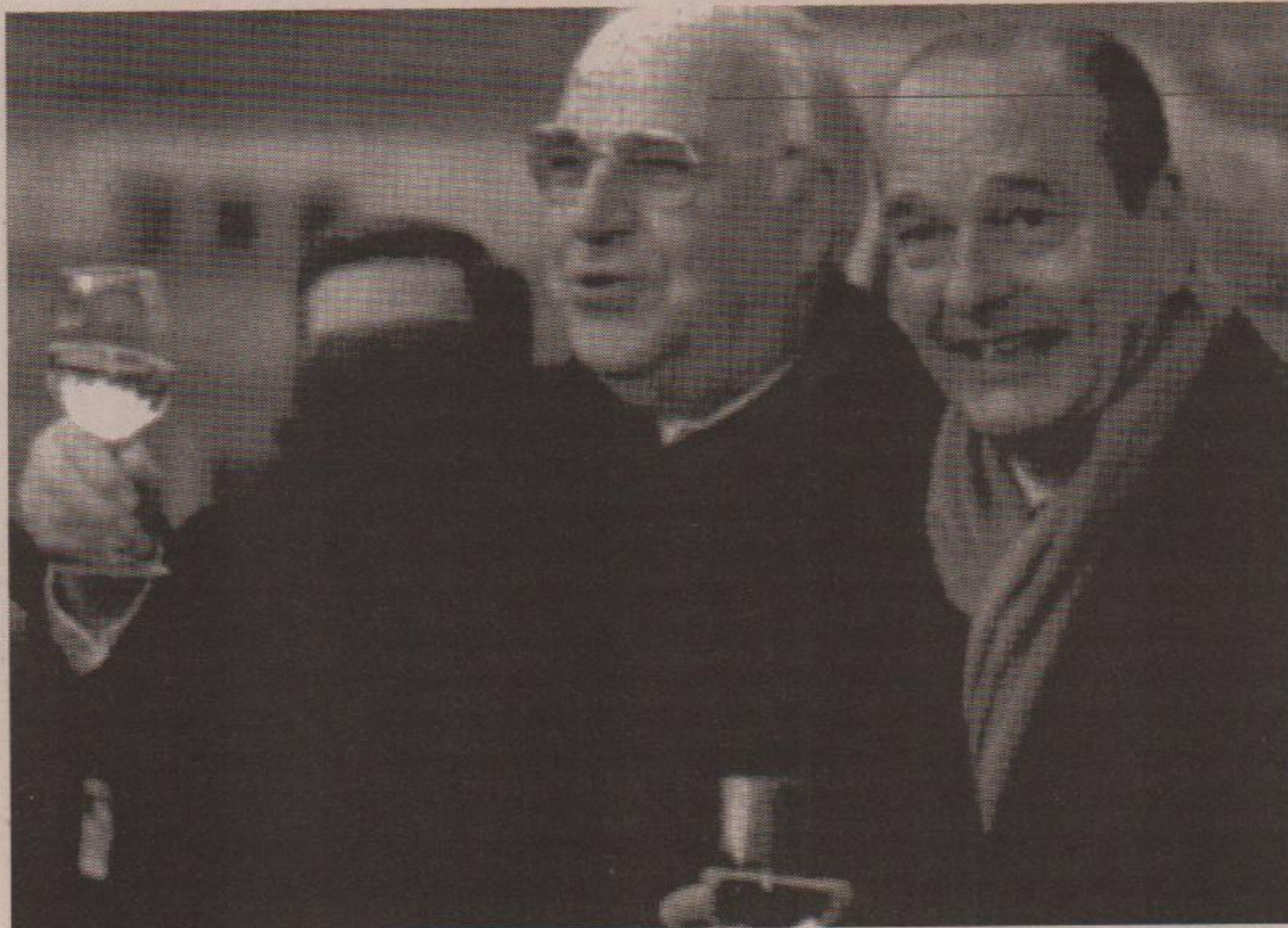
Kohl wants to bring in more European countries presently knocking on the door. Most of these—such as Hungary, Poland and the Czech Republic—are countries in which Germany is already the biggest investor and has the greatest political influence. Drawing them into the EU will strengthen Germany's economic domination over them.

Memory

On the other hand, the memory of fascist Germany as imperialist conqueror of continental Europe is still so strong that the German ruling class cannot advance its imperialist and foreign policy ambitions without the cloak of pan-European institutions. This is the only way that it can legitimise and improve its military capacity, which lags far behind its economic might and political ambition.

So Germany needs to make its interests those of "Europe". For this Kohl will need to centralise decision-making, extend majority voting and reduce the power of veto.

France will not abandon its long-established goal of playing junior partner to Germany—despite the election of Chirac as President last year and his more nationalist rhetoric. Germany has the economic might, France the military and diplomatic experience. French imperialism can both restrain and influence



For Europe's leaders: a year of double dealing . . .

German policy and even gain Germany's support for specifically French national objectives: German criticisms of French nuclear testing last year were conspicuously low-key.

Britain now stands in virtual isolation. Major will spend his final year in office trying desperately to reconcile the irreconcilable within his own party.

Referendum

Dependent on the Euro-sceptics to stay in power Major has speculated publicly about holding a referendum on a single currency if re-elected; a key Euro-sceptic demand. Meanwhile, the pro-EU Tory chancellor Clarke says he will resign if Major agrees to a referendum on monetary union. Clarke does not want to risk a 'No' vote that would completely isolate British multinationals and finance companies from the European economy.

Can Germany get its way? Will it hold to the timetable for a single currency by 1999?

In 1991 the German ruling class only agreed to give up the D-mark, and therefore the control of money supply, provided that the weaker economies of the EU were made to adhere to the standards of the German economy. Strict targets were set for inflation, interest rates, budget deficits and public debt. The length of the recession in Europe and the weakness of recovery since 1993 have made the targets unrealistic; few will get near and even Germany will struggle to meet them.

But for German imperialism politics is decisive. They will adjust the criteria and gather a hard core around them for the next stage of integration. British imperialism will be relegated to the sidelines if it seeks to obstruct this.

Should workers applaud greater integration? Or should we line up behind the British bosses to fight Britain's corner in Europe? There is nothing for the working class on either side of the bosses' debate over Europe, nothing for British workers nor for any other European workers.

Take the case of the ruling on the 48-hour week. Socialist Europe against Tory Britain? Not really. Germany and Britain's other imperialist rivals are simply fighting for a "level playing field". German bosses want to erode the higher-than-average benefits and working conditions that German workers currently

Just how far the IGC is from ordinary Europeans is evident in its response to the European Parliament's request that elected MEPs be allowed to participate, at least as observers, in the IGC. Led by Britain and France, the member states have agreed to exclude them. Only occasional progress reports will be given to the European Parliament.

Return

There is not a shred of democratic accountability in the European Union. The original EEC was cooked up by imperialist ministers fearful of a return to war in Europe. The Single Market in 1986 was dreamed up in the boardrooms of the big multinational companies. An unelected Commission and Council of Ministers worked out and voted through the Maastricht Treaty in 1991/92.

The IGC will be fighting over the shape of the bosses' Europe. Last December French workers showed a glimpse of a different Europe—one of workers' unity in action. In France, millions of working people fought to defend hard-won gains against "the logic of Maastricht". But they rejected nationalist solutions, embracing instead international solidarity as the key to defending their living standards in a global economy.

As the IGC drags on its participants will be haunted by memories of the mass protests of the French strikes of December 1995, haunted by the spectre of millions of voices chanting 'No to the bosses' Europe! Yes to a workers' Europe!'

...and ours



For Europe's workers: a year of struggle!

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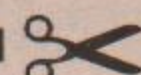
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Dockers

Determined to win

THOUSANDS OF trade unionists and socialists took to the streets of Liverpool on 23 March in a spirited celebration of the six month-long struggle by the city's dockers against union-busting and the return of casual labour.

Some of the dockers are old enough to remember the reality of casual labour before 1945, when men desperately waited in "holding pens" to see if the gang boss would select one of them like a prized beast of burden for a few hours work. These bitter memories explain why Liverpool dockers stayed out after the collapse elsewhere of the bureaucratically bungled dispute over the Tories' abolition of the National Dock Labour Scheme in 1989.

Their stance at that time made sure that Liverpool remained one port in Britain with strong union organisation. But the surviving strength of their union also spurred the port employers into provoking a decisive confrontation. And that is exactly what the dockers have been locked into since September 1995 when the sacking of 80 men led to a picket line that other Merseyside dockers would not cross.

The media has turned a blind eye to the dockers' dispute. In the beginning TV reporters mounted occasional forays onto the picket line with the script already written: the strike was seen as a doomed throwback to the 1970s. But the strikers have torn up the script.

Some of the most oppressed and exploited workers in Britain have forged links with the Merseyside dockers. Speakers at the dockers' rallies have included the Asian women fighting the multinational Pall Mall at Hillingdon Hospital, the mainly Turkish workers locked out from J.J.'s Fast Foods in North London, and speakers from a number of anti-deportation campaigns. The crowd at St George's Plateau on 23 March gave a warm reception to Lola Onibiyo, and a show of hands indicated unanimous support for her brother Ade's right to stay in Britain.

The fact that over 500 dockers—and their wives and partners—are still fighting, with only grudging financial support from their own union, is a tribute both to their determination and to the solidarity of rank and file trade unionists across Britain.

That the dockers are still in with a chance of winning a famous victory against the Mersey Docks and Harbour Company (MDHC) and the Tories' anti-union laws owes much to their global campaign to win solidarity action. Their success in persuading fellow dockers in several other countries to boycott ships bound for Liverpool has instilled the phrase "working class internationalism" with new meaning.

The Merseyside dockers' own support for imprisoned socialists and striking dockers in Argentina further testifies to that spirit of solidarity (see panel).

The dockers' decision to launch a worldwide campaign started with a discussion in a pub. Members of the port shop stewards' committee recognised that their pickets had inflicted only limited damage on the MDHC's scabbing operation with the London-based Drake



Scargill addresses Liverpool rally on 16 March

International. The TGWU's national bureaucracy had refused to defy the anti-union laws and organise real solidarity action. This left the dockers to fight in isolation against an employer bankrolled by the Major government.

But the dockers' leadership also appreciated the essentially international character of their industry. So they began to "go international", in the phrase of shop stewards' chair Jimmy Nolan.

The first delegation went to Bilbao, Spain, one of the key destinations for containers from Liverpool. There they won a regular levy and a pledge to stage go-slows when Merseyside cargoes ar-

rived. In Stockholm union officials arranged for Liverpool dockers to speak to rank and file Swedish dockers. Once again, the delegation secured regular financial contributions and a commitment to boycott all Liverpool containers.

In Australia, the national trade union leadership has offered both money and industrial solidarity. In Canada, Montreal dockers made an immediate donation of £2,500. They have established regular collections and staged overtime bans and go-slows in response to the arrival or departure of Liverpool freight.

Portworkers in Greece struck for 24

hours in solidarity with the Merseyside fight. Delegations have also received pledges of support from trade unionists in France, Italy, New Zealand and Israel.

Support from the USA came prior to the first delegation crossing the Atlantic. Having read about the dispute on the internet, the International Longshoremen's Union sent a \$5,000 (£3,300) donation. By December, a delegation from Liverpool had arrived in New York. The dockers had soon launched a literally flying picket, travelling by air up and down the east coast between New York and Baltimore, Maryland.

The pickets made use of a loophole in

individual state labour laws, which bar unions making official calls for solidarity action, but do not prohibit pickets making unofficial appeals. Thus, a trio of Liverpool dockers managed to get work stopped on a ship owned by Atlantic Container Lines (ACL) moored in Newark, New Jersey.

In Baltimore dockers met a Latino longshoreman, who appeared confused at the sight of their tiny picket. The Liverpoolians spoke no Spanish, but the Latino worker explained in his broken English that he had a family to support in his native country as well as dependants in the US. Still, he listened to the arguments of the Liverpool men. He eventually returned to his car and gave the men a clenched fist salute and the thumbs up as he drove away.

Money has poured in from unions in the USA, with a delegation to February's AFL-CIO meeting collecting nearly £40,000 in donations and pledges. ACL, the port of Liverpool's biggest customer, has twice threatened the MDHC with the termination of their business relationship unless a settlement is reached.

In the meantime, the MDHC itself has sought to initiate legal action against the port shop stewards' committee in an attempt to bar any further picketing in the USA. Their first attempt has failed. But the port of Liverpool bosses have reaffirmed their intention to go for "a renewed application for an injunction" in a statement to *Lloyd's List*, the bible of the shipping bosses.

These developments illustrate that the current international campaign is no guarantee of victory. Nevertheless, the significant and inspiring lessons of that campaign should not be lost. The international dockers' conference in Liverpool, convened by the port shop stewards' committee in February, attracted 55 delegates from 17 countries.

The conference highlighted the need to establish or rebuild combine committees across multinational corporations and whole industries which have become truly global.

The experience of the Liverpool dockers in recent months shows how we can overcome the barriers of nationality and language on the way to forging class unity against a shared capitalist enemy.

All of the international solidarity delivered so far has not yet won the dispute. The clear reason for this is the useless and cowardly response of the British trade union leaders.

The TGWU leadership has increased its indirect financial support for the struggle. But it still will not declare the dispute official.

Scab lorries, some driven by TGWU members, continue deliveries to the docks. Bill Morris and the TGWU bureaucracy as a whole have squandered the opportunity to relaunch union organisation in the country's other ports, while Liverpool battles on in isolation.

Rank and file activists must bombard Transport House with resolutions demanding the TGWU makes the dispute official, while also seeking to build immediate solidarity with the Liverpool fight, up to and including strike action. ■

● Strike on May Day! (see back page)

International solidarity

LIVERPOOL DOCKERS sent this message to a picket of the Argentine Embassy in London on 25 March. The picket was called to protest against the repression of socialists and trade unionists, including dock workers, fighting against the Argentine government's austerity drive.

"On behalf of the Mersey Port Shop Stewards' Committee and the 500 sacked Liverpool dockers, I send fraternal greetings to tonight's picket of the Argentine embassy. Our dispute has been continuing for six months, since the Mersey Docks & Harbour Company locked out and dismissed the workforce for refusing to cross a picket line mounted by dockers from Torside Limited, who were in dispute over sackings and the re-introduction of casual labour.

Over these months we have received tremendous backing from trade unionists, dockworkers and socialists from all over the world.

The high point of the internationalism was reached on 17-23 February,

when 55 delegates from 17 countries met in Liverpool to plan a co-ordinated campaign of solidarity with our struggle. International shipping companies and port employers can no longer depend on the workforce being divided on national lines. From Canada to Australia and New Zealand, from Greece to Russia, unions have been organising the blacking of trade with Liverpool.

We learn that also in Argentina, dockworkers are in struggle against unscrupulous employers. For the last two months, 513 dockers employed in the port of Capital Federal in Buenos Aires have been on strike to force the authorities to pay them five months' back wages and against redundancies.

When their profits are threatened, the employers and their class, whatever their nationality, are perfectly prepared to throw working people onto the scrapheap and to batter, imprison and repress those who are ready to resist. That is why the response of the working class must be international.

Our international conference heard with great concern reports of the repression being carried out by the Argentine Government against the organisers of demonstrations for the rights of the unemployed. We voted unanimously to lend our support to the efforts of the Campaign Against Repression in Argentina to secure the immediate release of Horacio Panario and the other trade union and socialist activists imprisoned in Neuquen.

Brothers and sisters, keep up the fight to support all workers fighting back around the globe. Together we can turn the words, "Workers of the World Unite" from a mere phrase into the great rallying cry of the working class movement.

- Victory to the Liverpool Dockers!
- Victory to the Argentine Dockers!
- Freedom for Horacio Panario!

Terry Teague
International Liaison Officer
Merseyside Port Shop Stewards'
Committee

Students

NUS drops free education

LAST MONTH'S NUS Conference was a major turning point in the organisation's history. The conference voted to ditch its long-standing commitment to the principle of free higher education by a two-to-one margin. The NUS leadership is now set to embrace a graduate tax, apparently the preferred option for higher education funding among Tony Blair's inner circle.

Steering the union on this rightward course is the Labour Students' organisation, whose presidential candidate, Douglas Trainer, easily defeated left independent Clive Lewis.

The Blairites, with an eye on careers

in the media and labour bureaucracy, are determined to gut the NUS of political debate. Their vision is one of "service unionism": elected officers in cosy collaboration with college managements; national bureaucrats working hand-in-glove with vice-chancellors.

After calling a big demonstration last autumn over Tory education policies, the NUS leadership has done nothing to mobilise its members around the continued erosion of living standards that

has forced tens of thousands of students into low-paid, part-time work, or off their courses altogether.

Under the leadership of outgoing president Jim Murphy, the NUS has gone along with the dismantling of left-wing union executives at the University of North London and South Bank University.

It has continued to systematically ignore the dramatically enlarged further education sector, with the larger univer-

sities still dominating the conference. The NUS bureaucracy has not lifted a finger to defend the elected officers at Kingsway College, London, victimised for militant anti-racism.

But delegates representing one-third of the NUS membership still voted in favour of fighting for a living grant for students—despite the barrage of propaganda from the media and the NUS leadership about the need to recognise "new realities". This shows that there is a ba-

sis in many colleges for a different kind of student unionism, based on action committees that draw in a much wider layer of students to combat the abolition of the grants system and the likely introduction of "top-up" fees.

Student activists should not abandon the fight within NUS structures, but the real battle is to build militant organisation in the colleges with roots deep enough to withstand attacks by the Tories, local management and the NUS leadership. ■

● Students fight back from Austria to Australia: Turn to page 13

Brent Fight Tory union busters

TORY-RUN Brent Council in north west London is threatening to derecognise the borough's main Unison branch on 1 April. Their excuse? The work of Unison Regional Officer Stuart Barber in exposing Tory mismanagement and the impact of the cuts is a major embarrassment.

The Tories want to keep working class people in Brent in the dark about many of their policies. Not coincidentally, Brent Unison has campaigned against the Tories' strategy of privatisation, spending cuts and redundancies. Brent Unison branch secretary Brian Butterworth told *Workers Power*:

"The Tory threat to derecognise Brent Unison is an attack on all trade unionists. We are confident we can beat back this threat, but we need your help. Taking on the biggest union in the country is a mistake they should be made to regret. We insist that our national leaders commit resources to a campaign to rebut this threat completely and unconditionally."

We cannot allow the Tories to get away with this attack. If the Tories in Brent succeed in derecognising Unison, it will not be long before other councils, NHS trusts, FE colleges and other service sectors get the same idea. Already, we have seen how Unison members in the privatised industries, gas and electricity have faced derecognition and its immediate effects—compulsory redundancies, wage cuts, attacks on pensions and the loss of many other services and conditions.

Unison must launch a national cam-

paign against Brent Council making it clear that it will not tolerate any move towards derecognition by the Council or any other employer. We must demand our national leadership speak out against Brent's Tories and condemn them for even considering this proposal. And we must be clear; tough words alone will not stop the Tories, even if they back down this time. The only guarantee of stopping this threat and dissuading any like-minded employer is effective industrial action.

Derecognition of any branch of our union should trigger all-out indefinite strike action by those members concerned, made official by the Unison leadership and supported by all the necessary resources including strike pay. Only

strikes cause the employers' real worries. Only strikes can start to transform Unison into an organisation that resists the bosses' attacks through action and not just fighting talk.

We urge all our readers in Unison to fight for the resolution printed below in their branches.

Send copies of resolutions and messages of support to:

Brent Unison,
Mahatma Ghandi House,
34 Wembley Hill Road, HA 9 8AD

Send letters of protest to:

Brent Council,
Forty Lane,
Wembley HA 9 9HU

Brent Unison Derecognition: Emergency Resolution

This branch condemns the threat of Brent Council to derecognise Brent Unison at a Council Committee on the 1st April. This is a fundamental attack on the rights of local government workers to trade union organisation, if this threat is not withdrawn it will not only lead to Brent Unison members being unrepresented at a time of ever increasing council cuts but could also be the forerunner to wider moves to derecognise Unison branches across the country.

This meeting resolves to:

- 1) Write to Brent Council condemning the threat to derecognise Brent Unison;
- 2) Demand Unison nationally and regionally organises a campaign against this threat;
- 3) Demand Unison nationally and regionally agrees to support any action decided upon by the branch, to oppose this threat, up to and including all-out indefinite strike action with strike pay.

Unison Women's Conference

A wasted opportunity

THE RECENT Unison Women's Conference in Bournemouth was a bureaucratically stage-managed event. At times, the Bournemouth conference had the feel of an empty gesture. Its agenda followed an increasingly familiar pattern with lengthy discussions of uncontentious issues such as improved screening and treatment for breast cancer, but little time for debate of important differences.

Potentially important debates followed on the organisation of the conference itself and self-organisation within Unison generally. But the national leadership can currently afford to ignore these. The standing orders committee then proceeded to use spurious technicalities to exclude any discussion of such crucial issues as the minimum wage, the Asylum Bill and even the threatened derecognition of Brent Unison (see above), which had provoked three emergency resolutions.

The appalling treatment accorded to the women strikers from Hillingdon Hospital was all too typical. These low-paid workers, who have been fighting the effects of contracting out for six months, received the opportunity to address the conference for all of five minutes. Delegates gave them a standing ovation, but the women later revealed that the National Women's Committee had vetted their speech. They were effectively told that they could not make any criticisms of the union, which took six weeks to make their strike official and is now considering the withdrawal of their meagre strike pay of £62.50 a week.

At Hillingdon itself, the strikers reported that union officials have encouraged other hospital staff to cross their



picket lines. Again, however, they could not say this from the platform, so it only came out at a poorly attended fringe meeting organised by the Campaign for a Fighting and Democratic Unison.

Safety

The only other mention of the Hillingdon dispute during the rest of the conference came in a debate around a motion supposedly about women's safety on demonstrations. Whereas the women strikers had complained about rough treatment by Unison stewards during a demonstration last October, the Glasgow District Branch submitted a red-

baiting motion denouncing "unruly elements" who dared to carry placards that were not produced by Unison.

Many good activists will question the point of conferences like this. Militants need to act now to create a women's section in Unison that is prepared to fight for members' interests. We need to challenge a bureaucracy that is content to pay lip service to issues of women's oppression, but is determined to gag the women's conference as soon as it says anything that it doesn't want to hear. An important first step would be setting up or revitalising existing women's caucuses in the branches and workplaces. ■



UCH

Fight workplace race checks!

In recent years Unison members at University College London Hospitals (UCLH) have fought successfully to defend both fellow workers and the Health Service. Last month union members saw off an attempt by the NHS Trust's management to conduct spot checks on the immigration status of some hospital workers. **Dave Rommer**, Unison assistant branch secretary at UCLH, spoke with *Workers Power* about this important anti-racist victory.

“OUR MANAGEMENT provoked staff outrage when Caroline Brown, a deputy personnel manager, sent letters to UCLH hospital porters and cleaners threatening them with spot checks on immigration status. The 20 February letter informed them that without "an up to date permit/authorisation it will not be possible to continue your employment with UCLH NHS Trust". In short, if they didn't produce valid work permits, they would be summarily dismissed.

The porters and cleaners are the only two large groups of mainly black and Asian workers at UCLH. To target them in this way was obviously racist. Though the actual letters came from a deputy personnel manager, we are convinced that the race check proposals originated from the top bosses in the Trust. It was obviously in anticipation of the Tories' Asylum and Immigration Bill becoming law.

Unison members responded swiftly. At our branch meeting, there was almost unanimous agreement *not* to cooperate after members discussed the implications of management's position. Many made it clear that they were prepared to strike.

Having agreed a policy of non-compliance and threatened action, we contacted both the national and local media, and launched a massive leaflet and poster campaign throughout the hospitals. Within a week, the management realised that their proposed race checks were unworkable. The prospect of industrial action, combined with the bad publicity, forced an image conscious management to back down.

The porters and cleaners received a second round of letters, dated 12 March, apologising "if...you have felt threatened or intimidated". This letter also contained an assurance that spot checks "will *not* be used in future". This is especially significant since the Asylum legislation includes a provision that would call on NHS Trust bosses to act like immigration

officers or police. If management try this on again, I believe that they'll be met by resistance from Unison branch members. This would be in line with our existing policy of clear opposition to the Asylum Bill.

Obviously, it's all well and good that Unison nationally has policy against the Asylum legislation. But for this to have any practical meaning, the union should be preparing branches for non-compliance with any attempt by managers to implement this racist act. Ultimately, this would involve defending, through strike action if necessary, any worker victimised by management."

Workers at UCLH have shown that determined action can stop the race checks which the government plans to introduce. The UCLH healthworkers have nailed the lie that workers' action cannot be built to stop the Tories in their tracks. Wherever the bosses try to implement the racist laws they must be met with similar resistance.

Increasing numbers of local government workers are beginning to plan their response to the Asylum and Immigration Bill. Workers in Social Security Offices, Housing Benefit Offices and schools are organising against the racist provisions of the Tories new immigration rules.

It is important that union branches meet to discuss what action is required and how to defend any members victimised because they take action against the immigration laws. It is important that workers who decide not to comply with the laws link up with workers in branches of their union and members of other unions. At every union conference this year we must be organising action against the Asylum Bill. The bureaucrats, whilst they may make fine speeches against the racism of the Tories, will not want to see any action which actually challenges that racism. It will be necessary for rank and file activists to build the action. ■

Conference Against the Asylum and Immigration Bill

(All Unison branches welcome)

SATURDAY 11 MAY 10.30AM TO 3.00PM

NATFHE CENTRE, BRITANNIA STREET, LONDON WC1

Called by the Campaign for a Fighting and Democratic Unison

Delegates £10, observers £5.

Contact London CFDU, c/o Fred Leplat,
Islington Unison (A branch), 1a Canonbury St. London N1 2TA

DEMO: STOP THE ASYLUM BILL!

SATURDAY 20 APRIL 11 AM EMBANKMENT LONDON SW1

CALLED BY CAIAB

Whistleblower: BCM Box 7750, London WC1N 3XX



PART 3

Trotskyism on trial

WHEN THE Second World War broke out in 1939 the Socialist Workers Party of the United States of America (SWP) was the strongest section of the Fourth International.

With around 1,500 members and a significant base in sections of the US working class, it was widely recognised as the leading section. The thousands of Russian Trotskyists who until 1937 were active, at least in exile, and in touch with Trotsky, had been physically liquidated in Stalin's gulags by the time the war broke out.

In 1940 the SWP suffered a major internal crisis over whether to defend the USSR in the war. The Hitler-Stalin pact of 1939, the division of Poland, the invasion of Finland, and the USSR's attempts to seize the Baltic states convinced the student and petit bourgeois minority led by Max Shachtman, Martin Abern and James Burnham, that Russia was no longer any sort of workers' state. They insisted that the USSR was some new form of exploitative, indeed imperialist, society. They split from the SWP, taking over 40% of the membership with them.

This blow for the SWP was not the only consequence of the political pressures of the war. When faced with the entry of the USA itself into the war in late 1941, the party, under the leadership of James P Cannon, distorted the Fourth International's (FI) established revolutionary tactics for intervening into imperialist wars—the proletarian military policy.

Compromise

The SWP placed their entire emphasis on the *tactical compromise* involved in this policy: acceptance of bourgeois militarisation programmes combined with a fight to place them under workers' control.

In doing this they obscured the *strategic* context that Trotsky always set this policy within—a clear and unambiguous struggle for the policy of *revolutionary defeatism*.

Revolutionary defeatism means placing at the centre of your propaganda and agitation the clear message that the main enemy in an imperialist country at war is at home. It means arguing that the defeat of your own imperialist bourgeoisie is the lesser evil than their victory at the cost of the cessation of the class struggle. Its practical consequence, spelt out again and again by Lenin, was the slogan, "turn the imperialist war into a civil war against your own bosses".

Using the argument that it was necessary to defend the SWP's legality, Cannon delayed the issuing of a clear defeatist statement on the outbreak of war with Japan on 7 December 1941. Only under criticism from Trotskyists in Mexico, largely inspired by the Spanish Trotskyist Grandizo Munis, did the SWP issue a statement. It was first published in the January 1942 issue of *Fourth International*, the theoretical organ of the party. It was not published in the party's weekly newspaper, *The Militant*, despite the far wider circulation of that paper.

The statement did make clear the SWP's opposition to the war and characterised it as an imperialist one. However, it did not spell out at any point that US Marxists regarded the defeat of the US bourgeoisie as a *lesser evil* than class collaborationist support for the war. It was an internationalist anti-war statement, but it was not a Leninist-Trotskyist defeatist statement.

On a number of occasions Cannon and the SWP even suggested that fascism rather than their own Roosevelt government was the US workers' main enemy. Yet the *Transitional Programme* had in 1938 laid down the guiding principles for the FI's war policy in the imperialist countries:

"In this struggle the basic principle is 'the chief enemy is in your own country'

Our series on the history of the Fourth International continues with an account of the American SWP in the war.

or 'the defeat of your own (imperialist) government is the lesser evil.'" (L Trotsky, New York 1973, p131)

The FI's *Manifesto on War*, issued in 1940, had further stated:

"The Fourth International builds its policy not on the military fortunes of the capitalist states but on the transformation of the imperialist war into a war of the workers against the capitalists." (Trotsky, *Writings* 1939-40, p222)

Trotsky already had occasion in 1939 to denounce his Palestinian co-thinkers for deviating from this line. He had insisted, "all the fundamental rules of proletarian 'defeatist' policy in relation to imperialist war remain their full force today". (*Writings*, 1938-39, pp207-212)

He repeated the basic point in the clearest terms:

"Defeatism is the class policy of the proletariat, which even during the war sees the main enemy at home, within its particular imperialist country. Patriotism, on the other hand, is a policy that locates the main enemy outside one's own country." (*ibid*)

Against the argument that there could be a fundamental distinction between fascist and democratic countries Trotsky replied:

"It is naturally easier to begin the struggle in those countries where the workers' organisations have not yet been destroyed. But the struggle must be begun against the main enemy, who remains as hitherto, at home." (*ibid*)

Repression

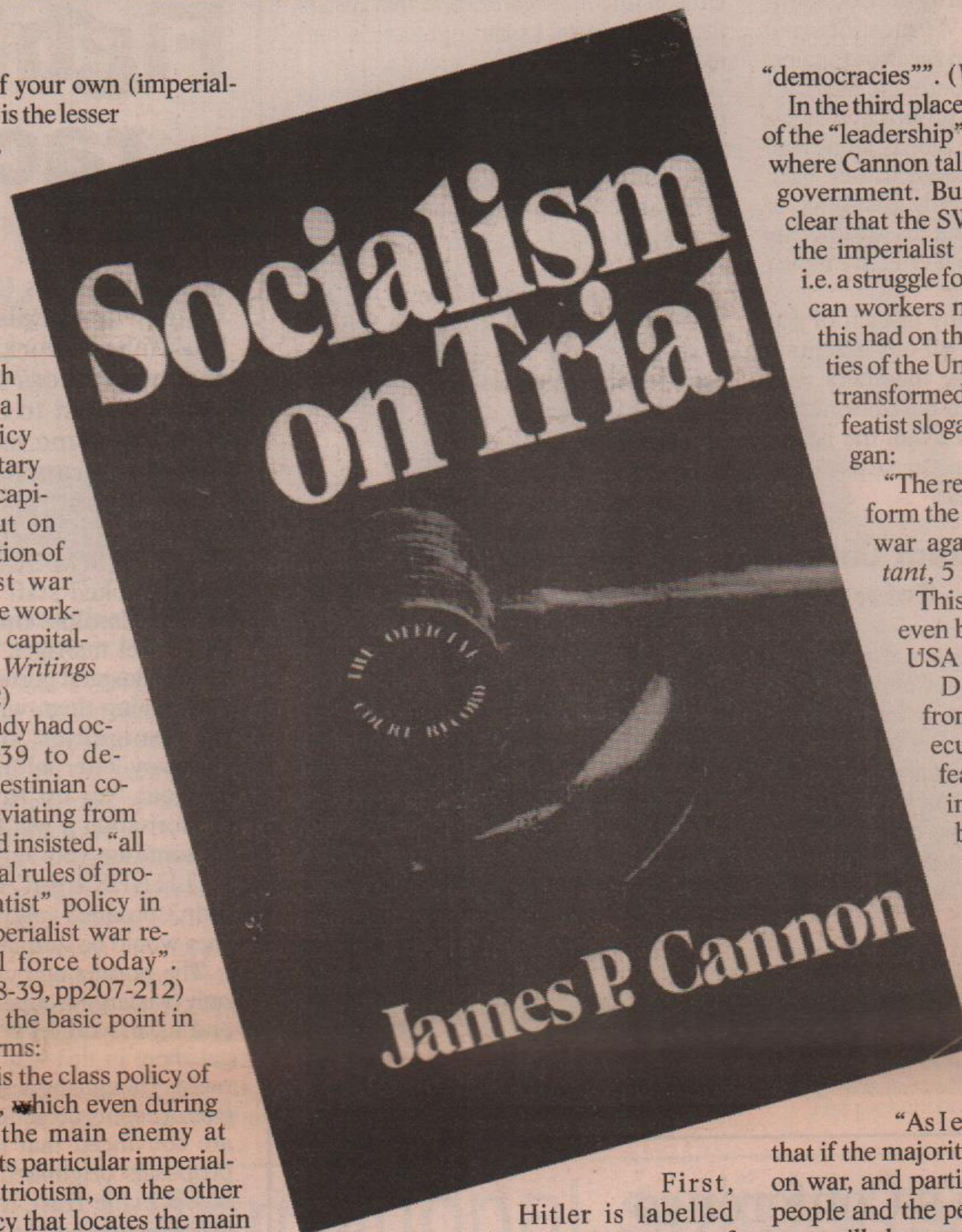
As part of its preparations for entry into the war the US government launched a campaign of repression against the SWP. On 15 July 1941, 28 of the most prominent SWP leaders were indicted on charges of sedition. The trial lasted six weeks, concluding on 8 December, the day after the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbour.

During this trial Cannon and his fellow defendants made clear their opposition to the war. But they also boycotted the FI's revolutionary defeatist position. *Socialism on Trial*, the transcript of the defendants' speeches and cross-examination, was produced as a pamphlet. In his answers to his lawyer's questions Cannon reveals a systematic evasion regarding an open revolutionary defeatist position:

"Goldman. Is it true that the party is as equally opposed to Hitler as it is to the capitalist claims of the United States?"

Cannon. That is unanswerable. We consider Hitler and Hitlerism the greatest enemy of mankind. We want to wipe it off the face of the earth. The reason we do not support a declaration of war by American arms is because we do not believe the American capitalists can defeat Hitler and fascism. We think Hitlerism can be destroyed only by conducting a war under the leadership of the workers." (New York, 1973 p52)

There are serious centrist concessions and evasions in this short exchange.



"democracies"'. (*Writings* 1938-39)

In the third place, Cannon talks merely of the "leadership" of the workers. Elsewhere Cannon talked about a workers' government. But he does not make clear that the SWP's task was to turn the imperialist war into a civil war, i.e. a struggle for power by the American workers no matter what effect this had on the war-waging capacities of the United States. The SWP transformed the revolutionary defeatist slogan into the evasive slogan:

"The real solution is to transform the imperialist war into a war against fascism." (*Militant*, 5 March 1941)

This evasion took place even before the entry of the USA into the war!

Despite being confronted by the state prosecutor with openly defeatist statements made in SWP publications before the European war began, Cannon studiously declined to argue this case.

To the charge "You do not believe in defending it (the USA) in any way do you?" Cannon replied:

"As I explained the other day,

that if the majority of the people decide on war, and participate in the war, our people and the people under our influence will also participate in the war. We do not sabotage the war, we do not obstruct it, but we continue to propagate our ideas, calling for a cessation of the war and calling for a change in government."

Cannon repeatedly restricts the SWP's opposition to the war to an expression of political opinion, making propaganda etc. What is missing is the element of the revolutionary class struggle during the war and the party's agitation for it. Such agitation, such actions taken by workers, would inevitably obstruct the war effort, would in this sense "sabotage" it.

The roots of this serious centrist vacillation was that it reflected the SWP's tendency to submit to national pressures and considerations, allowing them to override internationalist ones. All of



Pearl harbour, 7 December 1942

Cannon's justifications for his legalistic phraseology are couched in terms of reaching out to the consciousness of the American workers. But Cannon's correct desire to seek every avenue to the workers' consciousness went beyond pedagogic adaptation and ended in political adaptation. He seriously underestimated the necessity of the SWP during the opening stages of an imperialist war to be clear and unambiguous about three things.

In the first case, they needed to present a clear revolutionary challenge to the existing consciousness of the masses. They needed to challenge the workers' social-chauvinist leaders: the pro-Roosevelt trade union leaders, and a Communist Party which was ferociously patriotic after Hitler's attack on the USSR brought a *de facto* alliance between Roosevelt and Stalin. Only by standing against the stream in this way could the initially small vanguard of internationalist workers be won to Trotskyism.

Secondly, the SWP was the strongest party of the Trotskyist movement, operating in relatively free political conditions. Despite the prosecution of its leaders the party as a whole was not repressed. Hence it had an internationalist duty to make clear to the world working class the revolutionary defeatist position of the Fourth International.

Finally, the SWP had a responsibility to use its cadre to pursue open class struggle *agitation* in the factories and in the barracks that did not flinch from the inevitable conflict of such a policy with the claims of national defence, and which was not afraid to identify Roosevelt and the ruling class as the immediate enemy.

Courageous

The SWP vacillated on defeatism. But it did not lapse into social patriotism or chauvinism in the way that the reformist parties did. It maintained a clear message of international working class solidarity throughout, in both its paper and its journal. And after the outbreak of the war the SWP maritime fraction and its members in the armed forces were courageous in their efforts to re-establish contact with Trotskyists in Europe and beyond (See WP 198). Sherry Mangan (Terence Phelan) used his position as a foreign correspondent for the US magazine *Time/Fortune* to carry out important political missions in Europe and South America.

But Cannon's US-centred tendencies were reflected in his retreat from playing an active role as an international leader after Trotsky's death. During the war itself the party contributed only the most meagre resources to supporting the work of the International Secretariat, relocated to New York in late 1939. Nor did it mobilise resources to create such a centre in a neutral European country. Nor did it put any of its leading comrades onto the international leadership after the Shachtman split.

In short, the party did not act as an international organising centre for the FI. The SWP did not lead the FI during the war. And after it, as the FI was being reconstructed, it continued to avoid its leadership responsibility. At a crucial moment in the history of the FI Cannon ceded leadership to young and inexperienced Europeans like Michel Pablo and Ernest Mandel.

In spite of all this the FI survived the war as a revolutionary International. Sections wavered, but the International did not cross class lines.

And towards the end of the war the FI, alone in the workers' movement, fought for a revolutionary alternative to an imperialist peace. But the principal credit for this does not belong to the SWP.■

Next month: The FI debates perspectives for capitalism after the war.

BSE Scandal

Never trust the Tories!

IN DECEMBER 1995 John Major told the House of Commons:

"There is currently no scientific evidence that BSE can be transmitted to humans or that eating beef causes CJD in humans. That issue is not in question."

On 20 March 1996 Tory Health Minister, Stephen Dorrell, confirmed that ten people had died from a new type of CJD:

"The most likely explanation is that these cases are linked to exposure to BSE before the offal ban in 1989."

Evidence

The evidence that caused this change of line was presented by the government's own scientific body, the SEAC. But the evidence was piling up well be-

fore March 1996. Like every Tory who has spoken about mad cow disease (BSE) before him John Major was lying through his teeth in December.

What we now face is a potential epidemic. Professor Richard Lacey—whose warnings about BSE the government systematically ignored for years because he was "politically suspect", estimates the epidemic could kill between 5,000 and 500,000 people over the next decades. The Tories have rubbished all independent scientific research into the disease. They terrorised Dr Harash Narang, who had developed a means of testing live cows for the disease.

Even now, with a worldwide ban in force, the Tories repeat that beef is safe.

After Dorrell's announcement, Agriculture Minister, Douglas Hogg, insisted: "British beef can be eaten with confidence."

Lies

BSE has been with us for at least 10 years. The government's inaction, its lies and its current claim that everything in the farmyard is fine, should condemn it in everyone's eyes.

Why have the Tories played Russian roulette with the health of millions?

Why have they placed so many at risk when basic public health measures back in 1985, when the disease was first spotted, could have saved lives?

The answers lie in one word: profit.

The Tories' priority is not the safety of food but the size of the bosses' profit margins. And there's a lot of money to be made from beef.

The farmers who produce it, the feed producers who supply them and the big meat wholesalers are worth billions of pounds. An average size herd (82 cattle) yields a financial return of £127,000 from both dairy and beef products. It costs a farmer about £100,000 to maintain according to the Ministry of Agriculture. Much of this goes to the feed producers. So the average farmer nets £27,000 in profit. The British herd is 11-million strong. Profits for farmers total millions each year. In 1994 sales of beef in Britain alone netted £1.86 billion. ■

The warning they ignored

A ROYAL Commission on Environmental Pollution was set up by Labour in the 1970s. Its report went to the Tories in September 1979, four months after they came to power. They ignored it. The Royal Commission was anxious about using dead animals in feed for herbivores like cows, stating that:

"The major problem in this recycling process is the risk of transmitting disease-bearing pathogens to stock and thence to humans."

It went on to recommend very strict regulations for rearing and slaughtering animals.

The Tories shelved this advice. The price of protein for animal feed from sources other than dead animals (such as soya) rose in the early 1980s. Dead sheep were a lot cheaper, both for the producers and the farmers. A 1980 Ministry of Agriculture internal policy memo noted that:

"New proposals reflect the wish of ministers that, in the present economic climate, the industry should itself determine how best to produce a high quality product."

But the dead sheep carcasses contained scrapie, a disease like BSE. In their mad rush to "deregulate" farming and every other industry, the Tories did not care.

In 1981 Tory ministers signed the Diseases of Animals (Protein Processing) Order in 1981. This freed the meat industry from the safety measures already in place and the tighter ones proposed by the Royal Commission. It also sanctioned the use of dead sheep in feed designed to fatten up cattle for the beef market.

Within five years, the first cows had developed BSE. By late March 1996 at least 12 human victims of Tory policy have died from the new form of CJD.

The Tories have done everything in their power to protect the farmers and the meat industry from the financial repercussions of BSE. They waited 18 months before setting up a committee to investigate the disease.

They waited three years before introducing elementary safety measures, like the offal ban.

And, despite the fact that the government has found 193 slaughterhouses guilty of breaching BSE safety regulations, not one has faced prosecution.

By cutting compensation to farmers with BSE-infected cows they encouraged them to sell diseased cattle and let them enter the human food chain. ■

Market madness

MARKET FORCES were supposed to cure everything that was wrong with society in the 1980s. All that stood in the way of a prosperous Britain, said Thatcher and Major, was too much "regulation". Even in the month before the BSE crisis broke Tory minister Richard Freeman was calling for continued deregulation of the food market claiming that "unnecessary food rules have cost £200 million".

So market forces went unchecked. Lower standards for cattle feed meant higher profits.

But now "market forces" have passed a harsh judgement on the Tories and the meat industry themselves. Beef sales have fallen by one-third in Britain and the export market—worth £500 million a year to the industry—has been wiped out by the international ban on British beef.

The Tories may still have to pay millions in compensation to farmers, destroying their leeway for vote-buying tax cuts. They are facing a growing trade deficit, projected by one City stockbroker as rising by £6 billion as a direct result of the collapse in beef sales.

The beef crisis has exposed the vicious contradictions of the market. Left to its own devices it produces not only booms, but collapses. Unchecked, it places lives at risk.

Now the farmers and food producers come grovelling to the state, and to the European Union for vast cash handouts. Tony Bailey, of the Country Landowners Association said:

"If this matter is left to the market a lot of people are going to go bust, rather quickly, and not just farmers—a whole industry serving them could go bust. The government is rapidly going to have to think of some way of compensating people for the mess they have got us into."

What hypocrisy.

"Market forces" ripped out the

heart of the British manufacturing industry in 1979-81, leaving millions on the scrapheap and destroying decades of solidarity and organisation in working class communities. The Tories stood aside and watched with glee.

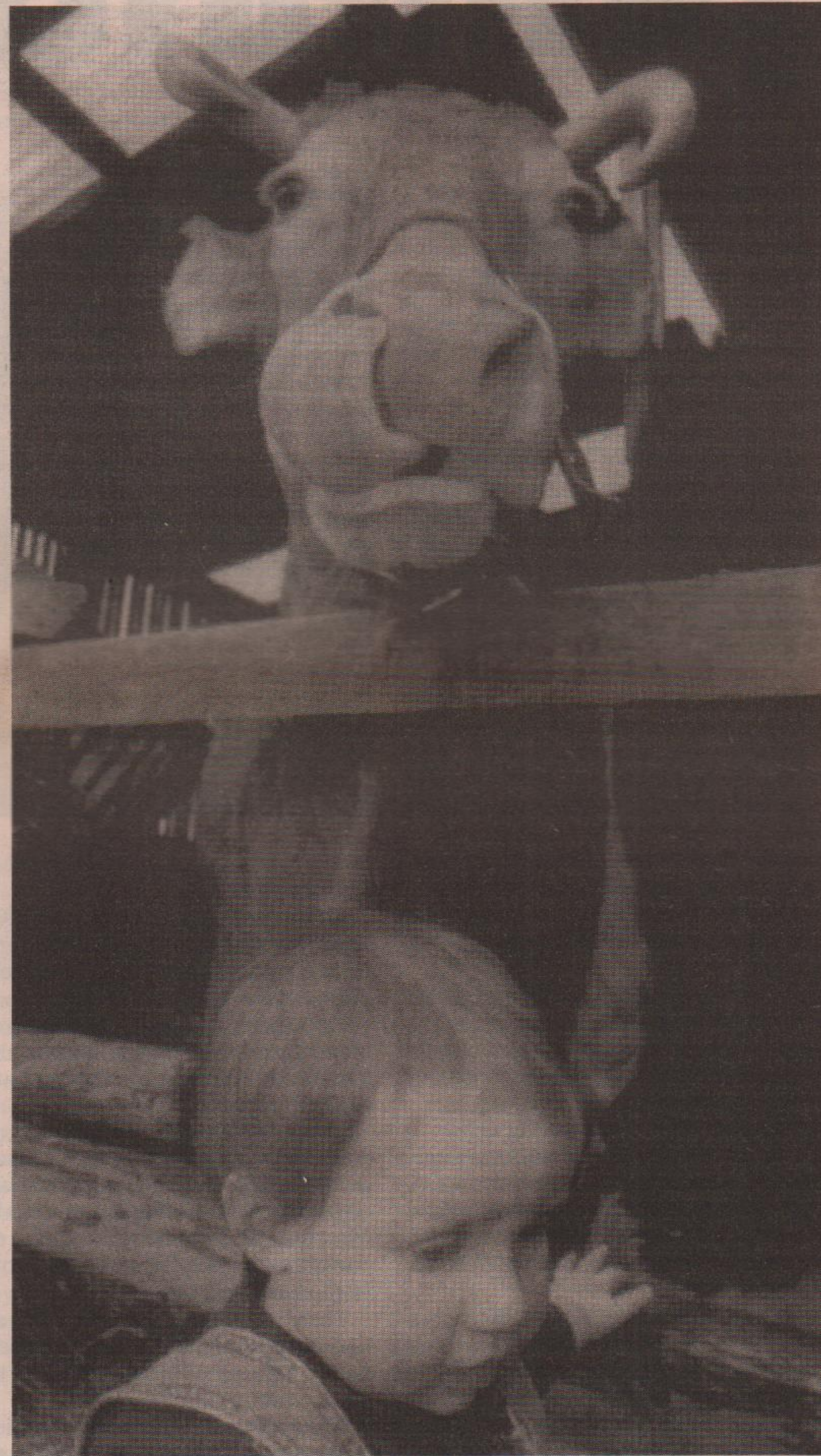
"Globalisation" that other Tory watchword, was used to justify mass unemployment. Coal and our cars are too expensive to produce in Britain, the Tories said, and in the name of the "global market" they butchered millions of jobs. But nothing must threaten the British beef industry. British beef must be protected from the global revulsion—not least because the Tory party is stuffed full of rich, reactionary farmers.

All this shatters the myth of "market forces". The market is like a mad cow itself—dangerous, unpredictable and prone to violent swings. When it suits the bosses they regulate the market. They will bail out and even nationalise failing industries themselves if their collapse threatens the profits of the capitalist class as a whole.

And it shatters the myth of "globalisation". When it suits the bosses they hide behind the "national interest", when it doesn't, they use the "global market" as an excuse to attack the working class.

That is why socialists want to abolish "market forces" altogether. That is why we refuse to fight alongside British bosses for the "national interest".

We want a world based on need not profit. We want global production organised to meet the needs of the whole human race. This cannot be achieved overnight, or even in a few years. But a socialist society, where human need, not profit, is the sole motive for production, is the only alternative to a system riddled with market madness and nationalist hypocrisy. ■



How long will the Tories keep on saying that British beef can be eaten with confidence?

What's the answer?

BSE IS a major national crisis. The Tories cannot solve that crisis. Not only are they in hock to the farming multinationals, their dwindling mass support rests heavily on the rural middle class who want either freedom to sell their diseased beef or massive handouts to compensate for a ban.

The crisis has also exposed Labour as a useless opposition. Even now Labour has offered nothing different to the Tories in practice, for fear of being labelled "unpatriotic" or "anti-farming".

The mass of consumers have acted far more decisively and effectively than all the MPs and government scientists put together. They have stopped eating beef.

But that is not enough. At present there is a worldwide ban on British beef... except in Britain. The big supermar-

kets responded to the fall in sales by slashing the price of beef. In response, many poorer families have been tempted to go out and buy what for millions is an occasional luxury. At the same time "market forces" have allowed poultry, pork and lamb producers to push up prices. In some butchers the only beef "guaranteed safe" is expensive imports.

Dangerous

EU ministers and scientists think British beef is too dangerous for their consumers in the rest of Europe. The Tories should not be allowed to defy that ban for British consumers. We are in favour of the state taking action and introducing controls to protect consumers from dangers that result from production processes that we do not control. But

we are not in favour of each nation using such health and safety measures to get a market "advantage" for their own producers. If the EU say British beef should not be eaten, then it should not be eaten in Britain either. Equally, the same standards must be applied to beef in other countries—including the mass testing of herds and close surveillance to see if the new CJD is occurring elsewhere. But we should not trust the EU and other governmental organisations to decide what is safe. We need an independent inquiry, under workers' control, into the real hazards of beef—in Britain and elsewhere.

We must create an independent alternative to the SEAC and demand that doctors, vets and researchers report their findings to this independent body as well

as to this government puppet show.

We demand price controls on other forms of meat, enforced by price watch committees of shoppers and retail workers to combat profiteering.

The big feed companies and meat producers should be nationalised now, without compensation, and their assets used to help clear up the BSE mess.

Compensation for any slaughter policy and for the fall in sales must go only to the small producers, and only on the basis of proven need. Already, the bosses have laid off 6,500 workers in abattoirs and other aspects of the processing industry. Workers in the processing plants and on the farms should be guaranteed full pay until safe production can resume, or redeployment with no loss of pay.

Beef is not the only food which is likely

to be bad for our health. We demand full labelling of all food, an end to the secrecy over the contents of food, animal feeds and other materials that are used in the production of food. Workers' and consumers' committees must be established to constantly review the processes of food production to enforce safety measures on food producers, manufacturers and distributors.

Consumers, on their own, cannot force through such changes. But the trade unions with seven million members, still Britain's biggest mass membership organisations, can and must lead the fight for safe food, accurate information and a plan to make the bosses pay for this crisis. They must also force Labour to fight for this emergency programme. ■

Helen Watson
reviews
**The Blair
Revolution: Can
New Labour
Deliver?**

by Peter Mandelson
and Roger Liddle.

THE FUNCTION of books like this is to test the water for the Labour leadership. Throw together a series of outrageous policies packaged in a repulsive social philosophy and lay it before the great British public. Stand back and watch the reaction. As the initial shock subsides launch a propaganda offensive against the "dinosaurs" who condemn it. Later, pile as much of this right wing agenda as the union leaders will accept into the practical policies of the party itself.

The authors' job, in short, is to set down in print what senior Labour politicians can only say in private.

Peter Mandelson and Roger Liddle are dab hands at doing this. Mandelson is a Labour MP who advised Kinnock how to smash the left inside the Labour Party after 1983. He is the "spin doctor"—a preparer of public opinion, a manufacturer of the discrediting rumour, a consummate back-stabber.

Roger Liddle, one of Tony Blair's policy advisors, helped Labour stay in opposition for 17 years by founding the SDP in 1981 and fatally splitting the Labour vote. While Liddle stopped a leftist Labour Party getting into office in 1983, Mandelson set about making sure that the next Labour government would be the most right-wing ever. Job done, Peter and Roger are now back together at the centre of Labour policy development.

The theme of their book is clear enough. Thatcher did a job that was long overdue in taming the trade unions and restoring the rights of "entrepreneurs". Thatcher understood too that modern capitalism can neither financially afford its inherited welfare state commitments, nor tolerate the fact that welfare undermines workers' willingness to work for peanuts.

Much of the book therefore is about how to scale down the welfare state to US proportions: a "welfare state" that guarantees sub-standard minimum existence for the poor and needy.

While Mandelson and Liddle do not speak for the whole of the Labour Party, they clearly represent the views of the dominant Blairite leadership faction. This faction is pulling Labour in the direction of bourgeois liberalism, aiming to break the historic links with the working class and make Labour a thoroughly bourgeois party that the bosses can trust.

Organisationally this transition is incomplete. Labour still has roots in the trade unions, and its mass support is still that of working class voters. But *The Blair Revolution* shows how committed they are to this road.

The fundamental positions of the book reveal how far this wing of Labour wants to go to please the bosses.

Mandelson and Liddle attempt to explain what is wrong with British capitalism: British capitalism has gone down the pan, is not very competitive, there is too little investment and the workers are poorly educated and trained. In two pages, which take the reader from the Industrial Revolution of the 1770s to Harold Wilson in the 1970s, we are told the cause of the long term decline.

The explanation goes something like this: Britain launched the Industrial Revolution through invention and bold entrepreneurship, but never developed the organisational strengths in management, research and training possessed by "our competitors" who industrialised later. The City of London then developed a separate and thriving existence of its own, too separate from the concerns of the home manufacturing base. Boardrooms became "ossified" bastions of privilege. And to make it all worse;

"Working people developed their own crude defences against the depredations of raw capitalism—trade union restrictive practices, demarcation rules and rigid apprenticeship systems became an

Labour's plan to scrap welfare

The Armani-trousered philanthropists



Blair



Mandelson

entrenched part of the British industrial scene. This impeded industry's necessary adjustment to change, handicapping competitiveness for much of this century."

The problems are still there today, according to Mandelson and Liddle. The key is to start generating more wealth. Adam Smith would be proud of their thoughts on how.

They write that we must not: "delude ourselves that wealth is somehow created by governments or society. Wealth comes from personal effort and entrepreneurial flair, exercised through companies that have found the right formula."

These bright companies suffer when school leavers are illiterate and innumerate, if potential customers are unemployed, "if the shops they go to are wrecked by young hooligans; and if they and their employees have to pay higher taxes to support millions of people on benefit".

The picture becomes very clear—British entrepreneurs are strangled by the restrictive practices of the unions, and disrupted by those troublesome poor people who wreck shops and demand benefits.

And if all this all sounds remarkably similar to the arguments of an earlier British Prime Minister it is no accident; "[New Labour's] strategy is to move forward from where Margaret Thatcher left off . . ."

But Mandelson and Liddle are not Tories, yet. This is about the best that can be said of them. So, whereas the Tories also want the welfare state reduced to emergency cover, the authors know that on its own this is not enough. This could just lead to a vicious circle of more crime, more repression to deal with the crime, and so on.

Hence, it is the central argument of the book that, in removing the "dependency culture", the working class are given the prospect of training and jobs thus re-

moving the need to rely on benefits or resort to crime.

While the Tories know that late 20th century capitalism cannot guarantee a job for everyone and think that mass unemployment and job insecurity have a function in disciplining the labour force, Mandelson promotes the illusion that everyone can have a job in New Labour's capitalist Britain.

Labour's training "charge card", its plans for training while at work, the suggestion to the employers that they take responsibility for skilling the workers for other jobs before sacking them from the ones they currently have—all this is official Labour Policy now.

These ideas for the labour market are borrowed from the USA and especially Labor Secretary Robert Reich in the Clinton administration.

The strategy, on a moment's reflection, is laughable. It assumes at root that the structure of demand and supply for the future labour market can be accurately predicted. If not, then how can you rationally train workers for future jobs that do not yet exist? But if capitalism could forecast accurately the nature of demand for goods and services and hence the workers needed to fulfil them, then capitalism would not be capitalism.

If Mandelson's strategy had been followed in the early 1980s we would have been setting up colleges for training estate agents and building workers ready for the housing boom after 1986; but as soon as the housing boom took off we would have been preparing them all to be shelf-fillers at B&Q so they could take up these posts when the housing market crashed in 1990. But neither the boom nor the bust was predicted by capitalist economists, let alone their minute effects on sections of the labour market. Only if production was planned could we begin to really anticipate demand for training and meet it rationally.

The whole jobs and training programme at the heart of this book is a



What future for them without the welfare state?

deceit, a left cover for destroying the benefits system. The real plan for the welfare state will only come through once Labour is in office. But the book remains a warning to us all.

The welfare system was constructed by liberals and Labourites originally in recognition that capitalism was incapable of generating the necessary jobs. Mandelson rejects this and so needs an alternative social philosophy.

The specific policy commitments of the book are bad enough. But the social philosophy that underpins it is repulsive. Mandelson and Liddle express this through a tale of two fictional families.

First we meet Eileen. Eileen is a dinner lady earning £100 a week. She lives in a council flat in South London and has had trouble making ends meet since her husband died. Her daughter is a struggling single mum desperately trying to get housed by the council. Eileen's youngest son is playing truant and getting into trouble with the police.

Next we meet Ben, a successful director of a media company, who lives nearby in a Georgian house in Kennington with his wife Laura, a fashion journalist. We don't know how much Ben earns (it would be impolite to ask) but he worries about getting to work in the morning because of the terrible state of the Northern Line tube service, but can't take the car because his wife needs it to take the children to school.

Eileen and Ben have never met. But, "despite the enormous differences in their individual circumstances, and although they may not realise it, they share many concerns about the state of Britain."

The belief that the working class and the middle class have the same interests underpins the whole of this book and the politics of New Labour. Mandelson and Liddle argue:

"That fact symbolises the national purpose underlying the social agenda of the Blair revolution. Their concerns give a clue to the themes and policies needed

state:

In its place is a return to the Victorian values of "charitable works" and providing good role models so that the poor may raise themselves up by their own bootstraps.

For example, the book is very keen on a "mentor" system, a surrogate parent for kids whose parents clearly can't cope. The mentor would be appointed by the school and would have weekly contact with the teenager, act as a mixture of counsellor and wise elder brother or sister. These mentors would be local people who had "made something of life".

In the book's last chapter—a fantasy of life under Labour in 2005—Ben the toff became "mentor" to Eileen's wayward son, Peter, who stopped taking drugs and is now the owner of a small garage in Pimlico, courtesy of a loan he got with the help of Ben.

No doubt Peter tugs his forelock when Ben drives in for petrol!

The organised philanthropy of the liberal middle class comes to replace the welfare state; the privileges and compassion of wealth take over from the rights of workers to be protected from the logic of capitalism.

This, of course, is the currently prevailing social philosophy of Clinton's Democrats in the USA. There the middle class would take to the barricades rather than pay more tax, but some see the social obligation that wealth brings to dispense charity to the poor. It assuages their guilt without making them obliged.

"It is not right that some people should collect the dole, live on the black economy, and then refuse to co-operate with society's efforts to reintegrate them into the labour market."

Mandelson

Mandelson and Liddle are truly "Armani-trousered philanthropists".

Mandelson and Liddle would object, no doubt, that their philosophy is designed to help the poor into self-sustaining work, not to be dependent on hand-outs from the middle class. But that really depends on how seriously you take New Labour's job creation schemes in an epoch of mass structural unemployment throughout the world.

Many of the book's social policies go beyond naivety; they are downright sinister.

Throughout, the poor are closely linked to crime. The authors recognise that poverty is a problem, but put the emphasis on anti-social behaviour and irresponsibility as the real social ills of the 1990s. Benefit claimants are depicted as idle, and social security is described as a hand-out when it should be a hand-up (i.e. workfare). "Scroungers" are not going to be tolerated in a New Labour society;

"It is not right that some people should collect the dole, live on the black economy, and then refuse to co-operate with society's efforts to reintegrate them into the labour market."

The authors put a lot of stress on the problems of the young male unemployed who have no self-respect and role in life. Single mothers are not exactly the cause of social problems, but they are definitely not as good for society as married mothers, according to Mandelson and Liddle: children from "broken homes" inevitably become delinquent.

Promoting the family is at the heart of these policies. Strong families, across the generations, mean children become responsible citizens. Grandparents should be encouraged to play a greater role—there should be tax breaks for parents who want to pay grandparents to look after children, and grandparents who have any capital (a home) should be encouraged to take out second mortgages to pay for their grandchildren's education, recommend the authors.

The key to overcoming anti-social behaviour and social decline lies, for the authors, not in removing their roots: poverty and unemployment. It lies in recreating "the community", a society where everyone feels responsible for social norms and standards. If it can't be created by economic change, for the New Labourites, it has to be imposed by social engineering.

There are many examples of their visions of this communitarian response, but all the elements are contained within the example of the "new contract between society and young people".

The "contract" is about giving young people opportunities—like going to school, training schemes—and then giving them responsibilities in return: behaving well and not being anti-social.

"Tough penalties" are promised for those who refuse opportunities and fail to fulfil their side of the bargain. Parents are to be taken to court for truancy. Disruptive children are to have compulsory homework and Saturday night detention. Vandals are to be severely punished. Local people are to report on truants and suspected perpetrators of crime, and the police are to act more rapidly on information from the public, since "local people know who the bad individuals are".

No doubt, as under Mao's cultural revolution, children will be expected to grass up their parents to the police for anti-social behaviour!

All in all it is a reactionary recipe, and one which stands no chance of really solving social problems. The family is idealised and no account is taken of the way in which modern capitalism, not fecklessness, has torn it apart, creating eight million single person households.

The whole book is completely devoid of any understanding of the economic and social underpinnings of capitalism and therefore of the decline and social decay of the late 20th century.

It is a vision of society completely at odds with reality. The authors naturally dismiss out of hand the notion that the structure of inequality, its reproduction and growth is intimately bound up with the ownership and control of capital, in a word class:

"This quasi-scientific view of the world (Marxism—WP) rests on economic determinism and class analysis, propounded by those who claim to speak for "the working class"... Its narrow view of class offers no insights into today's pluralist society..."

If Mandelson gets into the Cabinet in a future Labour government the working class will make him eat those words. Class has not gone away; nor has capitalism. Mandelson and Liddle's communitarian vision of the future will prove to be an illusion, as capitalism tears away even more of the social fabric.

Unless the working class imposes its own solution on society the year 2005 may look very different for the authors' fictional characters. Eileen will be retired on a pension which leaves her without adequate food and heating. Peter may well have spent the best part of his youth out of work, in prison or had his life squandered in one of imperialism's ever more frequent military adventures.

Ben and Laura, providing their businesses had not collapsed and their pensions not been wiped out in a stock market crash, will long ago have moved somewhere safer than Lambeth. They will be paying through the nose for private health care and education. Presiding over all this, no doubt, will be elder statesman Tony, abetted by his greying, trusty side-kicks Peter and Roger.

On the evidence of this book, it's a nightmare waiting to happen.■

The Blair Revolution is published by Faber & Faber, £7.99

Read Trotskyist International 19: What's new about Blair's New Labour? Price £1.50 Available from the address on page 3.



K The A-Z of Marxism is for Kollontai

by Clare Heath

ALEXANDRA KOLLONTAI made three decisive contributions to revolutionary socialism.

- She argued for special forms of party work among working class women, and fought for the creation of a women's section of the Bolshevik Party during and after the Russian revolution.
- Unlike many Bolsheviks who agreed with special work, she argued that women needed to be organised within the Party to ensure that the party took up correct positions on women, not simply that special work needed to be done because women workers were "backward".
- Finally Kollontai never flinched from fighting to win working class women away from the bourgeois feminists.

Kollontai, born in 1872, joined the Russian Social Democratic and Labour Party (RSDLP) in 1899. She first recognised the need for the socialists to carry out special work with working women in 1905. Factory women were prominent in the demonstrations and strikes at the time of the revolution, but many were illiterate and few were organised in the party. She began by organising factory gate meetings and special lectures.

In 1906 she met Clara Zetkin, leader of the German Socialist Women's Movement, and discovered that they too were organising special work and producing literature specifically addressed to women. After this meeting Kollontai was more determined that the party itself should be carrying out such work, but found little support from either the Bolsheviks or Mensheviks.

Bourgeois feminists were trying to organise working class women in support of their own campaigns. In 1905, the Union for Political Equality organised a petition on equal property rights which got signatures from 40,000 factory women. Socialists in general dismissed feminism as a bourgeois deviation, and it was left to Kollontai and a few other socialist women to challenge the feminists.

In 1908 feminists organised an All-Russian Women's Congress, and Kollontai argued that the Social-Democrats must intervene. Both the trade unions and the Petersburg Committees of the Social Democrats eventually agreed to organise delegations. Kollontai organised the delegation of 45 women who attended the feminists' conference and made a determined intervention.

They produced resolutions on universal suffrage, labour legislation, maternity protection and finally on the need for working women to organise separately from bourgeois women in order to "overthrow the capitalist system that exploits and oppresses them".

After this final statement the working class women walked out. Kollontai later wrote about the conference:

"For the broad mass of working women the conference and the intervention of the working women's group was of great educational significance, for a sharp and distinct line had been drawn between bourgeois feminism and the proletarian women's movement."

Kollontai joined the Bolshevik faction in 1915 after being convinced of Lenin's position on the war. She continued her work on women, completing a pamphlet, *The Social Bases of the Woman Question*, in 1909.

Other Bolshevik women in exile, particularly Inessa Armand and Nadezhda Krupskaya, took up the question of special work among women, convincing the Bolsheviks to launch in 1914 a special paper for women: *Rabotnitsa* (Woman Worker).

In the editorial of the first edition Krupskaya explained the significance of the new paper:

"The woman question, for working men and women, is a question of how to organise the backward masses of working women, how best to explain to them their interests, how to make them comrades sooner in the common struggle."

Kollontai argued that there was more to special work.

She wrote about the need, as well as propaganda, for a special form of organisation—separate, but led by the party:

"Separation has a double aim; on the one hand these intra-party collectives (commissions, women workers' bureaux and so on) must carry out special agitational work adapted to the level of the questions women want to have answered; their task is to recruit members among the mass of women who have a low level of consciousness, to raise it to the level of the rest of the party members; to move women into the arena of revolutionary struggle. On the other hand these collectives give women workers the possibility of putting forward and defending in practical ways those interest which touch women most of all: motherhood, protection of children, the rate set for children's and women's labour, the struggle against prostitution, reforms in housekeeping, and so on." (*Women Workers Struggle for their Rights* 1914)

Unlike most of the Bolsheviks, Kollontai recognised that special work among women, including women's commissions of the party, special meetings and structures, not only overcome the difficulties some women had, it also encouraged women to press for the party to take up women's issues.

"Joining together in a special collective gives women workers an opportunity to influence their comrades within the party, to inspire and urge them on to the struggle for political rights for women class women, gaining for women those rights which they themselves possess."

After the 1917 revolution Kollontai argued for a Women's Section of the party. The party was won to the position and the Women's Section, "Zhenotdel", was established in 1919 at all levels of the party.

The Zhenotdel created a mass communist women's organisation which played a key role in defending the revolution and tackling sexism in the Bolshevik party. Kollontai became the director of the Zhenotdel after Inessa Armand died in 1921.

Kollontai was the only woman commissar, and was able to put into practice some of the programme she had helped develop on the welfare of women and children.

Later in life Kollontai strayed from Bolshevism, leading the "Workers Opposition" against Lenin before finally becoming a loyal, if exiled, part of the Stalinist bureaucracy as a Soviet ambassador.

But the contribution Kollontai made on revolutionary work amongst working class women remains valid today. Alexandra Kollontai has been an inspiration to generations of revolutionary women.■

personal view

Pete Ashbury

Human fertility research worker **Pete Ashbury** looks at the fact and fiction surrounding the reported fall in male fertility

Sperm wars?

AS A research worker into human fertility I have had to put up with more than my fair share of jokes recently. The press has given the reported decline in male fertility the predictable "seaside picture postcard" treatment. But if you are a childless couple the alarming fall in the amount and quality of sperm that men produce is no laughing matter.

Clearly, having problems conceiving can be traumatic enough for individual couples. But at the level of society as a whole this decline could have profound effects on future population levels.

Blaming women when they have failed to conceive is a practice as old as women's oppression itself. Reflecting this patriarchal conceit, the majority of scientific research into fertility in the past was focused on women. The study of male reproductive functions and disorders—"andrology"—is a relatively new and underdeveloped field of research. But evidence now suggests that male infertility is the main cause of couples' failure to conceive in around 40% of cases.

At first sight this seems incredible. After all, the average man produces over a thousand sperm a second, and a typical ejaculated semen sample contains well over two hundred million sperm. Yet only a few dozen sperm actually pass through the uterus, to reach the egg in the fallopian tube, which then has to be penetrated by a sperm.

Blockers

A recent book by Robin Barker, *Sperm Wars—infidelity, sexual conflict and other bedroom battles*, tries to give a biological explanation and function to all these "wasted sperm", classifying them variously as "killer sperm", "blockers" and "egg-gatherers".

However, while the book is a good read, and it all sounds plausible, there is not a shred of evidence to back up Barker's thesis!

The fact remains that, whatever the reason so many sperm are produced but so few are utilised by nature, the numbers being produced are declining.

Several large studies in Britain, Europe and North America have demonstrated this. In 1992 the Danish scientist Niels Shakkebaek reviewed all the published studies of sperm counts from around the world, involving 15,000 men, in 61 studies, dating back to 1938. He found a fall in the average sperm count of no less than 42%! He also found that sperm quality (mobility and shape) had also declined significantly.

In Britain sperm count is falling by around 2% a year at present. The logic of this decline suggests that by the middle of the next century men may be producing no sperm at all!

So, what is responsible for the decline and can it be reversed?

First, it is widely accepted that alcohol, tobacco, marijuana and com-

mon antibiotics can severely reduce sperm production. In addition, X-rays, venereal diseases, petrol fumes, and pesticides, as well as the stress of urban living, all reduce sperm counts.

However, all these are generally short-term in their effects. Beyond these findings, scientists are not agreed.

Chemicals

In the opinion of Shakkebaek the most likely causes of declining male fertility are chemicals in the environment which are similar to oestrogen. These chemicals are already known to cause permanent damage to the reproductive systems of young boys whose sexual organs are not yet fully developed. It is thought that unnaturally high levels of oestrogen in the environment are being absorbed by the mother and passed on through the placenta to the foetus.

Despite this evidence, many synthetic oestrogens are still widely used as growth promoters in livestock. Scientists have also shown that residues of oestrogen, probably mainly from the contraceptive pill, are found in treated sewage. Oestrogens also enter the ecosystem through their use in Hormone Replacement Therapy (HRT)—used by menopausal women mainly to reduce the risk of osteoporosis (brittle bones). Indeed, HRT with oestrogen is so popular that it is now the leading prescription drug in the USA, taken by over 10 million post-menopausal women. It is a multi-billion dollar business, with profits soaring every year.

So what's available for couples experiencing difficulties having a child, which affects as many as one in six couples in Britain?

There are many treatments but, at best, they only have a 30% success rate. While they are routinely available in many Western countries, though often with privileged access for the rich, they are not an option for the masses in the Third World.

While capitalists cause many of the problems that have given rise to excess oestrogen levels, and make a tidy profit from its production, they have little interest in the issues of choice in fertility, and human health in general.

Research

In response to all these findings we need a planned programme of research into the causes of infertility, both male and female, and to discover whether the current decline can be halted and/or reversed if necessary.

We should demand that governments fund the research, which must include independent scientific experts from all the relevant fields.

This work should be under workers' control and we should demand that research organisations and companies open their books to inspection. ■



Chinese invasion will drive the masses of South East Asia into the hands of US imperialism

War over Taiwan?

IN THE weeks leading up to the Presidential elections in Taiwan, on 23 March, China carried out military exercises in the Taiwan Strait, less than 150km from Taiwan itself. In response the US moved a carrier taskforce close by.

The Chinese ruling bureaucracy were reminding Taiwan's political parties that they still claimed the island as their own.

The US generals were reassuring the rich Taiwanese bourgeoisie that they would continue to defend the island as a bastion of anti-communism.

But despite the sabre-rattling, as *Newsweek* noted, "what is happening off Taiwan is a pantomime rather than a confrontation."

The West has attempted to play up the threat from the Chinese "rising super-power" in South East Asia. But China would have paid a huge military and political cost if the invasion had taken place. China has the numbers, but on land, sea and air its firepower is 20 years out-of-date and not guaranteed to beat Taiwan alone, never mind the USA. So what is it all about?

Until President Nixon's change of policy in 1971, Taiwan remained a pro-US "gendarme" state. It was ruled by dictator Chiang's Kai Shek's Kuomintang (KMT). The KMT still claimed to be the real government of China and was formally at war with the "bandit regime" in Beijing. Chiang maintained martial law and denied the Taiwanese any democratic rights to elect their own government.

Even after the rapprochement between the US and Beijing, the pretensions of the Taipei regime were maintained. After Chiang's death in 1975, his son Chiang Ching-kuo, retained martial law until 1987, the year before his own death. Parliamentary elections were allowed in 1988. The regime, however, has continued to claim the status of "The Republic of China" and to defend the supposed "sovereign integrity" of China, including Taiwan, in direct defiance of the Stalinist bureaucracy in Beijing.

At an economic level the market reforms introduced in China by Deng Xiaoping have increased economic integration between Taiwan and China, both by direct investment and trade and indirectly via Hong Kong and the Special Economic Zones (SEZs). The Chinese bureaucracy sees the prospect of transforming these links into a fully integrated capitalist economy as probably the shortest route to the restoration of capitalism as the dominant economic system within a "reunited China."

The need for the Taiwan-based Chinese bourgeoisie to secure their place in such a system lies behind the current electoral campaign of Lee Teng-hui. Lee is Chiang Ching-kuo's successor as President and leader of the KMT. Unlike his two predecessors, Lee has actually toyed with the idea of declaring Taiwan "independent". This belated recognition of the "democratic rights of the Taiwanese", rather like British imperialism's death-bed conversion to democracy in Hong Kong, is intended solely to strengthen

the regime's hand in bargaining with China, avoiding complete subordination to Beijing.

At the same time, it allows Lee Teng-hui to prepare a viable new political order should integration into China prove a long drawn out process. For the USA these developments allow Taiwan to be used as one more bargaining chip in the campaign to wring trade and investment concessions from Beijing.

But what of the rights of the people of Taiwan in all this? In 1949 Chiang Kai-Shek led the remnants of his nationalist movement to Taiwan, after their overthrow by Mao's Communist Party. Families of mainland-born Taiwanese number 15% of the population of the island. The original part of the population have long been the subject of discrimination by the Taipei regime.

WHAT WE FIGHT FOR:

- ★ US troops out of Taiwan! US fleet out of the China Seas!
- ★ For working class power in Taiwan!
- ★ For Political Revolution in China and the expropriation of large scale capital in the SEZs!
- ★ For the revolutionary unification of China and Hong Kong through political and social revolution!
- ★ For the right to self-determination of the Taiwanese people!
- ★ For a Socialist Federation of South East Asia!

Taiwanese nationalist and separatist movements suffered systematic state repression under martial law, including massacres. Although now legalised, they are unable to reverse the consequences of nearly fifty years of control by the KMT. Despite this, the biggest of the native Taiwanese parties, the Democratic Progressive Party (DPP), was capable of winning 40% in parliamentary elections.

In the March Presidential elections, won by Lee Teng-hui, none of the candidates represented the interests or organisations of Taiwan's working class. The DPP, although supported by many workers, is a thoroughly bourgeois party, linked to the "Liberal International" and is the most outspoken in favour of independence. The other candidate (Lin Yankang, backed by the New Party) represents the old guard of the KMT, still committed to reunification. Polls suggest that only one in four favour independence and the same number reunification. Most, as can be seen in the 54% vote for Lee, back the open-ended status quo.

Socialists in Taiwan must work for the newly legalised trade unions to establish the basis for a Workers' Party committed to complete independence from all these bourgeois parties.

Neither the KMT and the DPP, nor their US imperialist masters, will defend the democratic rights of the Taiwanese masses.

Therefore we cannot support them in their clashes with Beijing. Revolutionaries must condemn the incursions of the US fleet in the Straights of Formosa and demand its immediate and total

withdrawal from the entire region.

In the event of a military conflict between the US/Taiwanese forces and the Peoples' Republic of China, a victory for the US-led bloc would only lead to the acceleration, extension and completion of the piecemeal process of capitalist restoration currently being pursued by the Chinese Stalinist bureaucracy. China remains a degenerate workers' state—albeit one well on the road to the restoration of capitalism—and the working class must therefore stand for its unconditional defence from imperialism and its puppets. Thus workers around the world should support the People's Republic of China, as a degenerate workers' state, in any conflict arising between US and/or Taiwanese forces, no matter who fires the first shot.

But this does not mean that we should support the policy of Beijing vis-a-vis Taiwan, let alone advocate its seizure by Beijing. Revolutionary socialists condemn the Chinese Stalinist bureaucracy's military manoeuvres aimed at coercing the Taiwanese electorate, and their threats to invade Taiwan. These threats represent vulgar great power chauvinism totally alien and inimical to the interests of the mainland Chinese and Taiwanese proletariat and poor peasantry.

A Chinese invasion of Taiwan would not result in the extension of the planned economy to Taiwan. It would only recreate the conditions existing in Guangdong or Fujian or the conditions that will exist in Hong Kong after 1997: rampant capitalist exploitation, brutal Stalinist police dictatorship and an added measure of bureaucratic parasitism.

It would certainly also mean the crushing of the newly emerging union movement, and of all political parties including any revolutionary forces.

Last but not least a Chinese invasion would further discredit "communism" in the eyes of the workers and youth of the region, handing the weapon of "democracy" once again to the imperialist and semi-colonial bourgeoisie.

China is gripped by a growing political and economic instability as a result of the crisis of bureaucratic planning and the rapid growth of capitalism in the SEZs and beyond. In this context socialists must fight for a conscious and thoroughgoing political revolution to overthrow the bureaucracy.

Its aims will be to create workers' council democracy, halt the capitalist restoration process and initiate workers' democratic planning of production.

Equally vital is the need for social revolutions in Taiwan and Hong Kong.

Proletarian revolutions in China, Taiwan and Hong Kong could unleash a revolutionary wave throughout Asia and the Pacific rim.

These tasks demand the closest co-operation today between the workers' movements of the entire region. They must be won to the goal of a federation of workers' states, within which the rights of national minorities, including the right to secede, should be guaranteed. ■

Palestine

Arafat: servant of Israel

Richard Brenner looks behind the recent catalogue of bombings, bulldozings and repressions to ask whether Yasser Arafat can keep the lid on mass Palestinian resistance.



PNA police crack down on Hamas demo in Ramallah

A SERIES of massive suicide bombings in Jerusalem and Tel Aviv last month, carried out by militants of the Islamist movement Hamas, left 32 Israelis dead. But the violent repression that followed came from a source that surprised and outraged many Palestinians - the PLO itself.

The Israeli Defence Force (IDF) punished the Palestinians collectively for the actions of Hamas, bulldozing the homes of the bombers' families and sealing off Gaza and the West Bank. President Ezer Weizman summed up Israel's brutality: "if we cannot find the needle we must burn the haystack." Around 250 Islamists were arrested without charge by the Israeli forces.

Threats

But that was not all. Under tremendous pressure from Tel Aviv, and repeated threats to send Israeli troops back into the newly autonomous areas, Palestinian National Authority (PNA) President Arafat sent in his new police force to smash Hamas. The PNA declared its intention to "demolish this vicious organisation", raided Islamic centres and offices, put all mosques in the Gaza strip under police control and arrested over 600 activists.

What has led to this situation of virtual civil war between the PLO and Hamas, with the former fighting hand-in-hand with the very Israeli forces that they were formed to resist?

The answer lies in the dynamics of the peace process itself.

The process originated with the signing by Arafat and the Israeli government of the Declaration of Principles on 13 September 1993. This agreement, negotiated behind the scenes in Oslo, set out the timetable and the main planks of the peace process to date. In return for Israel's formal recognition of the PLO, the Palestinians were to abandon all military operations against Israel and their opposition to the existence of the Zionist state. Indeed, Arafat went beyond this, assuming:

"responsibility over all PLO elements and personnel in order to ensure their compliance, prevent violations and discipline violators."

A staged withdrawal of Israeli troops would begin with the Gaza Strip and the town of Jericho on the West Bank, which would be policed by a special PLO police force and be administered by a national authority responsible for education, culture, health, welfare, tourism and taxation (though, significantly, this was to exclude indirect taxes such as VAT which would continue to raise revenue from the Palestinian workers for the Israeli state). "Defence" and foreign affairs would remain in the hands of the Zionists.

Surrender

When it was established, however, the PNA fell far short of even the limited autonomy that the Oslo accord seemed to offer. The purported withdrawal of the IDF was delayed again and again. When it came, it proved little more than a redeployment, on the excuse of Israel having to defend the armed Jewish settlements on the West Bank.

The laws and authority of the PNA and the Palestinian police did not even extend to all the citizens of the autonomous areas - Jewish citizens were completely exempt. Indeed the actions of the police and the laws of the PNA were all subject to the approval of the Israeli government. Last year's Taba accords

merely extended this withdrawal to six other West Bank towns and cities, including Hebron, where Israeli troops will retain a garrison to "defend" the 350 settlers who have occupied the historic centre of the town.

The Oslo process secured the effective surrender of the PLO and its conversion into a force fighting *against* rather than for the national liberation of the Palestinians.

Pressure

The Israeli ruling class, loath to offer any concessions to the Palestinians, were caught in a contradiction arising from the very nature of their state. As a political entity owing its very existence and history to a series of planned colonial settlements, it has necessarily poisoned its citizens with a racist and irredentist ideology - especially in the new West Bank settlements. Concessions, particularly involving withdrawal from occupied land, provoked a destabilising reaction from Israel's hard right - as dramatically shown by the assassination of Yitzhak Rabin.

Yet at the same time Israel's fundamental character as a special type of privileged semi-colony, wholly dependent on massive grants and the financial backing of US capital, greatly limits the Zionist government's room for manoeuvre. The policy of negotiating the PLO's surrender arose not only within Israel's ruling circles, but as a result of external pressure.

The USA - as part of a policy of attempting to defuse major global troublespots in the aftermath of the collapse of Stalinism - threatened to withdraw \$10 billion in loan guarantees unless Tel Aviv were prepared to make a deal.

Why did the PLO agree to take part in the Oslo process, given that it required them to concede so much for so little? The answer lies in the almost complete exhaustion of the entire strategy of Palestinian nationalism. Since launching its armed actions in 1965 and taking control of the PLO in 1969, Arafat's Fatah

faction pursued a classic strategy of petit-bourgeois nationalism - focusing on guerrilla warfare at the expense of mass struggle, and diplomacy with capitalist regimes at the expense of promoting working class struggles across the states of the region. The opportunity posed by the heroic *Intifada* rebellion of the Palestinian youth in 1987-89 was squandered. By the end of the Cold War and the changed conditions of the 1990s, the crisis facing the PLO was especially acute.

The collapse of the PLO's main geopolitical and military prop - the USSR - was not the only blow Arafat faced. His support for the Iraqis during the Gulf War of 1990-91 led to a haemorrhage of funding from the conservative Arab regimes who had backed the US-led coalition. A massive loss in donations and the freezing of PLO property held in Kuwait left the movement £10 billion short by 1995. The vast apparatus of PLO functionaries, offices and information centres was dramatically curtailed. The movement was on the verge of its deepest ever crisis. Oslo offered a way out.

This partly explains Arafat's extraordinary spinelessness at every stage of the negotiations. Since 1993, Arafat has conceded Israel's definition of "Jericho" (25 square kilometres as against the 390 square kilometres of the Jericho district) has accepted that Israel's security concerns rather than UN resolutions and international law should be the basis for the negotiations and allowed Israel to double the size of the administrative area covered by Jewish settlements in Gaza.

Priorities

But it is when the economic provisions of Oslo are examined that the underlying source of Arafat's contemptible weakness is revealed.

Oslo provided for the free movement of labour between the PNA areas and Israel. Yet this was made subject to any limitations imposed by either party. Given that the flow of labour is entirely

one way - a quarter of all the occupied territories' national product comes directly from wages paid to cheap migrant labour working in Israel - this represents complete control of the flow of labour by Israel.

Palestinian import controls and duties are to be assessed and fixed by a joint PNA/Israeli body with the aim of tying the territories even more closely to Israeli economic priorities.

Bloc

The growth of an informal economy based on subcontracting, measures to stem agricultural exports from Gaza and the West Bank to Arab countries and direct them towards Israel, and the restriction of industrial development to special zones are all designed to keep the territories in the defacto position of colonial subordination.

None of this benefits the Palestinian masses, nor the working class who make up Israel's cheap labour force. But these are not the class forces that determine PLO policy.

Over half of the PNA's appointed ministers come from the families of Palestine's old landowning elite. This explains why they drafted a basic law for the PNA which allows workers to be paid in kind - against the provisions of all international labour laws.

Similarly the official PLO trade union body intervened in a dispute between the Israeli labour front, Histadrut, and the Gaza and West Bank trade union federations, selling short their claim for reimbursement of Israeli union dues for non-existent services. And of course the PLO is committed to "a free market economy" which "guarantees the cardinal role for the private sector."

The level of Fatah's repression of the Islamist opposition, and mounting disquiet at Arafat's dictatorial mode of rule, has increased unease within the PLO at the direction the peace process is taking.

Yet opposition remains channelled principally through the reactionary

Hamas movement. A powerful faction exists within its military wing which is intent on demonstrating through spectacular guerrilla actions that the PNA is little more than a pliant tool of the Zionist state.

The PLO opposition factions - principally the PFLP and DFLP - have utterly failed to rally serious opposition to Oslo and the PNA. Concentrating on a rejectionist bloc with Hamas, they allowed the Islamists to take the sole lead in organising mass demonstrations and protest strikes by Palestinian businesses against repression and the undemocratic elections to the PNA.

Yet real social forces exist that could be rallied to a militant rejection of the deal and a renewed fight for democracy, a sovereign constituent assembly and genuine national self-determination. They are to be found in the plethora of non-governmental organisations providing welfare, educational, cultural and medical support in the territories, each of which faces - and has resisted - the blatant attempts of the PNA to cut their funding and bring them under direct political control.

Cohesion

They are to be found amongst Palestinian womens' organisations, let down by the Fatah leadership's opportunistic avoidance of any mention of real equality and rights for women, yet simultaneously appalled at the growth in support for the Islamic reactionaries with their self-conscious rejection of "modernism" and stress on Koranic law concerning the consignment of women to the family.

Above all, they are to be found in the trade unions, the most significant and socially cohesive sections of the organised Palestinian movement. Whilst the relative weight of migrant labour and PLO sponsorship has always led the Palestinian worker to identify the principal enemy as the Israeli occupation rather than their own bourgeoisie, the rise of Palestinian political institutions and the pathetic concessions secured by Fatah and the PLO can and must lead to a profound process of ideological and political change in the ranks of these 350,000 low-paid and brutally exploited workers.

The Palestinian trade unions are riven with geographical and political/factional disunity.

Attempts to unite rival federations have been scuppered by the unwarranted demands of the pro-Arafat federation for over-representation within a merged body.

Renewal

This gives a taste of the struggles to come in the ranks of the Palestinian workers' movement. There is no avoiding politics - it is already present at the very root of trade union organisation. The time is ripe for the foundation of a new political party of the trade unions in Gaza and the West Bank, a party that can challenge the political cowardice and tyranny of Israel's newest watchdog, the PNA.

On a programme that links the democratic fight for a constituent assembly to social questions such as the liberation of women, that combines the questions of pay and taxation with a fight against Israeli economic domination, the strongest section of the Palestinian nation - the proletariat - can press forward to the renewal of the struggle for a truly independent, non-confessional and socialist Palestine. ■

Italy

PDS poised for power?

WHEN THE *Mani Pulite* ("clean hands") judicial inquiry into political corruption began in February 1992, few anticipated the speed and scale of the collapse of bourgeois politics in Italy.

Immediately, the big names of the post-war years—Craxi, Andreotti, Forlani—fell in disgrace. By the 1994 elections the parties they led—the Socialist Party (PSI) and Christian Democrats (DC), the pillars of the post-war Italian order—had crumbled to dust.

The role of DC in this system was pivotal. Formed as a bloc of different social forces—the peasantry, part of the working class, the small-scale entrepreneurs, the big landowners in the south—the DC was united by anti-communism and support for the Catholic church. In the economy, the DC operated a nationwide network for distributing state funds to industry, contracts and jobs in state-owned industry, public administration and the banks.

By the 1980s, the functioning of this "mafia capitalism" was blatantly dysfunctional for an Italian bourgeoisie keen on the model of capital accumulation prevalent elsewhere in the European Union (EU). Italian capitalism fell behind its rivals and was increasingly burdened with a huge state budget deficit (120% of GDP). The accumulated costs of doing business the Italian way was bankrupting the state.

For 40 years this system had continued under the political imperative of keeping the PCI, the strongest Communist Party in western Europe, out of office. After the collapse of Stalinism in 1989-91 and its impact on the PCI, this rationale ceased to exist.

Meanwhile, the Maastricht Treaty of 1991 set targets for monetary and economic integration which were more onerous for Italy than most. The unthinkable became unpostponable.

Miraculously, corruption inquiries, literally strangled in the past, began in earnest. So did the crisis. The elections of 21 April 1996 will not end it.

The big bourgeoisie has a clear goal in the new phase. The big export-oriented multinationals need a stronger and "leaner" state, capable of speedily privatising the state-owned industries (including telecommunications and transport). They want the state budget pared down to meet the Maastricht criteria, by

In 1992 the political system in Italy crashed under the weight of corruption scandals. Both in 1992 and 1994 elections have failed to resolve the crisis. This month two evenly supported blocs of the centre-left and centre-right will fight for office.

The crisis, as **Marco Zito** explains, is set to drag on regardless.



March against Berlusconi, another top man with "dirty hands"

drastically reducing social spending on pensions and health. They want to abolish or dilute the laws affording labour some protection.

But to achieve this goal has meant attacking sectors of the state bureaucracy and of the bourgeoisie who benefited from systematic corruption. It was also guaranteed to provoke working class resistance.

The problems became clear as soon as media tycoon Berlusconi's Forza Italia took office in coalition allies with the Lega Nord and the fascist front Alleanza Nazionale (AN) in 1994.

Berlusconi's government lasted barely seven months. It fell under the pressure of working class protest which exposed the coalition's internal tensions. The yuppie-stuffed Forza Italia pressed for privatisations and Thatcherite policies; the AN, based in the poor south, needed continued state intervention and subsidies from the richer north. Meanwhile,

the Lega wanted precisely the opposite—to be free of the south and integrate more closely with the richer EU nations, even at the cost of loosening its ties with the southern half of its own country. To top it all, the stench of corruption hung round Berlusconi.

When this government collapsed, the bourgeoisie looked to Lamberto Dini, a "non-political" banker, to form a government. The Dini-led government formed in January 1995 around one central objective: reform of the pension system. Helped by consistent support from the former PCI, now transformed into the social-democratic, Blairite PDS, Dini pushed through pension and other welfare cuts and a privatisation programme that threatens big job cuts.

Whereas the Berlusconi government only succeeded in rousing a powerful workers' movement against his pension attacks, the PDS was able to pass off the very same measures to its working class

supporters without serious opposition. This confirmed the precious role of PDS for the bourgeoisie.

In the light of this experience, the big bourgeoisie approach the April elections prepared to live with a PDS-led government. They see its potential for imposing further attacks (preferably behind a centre-left ex-DC figure like Prodi as prime minister) while minimising resistance through its links with the trade union bureaucracy.

The strategy of the PDS is to take advantage of the collapse of the DC to become the new party of the Italian "progressive" bourgeoisie. The change of name, the dropping of any reference to its Stalinist past, the adoption of a neo-liberal programme, its support for Dini—all count in its favour. But even now the bosses do not entirely trust the PDS to rule alone without the tutelage of ex-bankers such as Dini or ex-DC figures like Prodi.

And the bosses have reason to be worried: the PDS, despite its rightward orientation, remains a bourgeois workers' party. The PDS inherited the control of the CGIL (main trade union federation) and most of the factory cells of the Communist Party. This base constitutes a considerable pressure on the PDS and one which could still explode in its face.

For the moment, the PDS has not yet fully fused with the bourgeois forces it emulates. At these elections, it stands in an electoral bloc named "Olive-tree" with the Partito Popolare Italiano (PPI), a creature of the 1994 DC split, the new forces of Dini (Rinnovamento Italiano) and Maccanico (Alleanza Democratica), the Greens and other minor leftist parties.

There are others, however, in the PDS who wish to complete the right-wing evolution of the PDS should the present strategy fail to gain it power. Veltroni, a media expert, whose reference points are John F Kennedy and Bill Clinton, openly advocates a more radical change to a US-style Democratic Party. He waits in the wings—hoping to capitalise upon present PDS leader D'Alema's failure.

The failure to secure a PDS-based government in the election would probably hasten another solution. The electoral reforms that preceded the 1994 elections produced a hybrid of first-past-the-post and proportional representation, but one which has not overcome the "curse" of weak coalition governments.

So the implementation of the bosses' programme without a PDS-led government would require a major constitutional reform to strengthen executive power to or even create a strong presidential state, like De Gaulle's Fifth Republic; one capable of imposing drastic solutions on the working class and on sectors of the petty bourgeoisie in the name of "the nation".

Incredibly, both the PDS and the right-wing agree on this. A suggested coalition of the PDS, Forza Italia and Alleanza Democratica to rewrite constitution has not yet happened because of secondary difficulties: Berlusconi wanted an amnesty for himself, something D'Alema would discredit himself by conceding at this stage.

The elections therefore are likely to be a mere episode; the decisive conflicts are yet to come.

Break with the bosses!

AMID THE instability since 1992 the Italian bourgeoisie has managed to find sufficient unity to press ahead with attacks. In July 1992, within a month of the lira falling out of the ERM, the CGIL union leaders caved in to the bosses' demand to scrap wage indexation.

But the working class was not passive in the face of such attacks. In 1992 and 1994 there were mass protests. The working class has made clear its opposition to the bosses' offensive time and again. Now it must build a party, based on a programme that stamps its own solution on this crisis:

- ★ Abolish the 1992 and 1993 pacts signed by the unions. Restore the scala mobile to defend real wages. For an across the board wage increase to compensate for the last four years.
 - ★ Reverse the Dini pension reforms!
 - ★ Oppose the reactionary labour laws designed to raise exploitation (e.g. night and week-end work, a north-south differential in wages, half-pay contracts for young workers)
- The programme should include a workers' answer to unemployment, especially in the south where it is 20%;
- ★ Defence of every plant against closure, like Olivetti or Aresé, with a

mass strike in the sectors involved; occupation of enterprises threatening mass redundancies or closures.

- ★ For an immediate 35-hour week without wage loss; for workers' control of hiring and firing; divide the available hours by the number of available workers!
- ★ For a state-funded emergency programme in the south for housing, schools and infrastructure under the control of workers and the unemployed.
- ★ No to auctioning off state industries. Open the books to expose corruption.
- ★ Make the rich pay! Expropriation without compensation of all firms declaring redundancies or obstructing the above measures to tackle unemployment and declining social services. Abolish all indirect taxation and replace it with a wealth tax. Nationalisation of the banks and finance houses.
- ★ Workers need to build rank and file committees in every workplace to fight for these demands. They have to organise themselves democratically, with local and national councils made up of recallable delegates.
- ★ Smash the racist laws passed by Dini

and approved by the PDS; open the borders to immigrants from Africa, Yugoslavia and Albania. No discrimination in wage levels, working conditions, hours or housing rights.

- ★ For workers' self-defence against the state forces and far right gangs! Economic and social gains can only be defended if the workers, starting with those in large-scale industry, organise themselves into disciplined defence units, for a nation-wide workers militia.
- ★ For a workers' check on bourgeois justice. Workers' tribunals should judge on the 50 years of corruption and kickbacks to the bosses.
- ★ No to constitutional "reform" either by parliament or through deals between the parties. Under present conditions, only a sovereign constituent assembly can have any democratic claim to change the constitution. It would have to be elected by universal suffrage for all aged 16 and older under a PR system without thresholds or other undemocratic restrictions. No to a presidential constitution which will give powers to a "man above politics" or "technocrat" to attack the workers and youth.
- ★ Rifondazione Comunista (RC) and

trade unions must call for a general strike against this project.

On 21 April workers must put their reformist leaders to the test of office. At present there are two substantial working class reformist parties, the PDS and the RC, a hard-line Stalinist split from the PDS. We call for a vote for the PDS within the Olive-tree coalition *only* in the single member constituencies and urge their supporters to use its union and working class community links to force the PDS out of their coalition.

Pact

But the PDS has also signed a pact with Rifondazione, thereby assuring this small left reformist party 20-30 MPs in the new parliament. It seems this was part of a deal with the PDS: no big campaign against Dini's pension plans in exchange for a PDS promise to stand aside in some seats.

Nevertheless, RC is a reformist workers' party with an important implantation in the most militant proletarian towns in the North. It has links with a part of the left rank and file movement (movimento dei consigli).

The success of the 24 February demonstration against fascism in Rome, with 200,000 taking to the streets, is another

clear sign of the RC's importance among the Italian working class' political vanguard. We call for a vote for RC candidates in these elections in the PR section as well as in those single candidate seats it contests; workers should vote for it and demand it breaks its policy of appeasement with the Dini-PDS austerity programmes.

We vote preferentially for the RC list not because of its programme, which is reformist, but because it represents a fight, however limited, against the attempt by the new PDS leaders to dissolve a bourgeois workers' party into an open bosses' party.

A critical vote for the RC, and the largest possible number of PDS and RC deputies, will put the reformist leaders to the test before the masses who elected them. The stronger and more independent its class organisation, the more the proletariat will be able to resist the attacks the bourgeoisie is preparing.

But the reformist parties can never lead the Italian workers to victory. The workers need a new revolutionary workers' party based upon a programme for the overthrow of the bourgeoisie, for the dictatorship of the proletariat based on workers' councils and the fight for the Socialist United States of Europe. ■

US car workers The rustbelt rises

by G R McColl

WORKERS IN the US car industry have hit back against the back-breaking regime of "lean production". Some 3,200 union members came out on strike at two brake production plants in Dayton, Ohio on 5 March.

The strike lasted for nearly three weeks. Complete with 24-hour picket rotas, this was the biggest dispute the industry had seen since 1972.

US car workers have paid a high price in the past 20 years for the bosses' drive to restore profits. General Motors (GM), the owner of the Dayton factories, has axed 75,000 jobs since 1990. Compulsory six-day, 54-hour weeks have become the norm across the industry, with workers in some plants on the job for more than 90 hours a week.

Key multinationals have pursued the practice of "outsourcing", as part of their lean production strategy. Outsourcing is a form of contracting out, with parts supplied by smaller firms, often set up by the big corporations, to keep the lid

on labour costs.

Nearly 80% of these suppliers do not recognise a union, and typically pay workers only two-thirds of the wages and benefits received in the big unionised plants. GM has lagged behind its principal domestic rivals, Ford and Chrysler, but is keen on shifting more parts production to outside contractors. This corporate policy, with its implicit threat to jobs, triggered the Dayton strike.

GM's bosses claimed that the strikers were in breach of their contract, which specifically forbids industrial action over the outsourcing issue. The UAW bureaucracy, however, gave official backing to the walkout. The corporation's management have been spoiling for a showdown since making concessions on overtime working in the wake of a 1994 wildcat walkout in Flint, Michigan. But it is less clear whether the bosses were ready to sacrifice the \$700 million (£460

million) worth of production lost in the wake of the strike.

In response to the Dayton action, GM shut down the bulk of its production capacity in the US, Canada and Mexico, laying off more than 175,000 workers in total. This reflected the corporation's decision to play divide and rule between the strikers and those locked out, with GM arguing that workers laid-off as a result of the dispute should not be eligible for unemployment benefits. But the shutdown also exposed the vulnerability of "just-in-time" production systems to all-out action by relatively small groups of workers.

After initially refusing to negotiate, GM eventually made a deal on 21 March with UAW national officials.

For the moment, GM will not pursue an outsourcing agreement, with the German-based engineering firm Robert Bosch, for production of anti-lock brak-

ing systems. It does, however, "reserve the right" to outsource production in the future.

The UAW bureaucracy were at least as fearful of a national showdown as GM's executives. But the decision of UAW president, Stephen Yokich, to sanction the strike was a recognition by the bureaucracy that it cannot carry on with give-back contracts and endless retreats and still hope to retain its membership.

The deal at Dayton is likely to be only a temporary truce in an ongoing war over restructuring. Battle could resume even before the next round of national contract bargaining, with the current agreement due to expire in mid-September.

If it does, GM workers will have to be ready to strike hard against the bosses, spread that strike across the industry and organise to take control of their action out of the hands of the union bureaucracy.

The action at Dayton shows that the mood for such a fight is there. ■

ON 14 MARCH over 40,000 university students and teachers marched in Vienna against government plans to cut back spending in education and other areas of welfare. On the same day thousands more rallied in demos in other towns and cities across Austria.

The package agreed within the coalition government aims to cut teachers' pay and axe certain courses. Students would have to complete their degrees in less time and lose public transport concessions.

The teachers were first to act back in early March. Then on 4 March at a mass meeting in the Haupt University in Vienna the students met to decide their response. The student union officials (a coalition of the Socialist Party and Greens, with Stalinist support) wanted the meeting merely to agree to a series of "days of action".

But after speeches from supporters of the LRCI's Austrian section, **ArbeiterInnenstandpunkt** (AST), the meeting

Austria:

Students strike against cuts!

voted for an immediate strike. The meeting also agreed to fight *all* of the austerity budget proposals and not just those aimed at the universities.

The AST argued for a democratically elected strike committee accountable to the mass meetings. Whilst this was not adopted, a degree of rank and file control has emerged. The union officials have agreed to negotiate with the government, but the rank and file mass meetings—usually daily and with up to

1,000 in attendance—demanded that their representatives be allowed to sit on the negotiations and that they be filmed.

The strike spread rapidly with all universities in Austria eventually joining the movement.

AST supporters have taken a prominent role in pushing the movement along. They have produced eight issues of a strike bulletin, *ActionInfo*, carrying a mixture of strike news and anti-capi-

talist propaganda. The student union officials have signalled the AST out for particular attack, thus underlining its effectiveness!

So far the government have been in no mood to make significant concessions. In the light of this, one university has already called off its protest instead of seeking to gain more power by generalising the movement against austerity. Some public sector workers have voiced opposition to the cuts but have yet to act; this is key to further success.

The universities went on holiday at the end of March and the danger is that the leadership will use the first half of April to bury the movement. The mass meeting on 15 April is likely to prove decisive for the next phase of the counter-offensive against the government. ■

- ★ Withdraw all austerity cuts!
- ★ Put the strike in the hands of the mass meetings!
- ★ Spread the action to the trade unions and public sector!

LAST MONTH students across Australia took to the streets demanding "student control of student affairs".

In Victoria, 1,500 students marched to Liberal Party offices and then to Parliament calling on the state government to stop its attacks on student unions and its harassment of student activists. Students called on all university administrations to hand over the money they have withheld from student unions by 1 May, with no strings attached.

Similar marches occurred in all major cities. In Brisbane, police arrested five students outside Parliament House including NUS Education Officer, David Taylor. Three hundred students occupied administration buildings at Sydney University while 7,000 students attended rallies on campuses in South Australia.

The National Day of Action was called in response to the increasing repression of the student movement and the effects of "voluntary" student unionism in Western Australia and Victoria.

Three days prior to the Day of Action, police arrested another La Trobe University student, in relation to an occupation last year (see *Workers Power* 198). In all, eight La Trobe students have now been arrested, including the Student Representative Council President and the editors of the student magazine charged after printing an article called "The Art of Shoplifting". The police action is clearly intended to intimidate students fighting Voluntary Student Unionism (VSU)—the government's preferred method for smashing the organised resistance of students.

Workers Power (Australia) has argued that the best way to defend the editors and other La Trobe activists suffering

Australia:

Students march against VSU

from state repression, and the best way to fight attacks on education generally, is to build a mass movement committed to smashing VSU.

In 1995 La Trobe students demonstrated in a small way what is necessary. Within two hours of 150 students occu-

pying the administration building, the La Trobe University administration had met student demands.

The lesson is clear: the agents implementing VSU only understand one language—militant action. If this action was repeated on a broader scale, more sig-



nificant victories could be won.

Ultimately, however, student activism alone is not enough to win lasting victories in defence of education.

In March the new right wing Coalition's Finance minister Peter Costello announced that billions of dollars are to be cut from public spending. For students this will mean a further decline in grants, an increase in fees, and a general reduction in the quality of and access to education. But the cuts will go beyond education and students need to link up with workers fighting the attacks.

To implement the cuts effectively, the government will need to undermine the ability of different sectors to resist. It is no coincidence that at precisely the time the state Coalition is cracking down on anti-VSU activists, federally they are gearing up for an onslaught against the union movement and the principle of collective bargaining. Both measures are part of the generalised attack on welfare, workers and students—a generalised attack that requires a generalised response: solidarity and united action with other sectors under threat. ■

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A World to Win

France

The French Front National (FN) may have disappeared from the headlines, but it is still very active on the ground, working through a series of front organisations. From bowls clubs to tenants committees, the FN is spreading its tentacles throughout French society. In March, one of these many front organisations, the "Comité Villebois-Mareuil"—a rather unpleasant "intellectual" discussion group—planned to hold a meeting in Nantes on "Africa and Islam".

Comrades in the French section of the LRCI, **Pouvoir Ouvrier**, in Nantes immediately got in contact with all the groups in the local labour movement and called for a massive mobilisation to stop the FN and "friends" from meeting. Only youth organisations turned up to the meeting held to organise the counter-demonstration, but they represented the whole political spectrum: from the Young Socialists, through student PCF members to the ultralefts of the SCALP. Also present were SOS-Racisme, the two student unions and the JCR-RED (youth equivalent of Socialist Outlook).

Despite the fact that the "adults" had chosen to ignore our initiative and the SCALP refused a mass mobilisation in favour of a "confidential" hit-squad, the call from our comrades for a counter-demonstration was accepted.

Whilst the organisation of the demonstration—route, stewards and aim—was entirely collective, each group was free to make its own propaganda. Our only agreement was on the concrete action—stop the FN: which is exactly what happened! 250 people turned up, virtually all of them youth, and marched on the FN's meeting. Having bombarded the FN's stewards with a hail of eggs, the demonstrators occupied the room and chased off the fascists.

The FN learned a lesson they won't forget in a hurry! ■

Sweden

Thousands demonstrated outside the congress of the Swedish Social Democratic party in Stockholm in March. On the previous day the Social Democrats had elected a new chairman, Göran Persson, the darling of the "free market".

The demonstration was organised by a loose network of local unions, groups for the unemployed and disabled, oppositional Social Democrats, and several left groups, under the name of The Campaign for Justice. They were protesting against the right-wing policies of the government. The march was headed by a group of disabled in wheelchairs, protesting against the cutbacks on assistants, followed by a group of miners from the north.

After the demonstration the marchers assembled for a short conference to debate out the next steps and elect a coordinating committee composed of representatives from a number of local unions who have been in the forefront of the struggle. The Swedish section of the LRCI, **Arbetarmakt**, was active during the whole day, with papers and a special leaflet.

The protest could be the beginning of a real movement inside the unions in Sweden against all the cutbacks planned by the increasingly right-wing social democratic leadership. ■

Militant on Ireland

Left cover for Loyalism

TROUBLED TIMES started life as a resolution discussed and adopted by the July 1995 Irish Militant Labour national conference. Now published as a book, it poses as a Marxist answer to the pro-Unionist "new historians" of the Irish conflict. It seeks to explain the development of the national question since partition in the context of Lenin's views of the national question.

It is an abysmal failure. It is a 150-page excuse, apology and cover-up for the reactionary consciousness of the loyalist majority of the Protestant working class.

Hadden's starting point is Irish history. He deals at length with the "new historians" of the Irish conflict who attempt to find historical roots for a distinct, Northern Irish or Protestant national identity as far back as the early middle ages. Whilst correctly identifying the idealist premises of the "new history" Hadden admits, ominously:

"Even the most false theories can be bedded on a seam of truth" (p23)

That seam, according to Hadden, is the assertion that "Partition did have historical roots". But which historical roots? Was the sectarian state an expression of the old "Ulster" of the Presbyterian settlers which had nine counties, not six? No. Did it express the Protestants' "roots" in the bourgeois republicanism of the late 18th and early 19th centuries when Protestants such as Wolfe Tone led the fight to free all Ireland of British rule? Not at all!

Privileges

Marxists, in contrast to Hadden, have always understood the material roots of the Protestant working class' identification with British imperialism in the relatively recent, conscious creation of a Protestant "labour aristocracy" during the late 19th century, a layer which enjoyed marginal privileges over Catholics. After 1921 these were embodied in the sectarian statelet created by partition.

The Northern Irish statelet was a conspiracy against the democratic vote of 1918 when the vast majority of the Irish people voted for a united and independent Ireland. The Ulster landlords and industrial bourgeoisie, together with the Tory fraction of the British ruling class, manoeuvred to carve out six counties with an artificial Protestant majority so that the most industrialised part of Ireland could be kept out of the hands of the Irish nation.

Meanwhile, the Loyalists could maintain their privileges over the imprisoned Catholic 35%. To suggest otherwise is to claim *legitimate* material roots for working class Loyalism, and to write out of history the reactionary role that this section of the Irish working class has, tragically, been conned into playing. And this is exactly what Hadden's book does.

Alliance

Hadden is not so stupid as to suppress the facts of late-19th century Orangeism:

"Skilled workers were mainly Protestants. In the shipyards and engineering factories they were paid wages akin to similar trades in Britain, far more than the unskilled who had no union organisation... Very often [craft conservatism] translated into sectarianism as workers of various trades opposed skilled jobs going to Catholics." (p27)

But he ignores the Leninist explanation for this, which identifies the creation of a skilled "labour aristocracy", consciously bought-off by the imperialists, and the welding together of a strong alliance of Protestant workers and their bosses on this material basis.

He proceeds to rewrite the history of an entire period, from the Belfast docks strike of 1907 right through to partition in 1921, as if the Protestant workers' alliance with their own exploiters was a

Colin Lloyd
reviews
**Troubled Times:
The National Question in
Ireland**
by Peter Hadden
Herald Books 1995 153pp
£5.99

merely episodic phenomenon, largely caused by the "narrowing of the nationalist movement to a point where it could have no appeal to them".

The whole history of revolutionary struggle in this period—whether of a national or industrial character—supposedly demonstrates "one of the great laws of revolution and counter-revolution in Ireland", namely:

"At times when the tempo of revolution is on the ascendant all the strata of the oppressed, exploited and downtrodden tend to unite, while those divisions of religion or region which have at times stood between them, tend to be pushed to the background. This law holds good also in reverse." (p21)

Truth

In fact, the startling truth about the role of the Protestant working class in the 20th century is just how decisively it has disproved that "law".

In the 1930s Protestant and Catholic unemployed marched together for jobs and against hunger; then and later they have fought alongside each other in trade unions for higher wages. But once the struggles have gone beyond their purely local, enterprise and economic level, the politics of the national question have intervened.

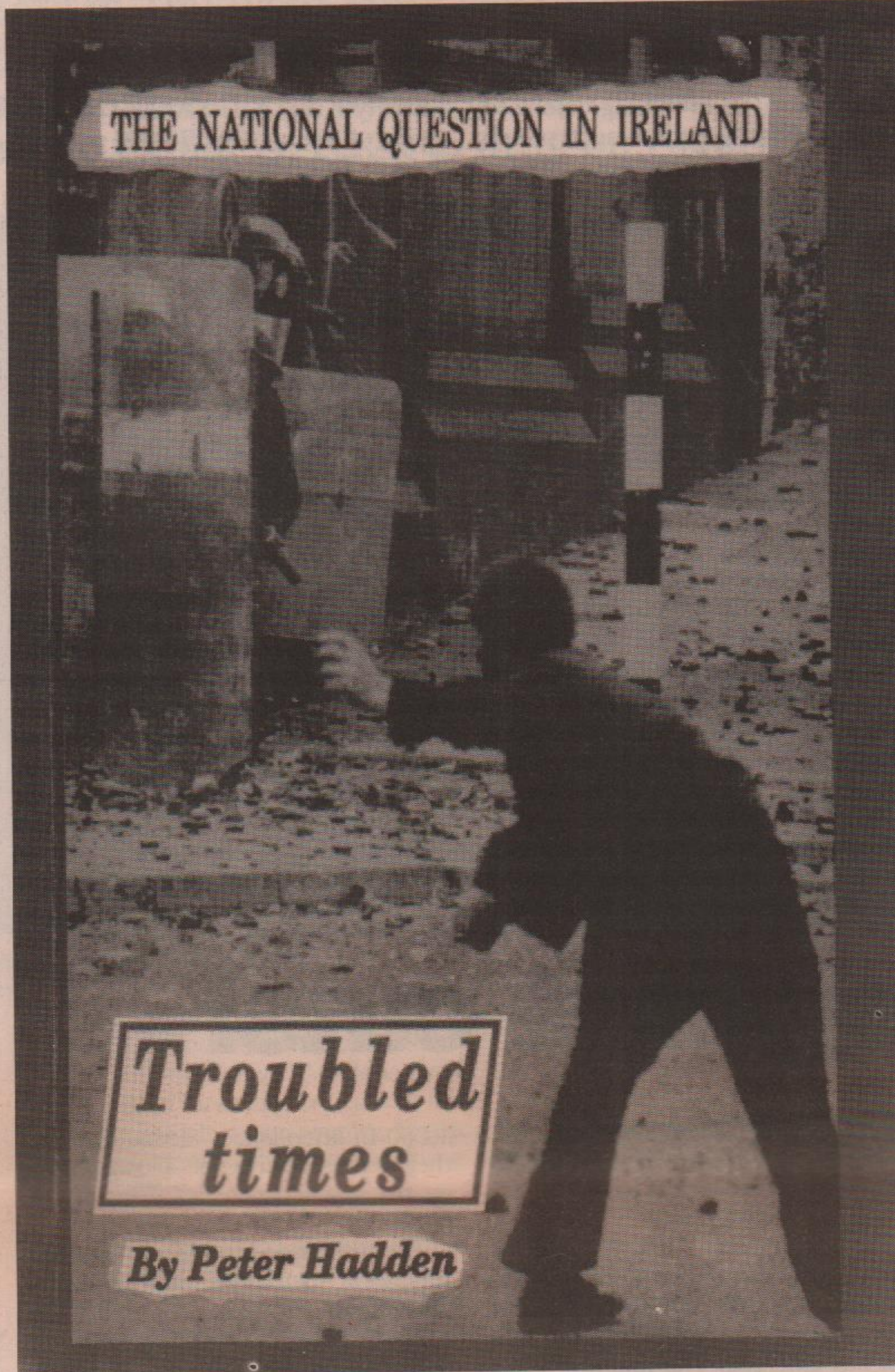
For example, when systematic anti-Catholic discrimination in local government blocked Catholic demands for political action for job creation, they began to recognise that their social condition was bound up with partition. Meanwhile, the bosses have brought Loyalist workers into line by pointing out that their marginal privileges have relied on the maintenance of this statelet. Time and again, the politics of Loyalist sectarianism have shattered the unity generated by the economic class struggle.

Occupation

The authentic Leninist position on Ireland is clear. Partition was a crime, an historic denial of the right of the whole Irish nation to self-determination. It guaranteed a reactionary alliance of Protestant workers with their bosses in the North, and facilitated the enslavement of Southern workers to their own bourgeoisie. After partition, ending the continued British occupation of the six counties remained a progressive goal on four counts:

- First, only by attacking the sectarian statelet could the material ties of Protestant workers to their bosses be broken.
- Second, only by ridding Ireland of British colonial rule could true self-determination be achieved.
- Third, the revolutionary national struggle had a powerful, objective anti-imperialist content, even when led by petit-bourgeois nationalists.
- Finally, the occupation of Ireland played a powerful role in cementing the alliance of capital and labour in Britain. As Marx said: "a nation which oppresses another can never itself be free".

For all these reasons, genuine Marxists have always called for an end to the occupation of Ireland by British imperialism, and for self-determination of the whole Irish people. We recognise that a progressive solution requires that the working class come to the head of the national struggle. But that does not pre-



Militant drop call for united Ireland to appease loyalist workers

vent us from solidarising with those who are fighting for independence under the banner of petit-bourgeois nationalism—i.e. a capitalist united Ireland.

But it is just this that Militant has always rejected. Militant has consistently shirked its elementary duty to solidarise with those fighting British imperialism under a nationalist banner. Hadden continuously equates the national struggle of the Irish people with the reactionary resistance of the Protestants, labelling both "sectarian".

This is, and always was, an excuse for avoiding the internationalist duty of taking sides with revolutionary nationalists

vigorous attack on his politics and practice. Instead, Peter Hadden, also on the platform simply "welcomed the opportunity to debate with others who've come to socialism by different routes".

And what is this different route to socialism for Hadden?

The starting point is the belief that the Protestants of Northern Ireland form; "a distinct community with their own sense of identity and consciousness... there are growing elements of a distinct 'Northern Irish' identity" (*Militant* 21 October 1994).

Hadden recoils, at present, from labelling the Protestants a nation, but he

"The best class fighters may describe themselves as socialists, but are likely to also sternly defend partition, the link with Britain and vehemently oppose a united Ireland.." Hadden

fighting against "our own" British state. It was a position which allowed Militant in Ireland to enjoy the dubious position of being the only "revolutionary" organisation with any significant hearing amongst self-consciously Loyalist workers (as opposed to Protestant workers who had broken with Loyalism).

On 19 May 1995, Militant hosted a meeting in Belfast where it debated not only former members of the Republican movement but also Billy Hutchinson, a current leader of the Progressive Unionist Party (PUP), the political wing of the sectarian death squads of the UVF.

Hutchinson served 15 years for murdering innocent Catholic workers. His organisation has proven links to fascist groups throughout Europe. To debate him at all would only be to conduct a

does say that;

"events have moved several notches along the scale in this direction". (p114)

Effectively, however, Militant's new position treats the Protestants as if they are a nation inevitably in the making and hence it spells out a separate path to socialism for the Protestant workers. Today:

"... the best class fighters may describe themselves as socialists, but are likely to also sternly defend partition, the link with Britain and vehemently oppose a united Ireland..." (p111)

To start with this is a grotesque vision of "socialism". These are not the "best class fighters". Some of them are the people who run guns to the British fascists, whose "socialism" is reserved strictly for the Protestant people. Oth-

ers may fight for higher wages at Short's while supporting an informal ban on Catholics in the workforce.

Prejudices

But if the "goal" (socialism) is distorted to fit the prejudices of the Loyalists then the route to it (Northern Ireland) is accepted by Hadden and Militant for the same reason:

"Inevitably the distinction between what socialists wanted and what nationalists were fighting for became hazy... With everyone talking about a socialist republic or a workers' republic and at the same time chanting 'victory to the IRA' the idea of a socialist united Ireland to many meant nothing more than a united Ireland... Consequently we dropped 'united' from the slogan and put forward the more open formula of 'a socialist Ireland and a socialist federation of Britain and Ireland'. This has served well in allowing Militant to stress the idea of a socialist society first, and then being able to deal with how it would be structured later." (pp106-107)

This is a breathtakingly frank capitulation to the reactionary sentiment of a pro-imperialist section of the masses. It is not in any shape or form a piece of pedagogy, or patient explanation.

It should be crystal clear how a real Marxist would address the fears of Protestant workers: you can't have socialism in Ireland without getting rid of the bosses; and you cannot do that while you are in an alliance with them to keep down the oppressed minority.

Democracy

Moreover, you cannot have socialism without democracy. And you cannot have democracy while an apparatus of terror, of no-jury courts and systematic violations of human rights needs to be maintained to keep down a minority who will not accept discrimination.

But Hadden will not even recommend getting rid of the most basic anti-democratic institutions such as the sectarian, armed and 93% Protestant RUC:

"The RUC are not an acceptable force in Catholic areas. However the more supportive attitude of Protestant workers compels us to take up the issue of policing in a skilful manner, avoiding terminology which is likely to be misinterpreted and misunderstood in any area. For this reason we deliberately do not use the slogan 'Disband the RUC' but neither do we retreat from the position that they are not an acceptable force. We say replace the RUC with community police services which should be under the control of locally elected committees".

What about smashing the state? And what kind of "community policing" would go on under the watchful eye of a locally elected committee full of "socialists" like Billy Hutchinson?

Militant's new position is born out of the disorientation which has occurred after the split with Ted Grant (see *Permanent Revolution 10*: "Militant after Grant"). Formerly, Militant was united around adaptation to one alien class ideology: Labourism.

Now it is pulled centrifugally towards black nationalism, Scottish nationalism, environmentalism, and middle class animal liberationism. To this list we also have to add: reactionary working class Loyalism.

A centrist organisation without any revolutionary ballast, Militant is adrift on a sea of conflicting currents within the working class. It is pulled left by some, but dangerously rightwards by others. Many Militant Labour comrades have welcomed the changes wrought in their organisation's politics since the split with Grant, holding them up as examples of a new "left" direction for the organisation. Hadden's book shows how hollow these claims are. ■

LETTERS

WORKERS POWER 199 APRIL 1996

Left regroupment?

Dear Comrades,

"Regroupment" is once again a buzzword on the international left. Militant Labour's international organisation, the Committee for a Workers' International (CWI) has initiated regroupment discussions with two other international "Trotskyist" currents: the United Secretariat of the Fourth International (USFI) and the Argentine-based International Workers' League (LIT).

In Sweden, CWI and USFI groups stood on a common election platform and are working towards forming a common organisation. In Australia all three groups are exchanging observers on each others' editorial boards and closely collaborating with a view to fusion.

In Britain this process would translate into a fusion between Militant Labour, Socialist Outlook and Workers Press. And when you pose it in this way you can see the problem of the kind of left regroupment that Militant is pursuing. These groups have well documented and completely divergent positions on questions as important as Ireland, Bosnia, Palestine, the nature of the Labour Party and tactics in the trade unions.

The fragmentation of the revolutionary left has to be overcome. Workers Power does not believe that it alone holds the key to building a new revolutionary party and international. But the starting point is clarity over programme. This is what, so far at least, Militant's regroupment initiatives have avoided.

In Australia, Militant's public Victorian Perspectives Document envisages the possibility not just of regroupment

with the groups already mentioned, but with the larger forces of the Cliffite ISO and the Castroite Democratic Socialist Party (DSP):

"Of course the programmatic questions that differentiate ourselves from each other need to be discussed fully... But the questions of entry work on the Labor Party, of state capitalism etc are not burning issues of the moment. What is key is a discussion about methods of building the movement".

But the Marxist programme is international. Labour entry work may be off the agenda in Australia, but the character of the British Labour party is an important question. Militant Labour thinks Labour is now no longer a "bourgeois workers' party". It thinks that we do not need a revolutionary alternative to Labour but a "mass socialist party" within which revolutionaries can work.

Worldwide

These are important programmatic questions worldwide. The first step towards resolving them is an honest assessment of the past mistakes of big centrist organisations like the USFI, Militant and the LIT. After all, Militant once called the USFI leaders "the manure of history".

Reverting to more diplomatic language, whilst glossing over the differences will not bring principled regroupment. It will pave the way for disastrous futures splits, such as the one which wrecked the LIT's last attempt at international regroupment in 1981 (see Workers Power Issue 29).

Workers Power approaches the vital

task of regroupment differently. We have initiated discussions with the Trotskyist Faction an organisation originating in 1988 out of the LIT, with groups in Argentina, Brazil, Mexico and Chile. We have published our agreements and differences with the TF, both in Workers Power (Issue 197) and in extensive public discussion bulletins.

Both organisations recognise that the task is to hammer out programmatic agreement not just at the level of the national class struggle, but on the major questions confronting revolutionaries across the globe.

And we start from an understanding that the record and the practice of certain leaders and currents in centrist Trotskyism hold out little hope of healthy regroupment.

To Militant Labour comrades, who see their own organisation as having moved left since the split with former leader Ted Grant, we say this: many of you freely acknowledge that Workers Power is a healthy, revolutionary organisation. On the ground Workers Power and Militant Labour comrades repeatedly collaborate, despite our differences. Why is your leadership steering you towards an international fusion with dyed in the wool right-centrist currents?

Why does not Militant Labour open up the regroupment process in Britain by entering into discussions with Workers Power?

Keith Harvey

International Secretariat of the LRCI

A version of this letter has been sent to Militant Labour.

Zapatista appeal

Companeros,

In one more effort to build a world based on the human values of democracy, liberty and justice for all, the Zapatista Army for National Liberation has called the First Intercontinental Encounter for Humanity and Against Neoliberalism. This Intercontinental Encounter, which will take place July 27 to August 3 of this year, will be preceded by a preparatory encounter in each continent. The encounter for the American Continent will take place April 3 to 8 in La Realidad, Chiapas, Mexico. We are sending this brief message to ask that you promote among the political organizations, trade unions, peasants', citizens', women's, and youth organizations, solidarity committees, etc., in your respective countries or cities, the sending of written messages of solidarity greeting the preparatory American Continental Encounter. You may send your greetings through

EMAIL: 74174.1671

@compuserve.com, or via fax, directly to San Cristobal de las Casas, Chiapas, addressed to Paulina Fernandez, to the telephone no. (52 967)86001.

Fraternal greetings,

Paulina Fernandez

Irresponsible SWP

Dear Comrades

On 9 March 2,500 people marched through Rusholme in Manchester protesting at the brutal treatment of Amer Rafiq by the police (see page 2). With tension in the area running high, there was a real possibility of police violence. Aware of this, several organising meetings took place prior to the demonstration.

At these meetings the Socialist Workers Party (SWP) agreed to disciplined stewarding, and a disciplined march organised into contingents.

They also agreed to joint campaign placards, with individual groups' placards restricted to their specific contingents. They also agreed to follow the instructions of the stewards.

The organisation of the demonstration was aimed at denying the police the opportunity to attack. Having agreed to the restrictive rule on placards, and agreed to allow the family and friends of Amer to march at the head of the demonstration, SWP members on the day refused to abide by that commitment. When repeatedly requested to follow the agreed policy, SWP members verbally

and physically attacked several stewards.

At the campaign meeting following the demonstration, SWP representatives refused to apologise or to agree to discipline their members, and there is now open distrust of the SWP by campaigners.

The verbal and physical attacks on the stewards on the demonstration could easily have given the police the excuse they needed to violently break up the march. It is to the stewards' credit that this did not happen. The behaviour of SWP members was both undemocratic and irresponsible, and must be condemned.

If the SWP are to be trusted by the campaign they must take public steps to discipline their members and regain the confidence of the local community. Working in democratic united fronts means working for the benefit of the campaign, in a disciplined and coordinated manner, not resorting to punch ups when your delusions of grandeur are punctured by the experience of the class struggle itself.

Steve Collins

Manchester Workers Power

GUN LAWS

Dear Comrades

In the wake of the Dunblane massacre some on the left, such as the SWP, have side-stepped the question of gun control and reform of the gun laws. They have focused on contesting the prevailing "common-sense" view that events like Dunblane and Hungerford just goes to show that there is such as thing as "inexplicable evil". Twisted individuals like Thomas Hamilton are certainly alienated products of capitalism.

But what about the guns? The SWP simply say "it is not guns but society" that is the problem. But this is a curious

left version of the cry of the gun lobby that it is not the rifle that kills people but the person that holds it. Both positions leave the question of gun distribution firmly in the hands of the state.

Revolutionaries have a different position. We start from the fact that to get to socialism we will need to smash the armed power of the capitalist state, for which we will need all kinds of firepower. Does that mean we should simply argue that "all people have the right to bear arms", echoing the American bourgeois constitution?

No. While we oppose the gun control

legislation that is likely to come forward, we should demand that the working class not the "people" in general—should have access to arms and be trained in their use.

Trade unions and socialist parties need their own gun clubs. This would give the working class regulated and regular access to arms—overcoming the fear and mystique that surrounds them—without going down the road of allowing each and every individual the right to have guns in their homes.

Pauline Golding
Croydon

Where We Stand



Capitalism

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



The Labour Party

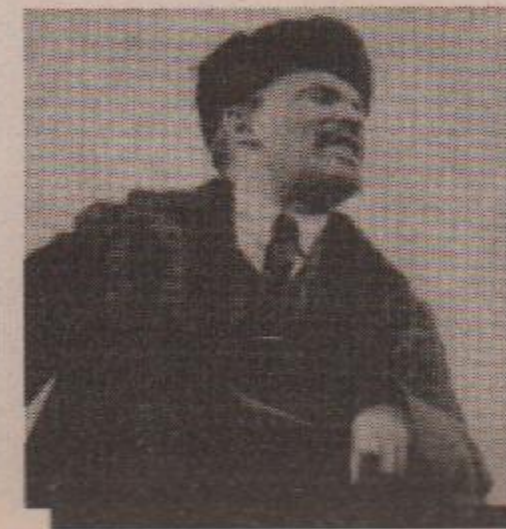
is not a socialist party. It is a bourgeois workers' party—bourgeois in its politics and its practice, but based on the working class via the trade unions and supported by the mass of workers at the polls. We are for the building of a revolutionary tendency in the Labour Party, in order to win workers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



The Trade Unions

must be transformed by a rank and file movement to oust the reformist bureaucrats, to democratise the unions and win them to a revolutionary action programme based on a system of transitional demands which serve as a bridge between today's struggles and the socialist revolution. Central to this is the fight for workers' control of production.

We are for the building of fighting organisations of the working class—factory committees, industrial unions, councils of action, and workers' defence organisations.



October 1917

The Russian revolution established a workers' state. But Stalin destroyed workers' democracy and set about the reactionary and utopian project of building "socialism in one country". In the USSR, and the other degenerate workers' states that were established from above, capitalism was destroyed but the bureaucracy excluded the working class from power, blocking the road to democratic planning and socialism. The parasitic bureaucratic

caste has led these states to crisis and destruction. We are for the smashing of bureaucratic tyranny through proletarian political revolution and the establishment of workers' democracy. We oppose the restoration of capitalism and recognise that only workers' revolution can defend the post-capitalist property relations. In times of war we unconditionally defend workers' states against imperialism. Stalinism has consistently betrayed the working class. The Stalinist Communist Parties' strategy of alliances with the bourgeoisie (popular fronts) and their stages theory of revolution have inflicted terrible defeats on the working class world-wide. These parties are reformist.



Social oppression

is an integral feature of capitalism systematically oppressing people on the basis of race, age, sex, or sexual orientation. We are for the liberation of women and for the building of a working class women's movement, not an "all class" autonomous movement. We are for the liberation of all of the oppressed. We fight racism and fascism. We oppose all immigration controls. We fight for labour

movement support for black self-defence against racist and state attacks. We are for no platform for fascists and for driving them out of the unions.



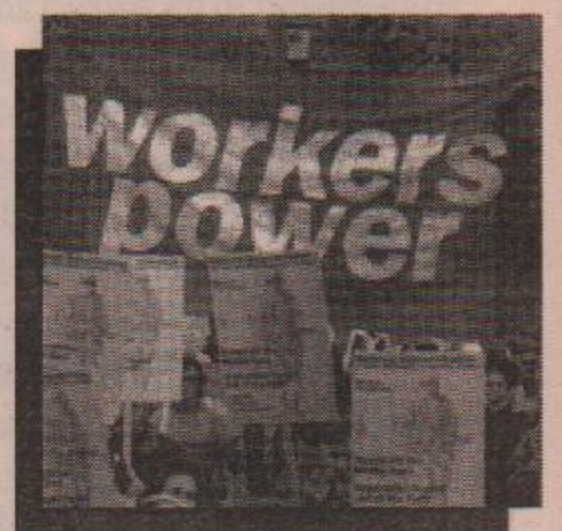
Imperialism

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

In conflicts between imperialist countries and semi-colonial countries, we are for the defeat of "our own" army and the victory of the country oppressed and exploited by imperialism. We are for the immediate and unconditional withdrawal of British troops from Ireland. We fight imperialist war not with pacifist pleas but with militant class struggle methods including the forcible disarmament of "our own" bosses.

Workers Power

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



Workers power

Striking dockers say:

All out on May Day!

Defy the anti union laws!

See page 4

SIX MONTHS into their strike Liverpool dockers remain determined to win.

Their struggle has been boosted by international solidarity from around the world. Now they have called for a general strike across Merseyside on May Day. Such action is long overdue, but to ensure it happens will require an almighty push in public and private sector union branches and workplaces.

Firefighters on Merseyside are still in dispute with their bosses over job and service cuts. There is also widespread anger among virtually every section of the 20,000-strong Liverpool City Council workforce over the latest round of job cuts and the threatened imposition of a pay cut of 4%-5%. A recent mass meeting of hundreds of Union members in the council voted unanimously in favour of action on 1 May in solidarity with the dockers.

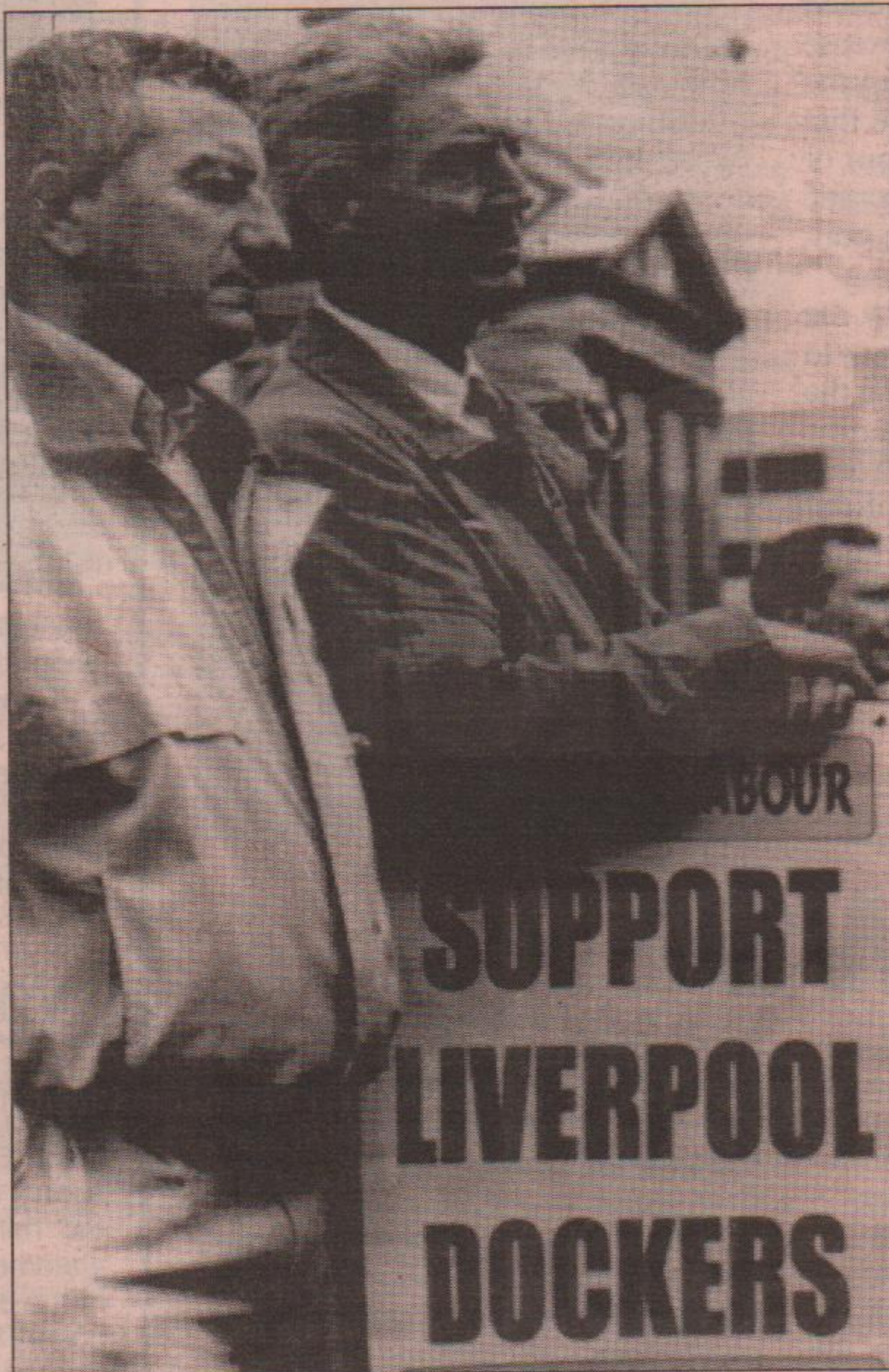
Liverpool postal workers, with a tradition of industrial militancy, are not immune to the widespread anger felt at the attacks contained in Royal

Mail's "Employee Agenda". At AC Delco in Kirkby, shop stewards have organised a regular collection for the dockers and mobilised union members to support the dockers demonstrations.

The time is ripe to turn such support into industrial action.

Trades unionists in Merseyside and beyond should go all out between now and 1 May to organise real solidarity action for that day. Significant cross union solidarity action could show to millions of workers currently reeling under the Tory attacks that there is an alternative to the surrender and retreat preached by the union leaders: unite and fight! ■

Messages of support and donations to Merseyside Dockers Shop Stewards' Committee, c/o Mr J Davies, Secretary/Treasurer, 19 Scorton Street, Liverpool L6 4AS. To invite a docker to speak at your meeting, ring 0151 207 3388.



As Tories bring back selection:

SAVE OUR SCHOOLS!



GILLIAN SHEPHERD, Secretary of State for Education, says she wants high quality education. She does—but only for the privileged, not as a fundamental right for our kids.

Shepherd wants an education system where parents pay for their kids' schooling. She is in favour of introducing "pay as you learn".

Through the nursery vouchers con-trick, parents will discover they now have to pay more to top-up nursery fees, or take their kids out of nursery. The way is then open to cut the vouchers and increase the fees.

This trick will be played over and over again in primary, secondary and further education.

Since 1988 the Tories have attempted to bribe schools to opt-out of local authority control. But they have failed. In the last week of March six schools were balloted to opt-out. Five voted against. Only 800 secondary schools have chosen to opt-out.

Now the Tories have come up with a new bribe. These opted-out schools can already select 10% of their pupils. The Tories want opt-out schools to be able to select 100% of their pupils, just like the old grammar schools. At 11 years of age some children will be told they are worth educating, and the rest will be left with the scraps of the education system: massively underfunded and poorly resourced schools. The Tories slogan of "a grammar school in every town", means every other school will lose out.

Whenever selection is discussed we are told it is to help bright children. But when you select some kids you create worse conditions for the rest. You get schools that cannot be described as comprehensive because they do not include a full range of abilities.

And, of course, it will be middle class kids who get selected for this higher quality education in the new grammar schools. The vast majority of working class kids will be rejected.

The Labour Party has shown itself to be no defender of comprehensive education. The Labour front bench are busy sending their own children to selective schools, and refusing to say that they will abolish selection if they come to power.

Gillian Shepherd is due to speak at the NUT Conference over Easter. The idea that this woman should be given a platform for her vision of education is a disgrace. NUT members should walk out in protest.

The whole labour movement must rally to the defence of comprehensive education and ensure that quality education is the right of all our children, not the privilege of a few. ■

Women's picket • Called by Women of the Waterfront • Wednesday April 10