

Workers power

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As dole cuts begin:

Who will defend the welfare state?

The so-called Job Seekers' Allowance (JSA) is the cruellest blow yet that the Tories have aimed at the unemployed and benefit claimants. In October, unemployment benefit is set to be replaced by the new JSA.

The JSA is one big benefit cut (see box). It is designed to save the Tories billions of pounds which they can give away before the election in the form of tax cuts for the rich and middle class. It is designed to force young people and the unemployed into jobs on poverty pay.

The Tories are trying to mask this criminal policy by carrying out a propaganda campaign against "benefit fraud". This is just a smokescreen. Why aren't the same Tories up in arms about the billions more that are lost to the tax man through big business tax evasion? Why aren't they bringing in higher taxes on the massive bonuses that the directors of the privatised water, gas and phone companies pay themselves every year?

The JSA is an attack on all of us. It is part and parcel of a Tory attempt to slash spending on every service or provision for the sick, the needy, the ill, the elderly or the jobless.

The Tories are determined to dismantle the welfare state. In secret meetings over the last three months, Tory ministers have been discussing with the heads of the biggest 10 insurance companies how schools, student grants, the NHS, Legal Aid, dole payments and pensions could all be sold off and run for private profit. The whole scheme would leave workers without the right to free healthcare, education and universal benefits. Instead we would face an American style system, where if you can't pay, you are left to rot.

Millions of people have come to expect this sort of vicious treatment from the Tories. But what is astonishing ever more people is that Tony Blair's New Labour are steadily dropping all opposition to the Tories' plans. ■



"Not me" says Blair

WHAT MAKES the Tories so confident they can kick the poor, the sick and the elderly in the teeth? The fact that Labour is pledged to dismantle the welfare system too. The Tories think they have "won the argument" about benefits. As far as Blair's New Labour is concerned that's true.

Labour will keep the JSA, if it comes to power, with all the added poverty and desperation it will involve.

Instead of attacking the hypocrisy of Tory propaganda about dole fraud, Labour has joined in. Shadow Social Security minister Chris Smith last month promised a tougher crackdown on "bogus claimants", with more DSS snoopers calling at claimants' homes and trying to catch them out.

Blair has announced that for every tax cut the Tories offer in the run up to the election, Labour will match it with a similar cut. Labour is pledg-

ing to the bosses that it will do nothing to alleviate poverty at their expense. It wants to get away from its old "tax and spend" image, says Blair.

But why not tax and spend? As long as we tax the rich, and spend on homes, education, health and services for all there is nothing wrong with this policy.

We need a government that will tax the rich to pay for the needs of the majority. ■

Robbing the poor to pay the rich

The Job Seekers' Allowance means:

- An immediate cut on 7 October down to just £47.90 a week for those on unemployment benefit
- All claimants under 25 will see their dole reduced to £37.90
- The £29.75 a week allowance for adult dependents is to be dropped altogether
- The means test comes in after 6 months, not a year as at present
- The dole office will be able to force claimants to take low paid work - or benefit will be cut off
- The DSS can even tell claimants to cut their hair, or what clothes to wear to find work! ■

Smash the JSA!

Fight Asylum Laws!

EVEN UNELECTED judges agree that the Tories' new rules for asylum seekers are inhumane, degrading and uncivilised.

The Court of Appeal—not known as a bastion of opposition to racism or injustice—ruled on 21 June that the policy of withholding benefits from 8,000 asylum seekers is illegal. As a result the Benefits Agency has suspended its practice of withholding benefits from most asylum seekers—for all of three weeks, until a new law is rushed through.

The judges confirmed that the real purpose of this racist measure is literally to starve asylum seekers out of the country. The policy would make it "totally impossible for them to remain here to pursue their

asylum claims", said one judge.

In a further judgement three days later, the same court ruled that it is illegal to deny asylum seekers refuge in temporary accommodation. Tory Social Security minister Peter Lilley immediately announced that the government would be bringing in emergency legislation to bypass the judges' decision.

Labour MPs are reported to have responded "furiously" to this announcement. Shadow Social Security minister Chris Smith declared in parliament that in "a supposedly civilised country, you are leaving people to starve." The proposal by Lilley to bring in a new law was described as being an abuse of parliamentary procedure.

Fine words. But what exactly are the Labour Party and the trade unions actually going to do about this law, this "uncompromisingly draconian" legislation, as one Appeal Court judge called it?

Since the Asylum Bill and the associated benefit changes were announced, the leaders of the labour movement have had it within their power to make the law unworkable. Withdrawing dole money, throwing people out of council houses and hostels, cutting off order books—all these depend on trade unionists carrying out bosses' instructions. By authorising a mass campaign of non-cooperation, union leaders would help to wreck this racist legislation.

The excuse that the union leaders have

given so far is that such non-compliance would be "illegal". This has been echoed by the leaders of the Campaign against the Immigration and Asylum Bill.

It was these arguments—cowardly to the core—that swayed the debate at the annual conference of the public sector union Unison in June, where a proposal to undermine the law through a campaign of non-implementation, backed by industrial action, lost very narrowly.

Now we have an opportunity to test whether the union and Labour leaders' arguments were anything more than an excuse.

If the benefit changes are found to be illegal in the courts, if Lilley's emergency legislation breaches parliamentary pro-

cedures as Labour has said, then even by their own legalistic standards they are not obliged to abide by the rules.

Will they now give hope to thousands of victims of oppression abroad and racism here by calling for a mass boycott? Will Labour's shadow Home Secretary Jack Straw commit himself unambiguously to abolishing the whole Asylum Bill after the next election?

Don't hold your breath. The defence of the rights and livelihoods of asylum seekers will be carried out by organised rank and file trades unionists, like the Unison members who support non-compliance, starting to organise action themselves—with or without the backing of the legalists in the union HQs. ■

Struggle not sanctuary

Richard Brenner, on a tale of two racist deportations with different endings.

ALBERT TONG was born in Hong Kong and is married to a British citizen living in Cornwall. They have a three-year old daughter. Mr Tong, aged 43, has lived in England for 17 years.

Natasha Matembe is 12 years old. She attends Forest Gate School in east London. Her family came to Britain from Angola in 1991 to escape the bloody civil war. In the course of the conflict Natasha's father was imprisoned and her four-year old brother killed.

When the government announced that Albert was to be deported, the campaign in his defence centred on the Church. An Anglican clergyman gave him shelter for 10 days. Hours before his deportation was due to take place, Albert Tong fled to a local Methodist church, where he took sanctuary.

The police waited until the minister left the Church, then entered the building and dragged Mr Tong away, "kick-

ing and screaming" according to one witness. Denied the chance to get his medicine before he was seized, he suffered a heart attack. The Home Office responded to Church protests by claiming that they had not been told that Albert was unwell. As we go to press he is facing immediate deportation.

In Natasha Matembe's case, the campaign to keep her in the country centred on the activity and support of her school-mates, the community and the labour

movement.

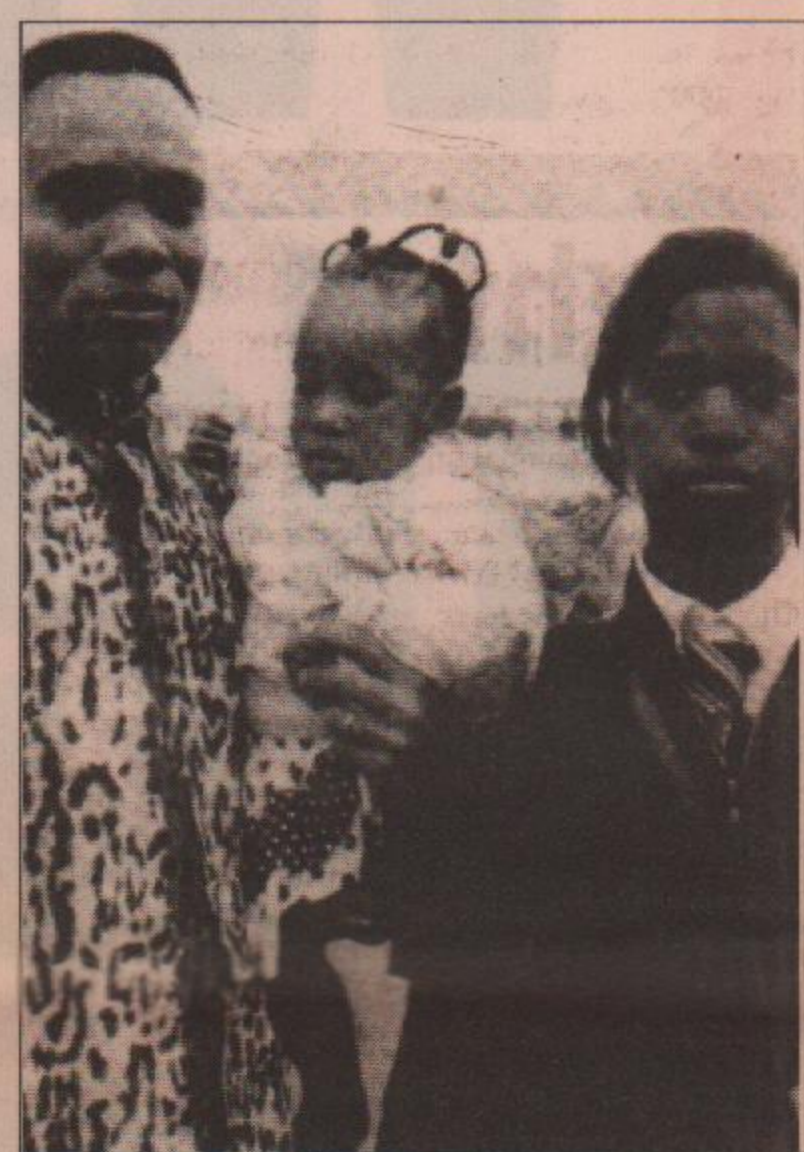
The day after Natasha announced to her friends that the government wanted to send her back to Angola, Forest Gate school students staged a 250-strong demonstration. On 15 June, a contingent of students, parents and teachers from the school attended and addressed a large and militant demonstration in Hackney against deportations. A petition and local meetings have attracted widespread support.

On 20 June news came that the Tories had backed down. The Home Office has agreed to a review. For the time being Natasha and her family will be staying in Britain.

The moral of this story has nothing to do with the good intentions of those involved in each campaign. Doubtless, Albert Tong's supporters were every bit as committed as Natasha Matembe's. But when fighting the Tories and their racist laws, noble intentions are not enough.

Isolated in the sanctuary of a church very few can hear your protests. And the Church cannot act to disrupt the functioning of society on your behalf.

But by walking out on strike, threatening to bring a school to a standstill, organising large-scale protests and, crucially, linking up with trade unions and other campaigns against deportations, you can make your voice heard. Mass action can make the Tory racists back down. ■



Natasha Matembe and her family

DO THE fate of 8,000 refugees, Peter Lilley's emergency laws and the brutal treatment of Albert Tong lead you to suspect that Britain is a racist country? Apparently not if you're Herman Ousley, Director of the Commission for Racial Equality (CRE). Ousley announced that he "was able to draw some comfort from the knowledge that race relations in Britain during 1995 were as good as, if not better than, anywhere else in Europe."

This, incidentally, comes from a man who has appeared on television to advocate compulsory labour schemes for young black people in return for their benefits. Whether his fawning to the establishment has anything to do with the CRE's current appeal to the government not to cut its £15 million grant is anybody's guess. ■

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Manchester bombing

Major is to blame!

EDITORIAL

WHY DID the IRA bomb Manchester? Every worker, socialist and trade unionist in this country should be clear. The Manchester bombing happened because John Major has given nothing to the anti-unionist population of Northern Ireland.

It happened because the current "peace process" is a sham. It is an attempt to trap the anti-unionists into accepting the validity of the artificial Northern Ireland statelet and give up their struggle for the basic democratic right of self-determination for the people of Ireland as a whole.

The extent to which the British state is prepared to go to achieve this objective is revealed by Major's refusal, backed by Blair, to allow any democratic representation for Sinn Fein, a party supported by nearly half the Catholic population.

The Manchester bomb, and the mortar attack in Osnabrueck, are the IRA's response to this British determination to impose a peace settlement - a peace without justice. They are a response to John Major's refusal to recognise the right of Sinn Fein to participate in the current "peace talks", and the Northern Irish Assembly.

Majority

The vast majority of anti-unionists voted in the recent assembly elections. Nearly half of the anti-unionist population - 15.5% of the electorate - voted for Sinn Fein. They did so knowing that the ceasefire was over and that the IRA was refusing to decommission its weapons. Sinn Fein has every right to participate and Major has no right to deny them entry.

Major's obstinacy is consistent with his attitude to the previous ceasefire by the IRA. He made no concessions of any significance and it was this intransigence which led to the ending of the ceasefire in February. Throughout, Major has been determined not to negotiate a peace but to force a surrender.

This is not just a reflection of the arithmetic at Westminster. It is true that Unionist support in the lobbies helps Major to survive; but from the point of view of the British state this is of passing significance. Far more important is their objective of grinding down, and if possible eradicating, the longest lasting struggle against British imperialism in the 20th century.

Having recognised that this could not be done by solely military means, Major's opening of secret negotiations with Sinn Fein some four years ago was the beginning of a political initiative to achieve the same ends. The huge bombs in the City of London undoubtedly added

urgency to Major's calculations, as did the arrival in the White House of a President sympathetic to the Irish Catholic vote in the USA.

But while Major wanted peace, he did not want it on the basis of ending the partition of Ireland. From the very beginning of the public phase of the peace process - when Major and Reynolds issued their joint declaration - Major made clear that the protestant majority would have a veto over the future of the state.

To many British workers this will seem fair enough - a majority is a majority. But that is precisely the big lie in Ireland. This "majority" was a tiny minority when Ireland voted for independence in 1918. It was a minority when Britain finally granted independence to 26 counties in 1921, in defiance of the 1918 majority vote. It was a minority that demanded and got the partition of the island and the creation of a six county state.

Why was it six counties, instead of the nine counties of Ulster?

Because all nine would have kept the protestants a minority. The border was drawn in 1921 to create a state with a protestant majority, against the will of the overwhelming majority of the country. Democracy had nothing to do with it. Britain acted to preserve its own interests.

Those interests led to the creation of an artificial state that created a new minority - catholic nationalists who could never unite with their countrymen and who could be systematically discriminated against in every walk of life and not be able to do a thing about it. No matter how many times they voted their status - an imprisoned minority - ensured that nothing would ever change.

Nothing, that is, unless they took action themselves which they did on a mass scale in the 1960s, unleashing the latest phase of the long war in Ireland against British domination. The Provisional IRA was a product of this struggle.

When Major decided to launch his peace initiative he was banking on the war weariness of the population and a political retreat by Sinn Fein. A section of the Republican movement had already concluded that they also could never win by solely military means.

For them the "peace process" opened up new prospects. They saw themselves following in the footsteps of Mandela and Arafat, securing a negotiated settlement as part of the New World Order.

Much was made of the ceasefire by the IRA. Equally important however was

Sinn Fein's acceptance that any settlement would have to be acceptable to the majority in Northern Ireland. This implied a settlement within the existing framework, a recognition of the Unionist veto and an acceptance of the rules of the parliamentary game.

That is why Workers' Power said that the ceasefire, and the agreements that accompanied it, were a dead end.

Two years on, it is clear how Major has exploited the concessions made by Sinn Fein, raising another pre-condition every time that an earlier one was met by Sinn Fein. Having made no progress after more than eighteen months, the IRA decided to end the ceasefire.

Adams' response to the Manchester bombs, "I want to see an end to the armed struggle. We are not involved in it. We do not advocate it", appears to give credence to suggestions that deep divisions are opening up within the Republicans' ranks.

Major would be only too pleased to allow these to develop and deepen.

Consequently, he will not drop his opposition to Sinn Fein participation in talks. It is even possible that he will reinforce his law and order credentials by a return to internment, secure in the knowledge that Blair's New Labour would back him all the way.

What is not so clear is the IRA's principal objective. Is it to prevent Adams being drawn into an unacceptable agreement?

Equally possible is the calculation that only another round of vastly expensive and spectacularly destructive bombings will convince the British to accept the dismantling of the Northern Irish state.

Elected

It is possible that this perspective is linked to the idea that a newly elected Labour Government, unrestrained by the Unionist veto at Westminster, would be a more willing negotiating partner.

Whatever the precise intentions of the IRA's tactics, what remains fatally flawed is its underlying strategy.

The whole method of restricting decision making over the national question in Ireland to the military leaders of perhaps 400 IRA volunteers excludes from the picture the most powerful force in the whole of Ireland: the working class North and South.

The biggest defeat yet inflicted on the British in Ireland was the retreat from Stormont in 1972.

Then Britain was forced to abandon

its sham Northern Ireland parliament. That was achieved not by bombings but by mass mobilisations.

The lesson is that to take the fight for a just peace forward the anti-unionists need to turn to mass mobilisations once again. The Northern Ireland assembly itself is a farce. Like Stormont it has a built in protestant majority. Giving credence to any such elections by participating in them is wrong. The elections should have been boycotted.

Nevertheless, now that a forum has been elected the struggle can and should move forward. What is needed now is to enforce the right of representation of all those who voted for Sinn Fein through mass mobilisation: strikes, demonstrations occupations.

It is all too easy for Major to justify his intransigence in the face of bombs. It would be far more difficult in the face of a growing campaign involving tens and hundreds of thousands on both sides of the border.

But the aim of such a struggle is not to endorse Sinn Fein's own peace strategy - which undoubtedly involves major concessions to Britain - or the IRA's guerrilla strategy. It is to transcend these diplomatic and military dead ends by raising the prospect of a mass campaign to get Britain out of Ireland, dismantle the six county state and secure national unification.

Immediately, such a campaign could begin to turn the tables on Major by focusing on the need to remove the military underpinnings of the six county statelet - the British troops - and its repressive apparatus - the RUC/RIR, the non-jury courts, the emergency powers. It could lay the basis of a fight to replace the rigged Ulster Forum with the only type of elected chamber that would be consistent with a democratic solution - an all Ireland Constituent Assembly.

Such a campaign is also the way to create the sort of working class movement that can fight for these goal as part of a struggle for a 32 county socialist republic - the one form of unification that will guarantee an end to the persecution of minorities within Ireland and the persecution of that country by British imperialism.

British workers can play their part in the fight for such a goal, not by joining with their class enemies in hounding Sinn Fein and the IRA - but by siding with them in their struggle against British imperialism and fighting in the British workers' movement to commit Labour and the unions to withdrawal of all British troops and for recognition of the right of self determination of the people of the whole of Ireland. ■

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THE FIGHT over the Employee Agenda (EA) and the related attacks on postal workers' terms and conditions has reached a critical stage.

On 20 June and again on 27 June 140,000 postal workers came out on strike and brought Royal Mail to a standstill. Both of the one-day strikes were very successful. Thousands have joined the union since it agreed to take action against the bosses' offensive. Postal workers have shown that they are determined to fight.

There is, however, a very real danger. The CWU's joint general secretary Alan Johnson may try and sell a deal to branch officials that falls far short of the union's demands for a shorter working week and guarantees on job security and second deliveries.

In fact, Johnson could be prepared to push an agreement that accepts many of the key elements of the EA around teamworking. But if this is the case then Johnson may not have an acceptable deal. In the words of a CWU steward at the giant Mount Pleasant sorting office, "the big sticking point is teamworking. This isn't like the annual pay round".

After the long series of unofficial strikes in recent years, this is the first national action since 1988 and a large proportion of the CWU membership is willing to give the national executive the benefit of the doubt for the time being. Many postal workers are understandably worried about the loss of earnings from a long, indefinite walk-out and are prepared to stick with a strategy that has so far not gone beyond one-day strikes.

At the same time some CWU members don't have a great deal of confidence in the national leadership. As one picket at Mount Pleasant told *Workers Power*, "I'm sceptical about the leadership of the union right across the board. I believe at some point in the near future they're going to stitch us up."

Such sentiments are not limited to

Post Rank and file control is key



London. As Kenny, a striking postal worker in Cardiff, put it, "Johnson's sending all the wrong signals to management. We need to step up the action,

but we've been told to accept as many casualties as they throw at us."

The current state of the dispute poses a number of difficult questions to CWU

activists that require urgent answers. First and foremost, rank and file members need to take the control of the fight around the EA away from Johnson and

Tube: unite to win!

ON 27 JUNE 2,000 ASLEF train drivers on London Underground staged the first in a series of 24-hour strikes over pay and against management's refusal to honour last year's agreement to reduce the length of the working week. Contrary to the lies circulated by the management the strike shut down almost the whole network.

The strikes came after an overwhelming 10-to-1 "yes" vote by ASLEF members after weeks of fruitless negotiations.

When the dispute between ASLEF and London Underground bosses first emerged, it looked as if the ASLEF bureaucracy was trying to claw back

some of the losses it sustained in last year's membership war with the RMT, which staged three days of strike action in 1995.

The RMT, which represents virtually all station staff, managed to recruit dozens of ASLEF drivers, furious at what they rightly saw as a complete cave-in by their general secretary Lew Adams.

Whilst Adams' foremost concern may have been to regain some credibility, he didn't count on the intransigence of the Underground's bosses.

Gross operating margins for London Transport have increased fivefold in the past year, while management tries to squeeze still more overtime working out

of drivers. The bosses are determined to operate in a climate where government subsidy to the network is cut to the bone.

ASLEF has announced three further strikes to take place by 16 July. In the meantime, the RMT has launched a ballot for strike action by its larger membership on the Underground. In sharp contrast to last year, the possibility of united action exists. Activists in both the RMT and ASLEF should seize this opportunity with both hands.

Rank and file members of the two unions must meet to hammer out tactics and strategy. In the first instance, they must fight to ensure that members of each union respects the other's picket

lines until such time as there is co-ordinated action. They should elect a joint union strike committee, with representatives from every depot, that can prevent bureaucratic sabotage of the strike.

Activists should be fighting for co-ordinated strike action, but also for an escalation beyond one-day walkouts until management stops cheating on the hours agreement and gives all tube workers a pay rise above inflation.

Joint action now could also lay the basis for what Underground workers desperately need: a single rail union that overcomes the sectional divisions that have so often undermined past battles with the bosses. ■

Support the firefighters!

DERBYSHIRE FIREFIGHTERS staged three nine-hour strikes in June against a £1.3 million cuts package. The Derbyshire FBU members had returned a massive vote in favour of the strikes - 75% yes, on an 84% turnout.

So far the strikes have been solid and received considerable support from other local workers. Firefighters in neighbouring counties have refused to work across the border, the normal practice on strike days.

The cuts would mean a dangerous deterioration in the fire service in Derbyshire. In a parallel with the Merseyside dispute, the Labour-controlled Derbyshire County Council is pushing ahead with the cuts. So determined are they to axe the fire budget and break the strike that they are prepared to spend £45,000 on troops and "Green Goddesses" for every strike day. They also spent £50,000 in the courts trying to get an injunction over the wording of the ballot to stop the strikes. They failed.

Management have also set up a special telephone line - dubbed the "scabline" by strikers - and are encouraging anyone who disagrees with the

strikes to phone in and tell them.

Troops brought in to break the strike are guarding the fire station, which they are using as their base, with a machine gun. When one striker attempted to follow one of the Green Goddesses on his bike to keep an eye on their activity, he was physically threatened.

But whatever the council, management and troops may try, the strikers have not been intimidated. When the

council offered to reduce the cuts to £700,000, delegates elected by the strikers unanimously threw out the offer. Many strikers are now discussing the need to escalate the action.

One of the Derbyshire FBU stewards told *Workers Power* that many strikers are annoyed that the next strike will not be until 18 July, called to coincide with the national rally in Derby. There is a fear that the momentum of the fight may

be lost.

Strikers should also be wary of Labour MP Tony Benn's offer to mediate in the dispute. Stepping up the action, not allowing the council a period of period, is what is required to win. □

● To invite speakers, send donations and messages of support, contact

Kim Smith, Brigade Secretary, Derbyshire FBU on Fax number. 01773 540909

Liverpool dockers fight on

THE 500 Liverpool dockers entered the tenth month of their historic battle with Mersey Docks and Harbour Company (MDHC) with a 2,000-strong demonstration on Liverpool's streets on 29 June.

The MDHC withdrew its final offer the previous week after the port's biggest customer, the US-based ACL, announced that it had pulled out.

This is a big blow to the MDHC's bosses who had ignored previous threats by ACL in the hope that they

could break the solidarity of the dockers and their families.

The company is now waging a vicious media campaign on Merseyside, seeking to blame the dockers for the loss of another 1,000 jobs.

The truth is that the MDHC engineered this dispute with the aim of breaking union organisation and reintroducing casual labour across the port.

Financial support from thousands of trade unionists across Britain and industrial solidarity from other dockers inter-

nationally have sustained the dockers' courageous defiance of the Tories' anti-union laws. But much more is required. ■

● Rush your donations to: Jimmy Davis, Secretary, Liverpool Port Shop Stewards' Committee, 19 Scorton Street, Liverpool L6 4AS. Cheques made payable to Merseyside Dockers' Shop Stewards Appeal Fund.

the whole of the national executive.

On 2 March an unofficial conference brought together some 140 activists, including a substantial number of local officials. A reconvened conference of these militants is vital, especially if it can pose a serious alternative to the national leadership's bureaucratic conduct of the dispute that has left members with very little say.

Any reconvened conference should issue an immediate call for the election of a national strike committee, made up of accountable and recallable delegates from as many of the branches as possible. Mass meetings across Britain would choose their representatives. Where local strike committees already exist they should send delegates to the national body.

The crucial function of a national strike committee would be to take over the day-to-day running of the dispute and the conduct of any negotiations with Royal Mail's bosses from the CWU's national bureaucracy. The committee's practical tasks would include:

- the organisation of mass pickets with the aim of turning away potential strikebreakers and winning contract casualties to the strike;

- full access to all talks between national officials and the bosses, with mass meetings to have the final say over any deal;

- the collection and administration of hardship funds

- the regular convening of mass meetings to ensure that all key aspects of the dispute come back to the rank and file for democratic debate and votes by show of hands.

Democratic control over the fight is essential, but it cannot guarantee victory over the EA on its own. The strikes so far have shown great strength, but some important weaknesses.

Engineers, who are crucial to the maintenance of sorting office lines, have been left out of the dispute. As word went round the picket line at the Nine Elms office in south London that Alan Johnson was to pay a visit, striker Kanti Kerai said: "I am going to ask him why the engineers are not balloted for strike action. Only by stopping the machines can we make the strike really effective."

Meanwhile, members hoping to recoup pay lost through one-day actions have been keen on overtime work that rapidly clears the backlog. This obviously reduces the effect of the strikes on Royal Mail's customers, so easing the pressure on the bosses. Kanti at Nine Elms argued that "there should be no overtime working to clear the backlog."

He is absolutely correct. Activists should be fighting for the imposition of an overtime ban as part of an overall escalation of the dispute. To repel Royal Mail's offensive and win postal workers' demands for a shorter working week, decent basic pay and job security will probably require indefinite strike action.

Many CWU members, however, are anxious about the effects of an all-out strike, given the absence of a national fund and the lousy level of their weekly wage.

An indefinite, national strike against a management that fears the permanent loss of market share and a Tory government that is clinging to office by a thread could bring a resounding victory sooner rather than later. For many workers, an indefinite strike could actually minimise the loss of earnings.

Postal workers should not hesitate to demand the support of other sections of workers. Delegations should be going out to union branch meetings, offices, factories and other workplaces now to win financial backing and pledges of industrial support.

CWU members have enormous sympathy enormous among other workers, who would see a victory for the postal workers as a boost to building resistance in their own workplaces and unions.

Postal workers should act as soon as possible to translate that sympathy into the kind of solidarity that can give Royal Mail's bosses a very bloody nose indeed. ■

For copies of Workers Power's postal workers' bulletin, or information for the bulletin, phone: 0171 357 0388

Unison Conference

The dangers of waiting for Labour



Hillindon workers can't afford to wait for Labour—their bosses want to cut their wages by £35 a week.

THIS YEAR'S Unison Conference was dominated by the prospect of a general election before next year's conference and the probability of a Labour victory.

The obsessive concern with avoiding any damage to Labour's electoral chances provided the pretext for defeating virtually every motion which raised the need for industrial action to achieve our aims.

This "don't rock the boat" mood of conference was stunning given the fact that we are facing continuing attacks on public sector jobs, pay and conditions. In recent months we have also faced the threat of de-recognition of the union in Tory-controlled Brent and even in Labour-controlled councils such as Southwark.

Yet no matter how significant the issue, whether it be the minimum wage, public sector pay, or the extension of Compulsory Competitive Tendering the response of the top table and the majority of delegates was essentially the same: wait for Labour.

Many delegates were very dubious about what a Blair government would actually offer. But only a minority were prepared to commit the union to taking any action in the here and now. Even the Socialist Workers Party (SWP) was not immune from this pervasive "mood" and often fell in with it rather than challenging it.

Fiery speeches from delegates who were SWP members captured loud applause for insisting that Unison's General Secretary Rodney Bickerstaffe put a motion for a minimum wage of £4.26 to the TUC in September. But the SWP then went on to oppose a "a campaign of industrial action" to win decent public sector pay and the minimum wage, even though a high proportion of Unison members are on much less than £4 an hour.

The vote for a definite minimum wage certainly was a defeat for Bickerstaffe who had pleaded with conference not

Unison, the biggest public sector union, held its annual conference last month. Bill Jenkins reports on the highlights and the low points

to "tie our hands". But given that the conference committed the union to no concrete measures over the issue, Bickerstaffe is unlikely to feel any great pressure to press the case with his fellow trade union bureaucrats.

There was widespread support for the composite motion, from supporters of the Campaign for a Fighting and Democratic Union (CFDU), calling for non-compliance with the Asylum and Immigration Bill.

The excellent work of CFDU comrades in campaigning for the non-compliance was vital in bringing a highly political question of practical anti-racism to the fore. It also forced the national leadership to expose its own position which called only for "consultation around the practicality of non-compliance".

Building on a powerful and moving speech from Lola Onibiyo the day prior to the Asylum debate, in which she described her family's appalling treatment at the hands of the British state, a series of excellent speeches from both CFDU and SWP comrades ensured an exceptionally close vote. Though we eventually lost on the card count by 494,000 to 564,000, the widespread support for other anti-racist motions and the enthusiasm voiced for concrete cases of non-implementation showed we can still win the fight for non-compliance—even if it must be waged unofficially.

The whole of the debate around the

Asylum Bill also highlighted how the CFDU has started to become a force that counts in the union. Along with this work, the first issue of its newspaper *CFDU News*, and three highly successful fringe meetings provided a very important platform for developing the CFDU into the type of rank and file organisation we need.

The establishment of a rival "Labour Left in Unison" by Geoff Martin of London Region, and supported by the pro-Bickerstaffe witch-hunter Dave Anderson, illustrates the extent to which the "left" elements of the bureaucracy appreciate the need to challenge the CFDU. The voting record of Labour Left in Unison's leading lights at this year's conference, and their failure in 1995 to mount a candidate against Bickerstaffe, confirms that the CFDU is the sole organisation currently capable of uniting the left to fight on a principled basis.

Rodney Bickerstaffe praised the Hillingdon strikers from the platform, but neglected to mention the bureaucracy's attempts to cut off strike pay. He also turned a blind eye to the role of the Hillingdon Unison branch secretary who instructed other Unison members to scab on the dispute. Meanwhile, Dave Anderson could present Jimmy Nolan Chair of the Dockers Stewards Committee with £10,000 for courageously breaking the anti-union laws, but forgot to mention he was currently disciplining Unison members for doing the same thing.

Every member who wants to struggle should go back to their branches and fight for affiliation to the CFDU, build local groups and place a bulk order for *CFDU News* for distribution to stewards. And we must demand of the SWP that they abandon their futile sectarianism towards CFDU. "Fighting for socialism" does not consist of mid-June speech-making in a Bournemouth conference hall, but of campaigning, even in the teeth of stiff opposition, for a strategy that can win. ■



Teachers and exclusion

Kate Foster, an NUT rep, considers the recent teachers' strikes in support of the exclusion of disruptive pupils.

EXCLUSIONS OF disruptive pupils from schools have rocketed recently. As spending cuts continue, so exclusions rise. The figures nearly quadrupled from 1990/1 to over 11,000 in 1993-94. The students excluded are often black and almost always working class. Every socialist has to look for ways to solve this mounting problem if we are to defend the principle of education as a right for everyone.

In recent months, teachers in two schools—one in Nottingham, the other in South Tyneside—voted to strike if certain pupils were not excluded. Many on the left, most notably the Socialist Workers Party (SWP) have argued that such strikes should not be supported. They even imply in *Socialist Worker Review* (June 1996) that any strike which excludes a child is reactionary. I strongly disagree.

My union group has discussed excluding children both to protect class sizes and in one case to exclude a student with a long history of verbally harassing and physically attacking black students.

We voted to exclude the children from our *classrooms*, not from school, and not from education in general. We refused to let management dump their problems onto us.

In both the South Tyneside and Nottingham cases the child involved was seen as "disruptive". Were the strikers "blaming" the individual child and instead of supporting their rights, were they "denying them access" to education?

The answer is no. All teachers know that many children suffer from appalling social conditions; they have many specific needs which must be met if they are to get anything positive out of school. The lucky ones have been assessed, have a "statement" outlining their special needs, and may have their own individual care worker who will accompany them to all their lessons.

We have a number of kids who clearly need support and yet they are not getting it. This is partly because the system for identifying, assessing such children and then establishing support is cumbersome. It allows the Local Education Authority (LEA) to drag its feet constantly, usually only acting when serious violence has occurred.

With more and more cuts, schools are meeting ever fewer of all children's needs. When LEAs look for cuts, they often chop support teachers and school counsellors: precisely those people who enable "disruptive" children to function in schools, but are not legally required.

Many special schools have shut. It costs a lot more to educate a child in a special school than it does in a mainstream school. Here pupil teacher ratios can be as low as one to five. An NUT member in a school for behaviourally disturbed teenagers told me:

"We get the kids who the system has failed. They are taking out their

rage, violently, against a lot of things—all of them the product of alienation caused by the system. Our aim is to get them back into mainstream education. In an ideal world you could do this work inside a mainstream school. But it's like the "community care" debate in mental health. They are closing special schools, or limiting access to them, for financial reasons—not to help the kids involved. The result is mainstream teachers having to deal with these kids. Who suffers? The majority of working class kids. Because you can be sure of one thing: there are very few violently disruptive kids allowed through the gates of middle class grammar schools."

Of course, some headteachers happily exclude problem children. Often the "problem" is of management's making like petty school uniform rules. As selection grows, so does exclusion—to ensure that a school isn't seen as a "problem" school. And there is a real problem of racist bias in the exclusions: large numbers of those excluded are young, black males.

But virtually all classroom teachers recognising a child's exclusion as a failure. They would vote for strike action only as a last resort.

Within such strikes socialists have to consider the issues concretely. If it's a racist strike we're against it. If it is teachers trying to defend their own working conditions we have to make sure it's not purposefully at the expense of the students. But ultimately, even if students' education does suffer as the result of strike action we have to place the blame with management. It is the LEA which has the statutory duty to educate a child—not individual teachers, at the expense of their own health and well-being.

We should fight to ensure that the needs of problem children, and those of all children, are met within the system. It will mean demanding additional training for mainstream teachers and demanding additional support teachers. In some cases it means demanding LEAs support the judgement of teachers and social workers that a child will best be educated in a special school.

Socialists should demand an assessment of the child's needs by teachers and other educational workers, and agree the level of support required. This must not be left to management, whether the headteacher or the LEA bureaucrats, whose first concern is spending limits rather than ensuring a high quality of education for all.

In this case defending the conditions of a particular group of workers need not contradict the interests of the working class. In fact, it forms part of the struggle for the interests of the whole class, especially our children. ■

● Jack Straw's curfew on working class kids—turn to page 6

Write to: BCM Box 7750, London WC1N 3XX

Last month Labour offloaded so many commitments to the working class that even the media struggled to keep up. This month Blairwatch focuses on Jack Straw's demand for a curfew on our kids and (below) Labour's meagre promises on union rights.

Jack Straw – leave those kids alone!

IN BRAZIL death squads execute so-called "street children". The authorities call this keeping the streets clean. Labour's shadow Home Secretary, Jack Straw, also wants children off the streets. Of course, he isn't advocating a Brazilian solution, but his proposed curfew is his most authoritarian policy yet. Straw has promised a law banning children under 10 from the streets after 9.00 pm. Seventeen years of Tory rule have left most inner city estates with virtually no facilities for young people. Signs saying

"No Ball Games" outnumber local football pitches, youth centres and designated play areas. This is the real problem that Labour would be addressing if it stood up for working class people.

But there are no proposals from Straw to build more facilities for youth. Nor will Labour offer any subsidies to young people to go to the cinema or to gigs that they can't afford.

Instead New Labour targets the young victims of Tory policies. The police will have a free license to patrol the streets

harassing young people for the crime of having nowhere to play but their own streets.

Thousands of Labour supporters have

and more cuts in public spending. This means life on the estates is going to get worse. The consequences of this could be socially explosive—and Blair knows it.

So Labour plans to give the police sweeping new powers to hide the evidence of urban decay and crack down on the victims of their policies. Meanwhile, the children of the middle and upper classes will be largely unaffected, playing in their gardens or on their computers.

Straw shares the lifestyle and prejudices of those middle class voters who cannot even utter the words "council estate" without a shudder. They feel threatened by the sight of poor kids on the streets, every one of whom they view as a potential burglar or vandal—and so does Straw.

There is a pressing need for working class youth to be organised. Labour wants them off the streets—they should take control of their streets and their lives. ■

Briefing: Labour and the unions

Anti-union laws: safe in Labour's hands

MORE THAN 200,000 businesses have gone bust since the Tories took office, most of them small to medium sized firms. Labour's new policy handbook, *New Labour, New Britain—The Guide* promises a package of measures to help them.

But what does it promise seven million trade union members? The answer is very little. And Labour is making fewer promises to the unions by the day.

Labour has dropped several commitments made to the unions by former leader John Smith:

- "zero hours contracts", which allowed Burger King to demand that workers hang around unpaid until there was work to be done, will not be outlawed;
- bogus self employment, widely imposed in the building industry to avoid giving safety and employment rights, will not be outlawed;
- a pledge to give workers full protection against unfair dismissal from day one—not after two years as is currently the case—has been scrapped;
- a plan to protect strikers from unfair dismissal has been watered down;

But these last minute climbdowns are nothing compared to the abandon-

ment of union rights that Labour has already announced.

Labour is pledged to do *nothing* to roll back 16 years of Tory anti-union laws.

The anti-union laws are the Tories' biggest gift to the employers. The most important aspects of effective trade unionism outlawed under the Tories are:

- 100% trade unionism, known as the "closed shop"
- solidarity action, including secondary picketing; unions can be bankrupted for organising it
- unofficial strike action—named shop stewards can be bankrupted
- workplace votes; all strikes must be preceded by lengthy postal ballots whose validity are governed by time limits and subject to challenge in the courts on minute irregularities
- political strike action: only issues directly affecting wages and conditions can be legally pursued through strike action. There can be no legal strikes against racism, privatisation or the anti-union laws themselves.

Draconian

Every one of these draconian anti-union laws will be retained under Labour. Blair is not just committed to getting sympathetic treatment from

the millionaire press before the election. He aims to run Britain in the interests of the bosses. It is no coincidence that British workers work the longest hours in Europe, are among the lowest paid and have the weakest union rights. Labour's lack of promises to trade unionists stands in stark contrast to its generous pledges to private enterprise.

There are only three real pledges Blair and Blunkett are prepared to make to trades unionists. According to *New Labour, New Britain—The Guide*:

• Labour will sign up to the European Social Chapter to ensure that British workers are treated as fairly as other workers in the European Union.

• Labour will ensure that everyone is entitled to join and be represented by a trade union. Labour believes that employees should have the right to have their union recognised where there is majority support amongst the workforce.

• Labour's low pay commission, with representation from both sides of industry, will determine the wage fixing and enforcement mechanisms for a minimum wage, taking into account the prevailing economic circumstances."

That—plus a commitment to restore union rights at GCHQ—is your lot.

There is no commitment, as formerly promised, to roll back some of the restrictions on show-of-hands or workplace balloting, despite the proven fact that postal ballots restrict participation.

Two out of Labour's three pledges do nothing to strengthen collective bargaining rights at work. The Low Pay Commission will involve the very employers whose interests compel them to push for the lowest possible figure for a minimum wage.

Signing up to the Maastricht Social Chapter is an act of benevolence from above rather than a strengthening of the right to struggle in the workplace. The Social Chapter was, after all, drawn up and signed by 11 of the biggest capitalist powers in the world.

Life

The Socialist Group in the European parliament talks of "breathing new life into the Social Chapter", as does the TUC. But their main focus is not the workers' right to strike but the bureaucrats' right to be consulted and incorporated into management decisions via the European Works' Council Directive, which Britain currently opts out of. Those looking to the Social Chapter to outline a framework of rights to protect effective trade unionism will look in vain.

Even where the Social Chapter does contain real reforms worth fighting for there is no guarantee that Labour will introduce them. Last year Labour's Harriet Harman made clear that "any EU social regulation would not be acceptable in the UK if it failed to make the country more competitive and was not in the national interest" (*Financial Times* 22 June 1995). This could have come from the lips of any Tory. Legislation that runs counter to British employers' interests and profits is ruled out.

That leaves Labour's policy on union recognition as the only tangible and positive advance. But . . .

To date derecognition has not been at the heart of the Tories' union busting strategy. Most bosses have rejected it. Since the Tories came to power around 200,000 workers have had their right to union representation withdrawn, in a total of 500 derecognition cases.

In two sectors the bosses have launched union derecognition offensives: the print industry and the private transport industry. Thus, out of the 500 derecognition cases, the NUJ and the GPMU have had to bear the

brunt of the onslaught with 184 cases. The TGWU (96 cases) and Unison (79) are the only other unions having faced more than 50 attempts at derecognition in the last 10 years.

Forced

Labour proposes that employers should be forced to recognise unions for negotiations only where over 50% of workers vote for this in a ballot. The print unions are already gearing up to test this law as soon as it reaches the statute book. But the leaders of some of the unions most affected oppose the policy. NUJ General Secretary John Foster warned at the union's 1995 Annual Delegate Meeting that the new law will be a "charter for the employers":

"The question is, who defines the workforce? If it is the employers, they could do so to derecognise unions they bargain with now." (*The Journalist* April/May 1996).

Once Blair's derecognition law is on the books we can expect a concerted effort from employers to get the first punch in, organising their own ballots for rejection of union recognition. In the retail sector 2.5 million workers remain unorganised and potential prey to the "one-off bonus" bribe for signing away union rights forever.

So what should trades unionists fight for, in the run up to the election and once Blair is in office?

- A massive unionisation drive amongst the lowest paid and most poorly organised workers
- Guaranteed recognition for all unions
- A legal right to join a union
- A legal right to strike
- Restoration of trade union immunities from civil prosecution and of the closed shop
- Legal protection for all: abolition of the 2 year qualifying period
- Legal aid for industrial tribunal claims
- Abolition of all the anti-union laws

No one should expect Blair to do this without his arm twisted halfway up his back. Workers in the best organised sectors will need to go on the offensive, testing the anti-union laws in struggle.

Every major strike should be used by every trade unionist as a chance to make the Tory laws unworkable through united defiance. If New Labour attempts to use the union laws to break strikes then—like with the Tories—a general strike will be needed to defend trade unionism itself. ■



Dockers on strike in Liverpool: effective trade unionism is banned by Tory laws

ALEX CALLINICOS, one of the leaders of the Socialist Workers Party (SWP), has dished up the party's critique of Blair in the pamphlet *New Labour or Socialism?* The themes of this pamphlet will inform much of the discussion at "Marxism 96".

The central theme is how socialists should respond to the impending prospect of a Labour government. This is a vital issue because, as Callinicos notes in his introduction, "the mass of people's hopes of a better life are concentrated on Labour."

The problem with the pamphlet is that its author, like his party, does not have a strategy for relating to these hopes in a way that can develop a revolutionary challenge to reformism. On the contrary, there is a very strong dose of fatalism and complacency in Callinicos' whole analysis.

This amounts to the following: the Labour Party has always been committed to capitalism; in power it will inevitably come into conflict with the workers who voted for it; the workers will respond with strikes; in those strikes they will be more open to socialist arguments. End of analysis.

No revolutionary would argue with Callinicos' potted history of Labour's betrayals, but it is Callinicos' understanding of the roots of reformism that is wrong.

For the SWP the Labour Party is simply "the political expression of the trade union bureaucracy". Because the bureaucracy is committed to containing workers' struggles within capitalism, the Labour Party defends capitalism. But reformism - the belief that workers' interests can be achieved within capitalism - is not restricted to bureaucrats. It is, to a large extent, the spontaneous consciousness of the working class.

In particular, the SWP rejects the idea that better off workers in skilled or secure white collar jobs, the "labour aristocracy" as Lenin called them, are a conveyor belt for bourgeois ideas into the working class. For the SWP it is not mass reformist consciousness, not the marginal privileges imperialism accords to a layer of skilled workers, but the union bureaucracy pure and simple which causes reformism.

For the SWP reformism is simply an "ideology": strong during economic booms, weak during crises, but capable of being circumvented by militant economic class struggle. For Callinicos, therefore, the question of reform versus revolution is reduced to a preoccupation with elections versus economic struggle:

"Socialists have to organise around struggle. Elections are the terrain most favourable to Blair. It is when workers go on strike that his influence is at its weakest. Promises of 'stakeholding' and chants of 'New Labour - New Britain' are irrelevant when workers are struggling to make their action effective, to mount pickets, to win the solidarity of other workers and to raise money for themselves and their families."

Struggle is essential. But it is not good enough simply to counterpose "struggle" to "elections" if we are going to break the mass of workers from reformism.

In today's conditions elections deter-

mine the character of the government. Will there be a viciously anti-union party in power, or a party which, despite its intentions is still funded by, and tied to, the unions? Workers are absolutely right to believe this matters.

In addition strikes, even against Labour governments, do not of themselves break workers from reformism. After all, there have been considerably more strikes than there have been Labour governments this century; in and of themselves they have not broken the grip of Labour over the mass of the working class.

That is because reformism is not just an ideological trick played on the working class. It is a political force within the working class that has to be challenged in every sphere of the class struggle, including elections.

If we don't recognise it we can end up actually making concessions to reformism. And this is exactly what Callinicos does:

"Labour governments have sincerely sought reforms that would improve the living standards of the working people who voted them into office. But they have sought to do so within the framework of capitalism. This means that when the system is in crisis they have been faced with a harsh dilemma."

Wrong. There is no dilemma for Labour when faced with a crisis. Their political strategy is based, and always has been, on class collaboration as the best means of preserving the system. They collaborate with the bosses, against the workers. Reform have been won, but only as a result of working class pressure, not the sincerity of Labour politicians.

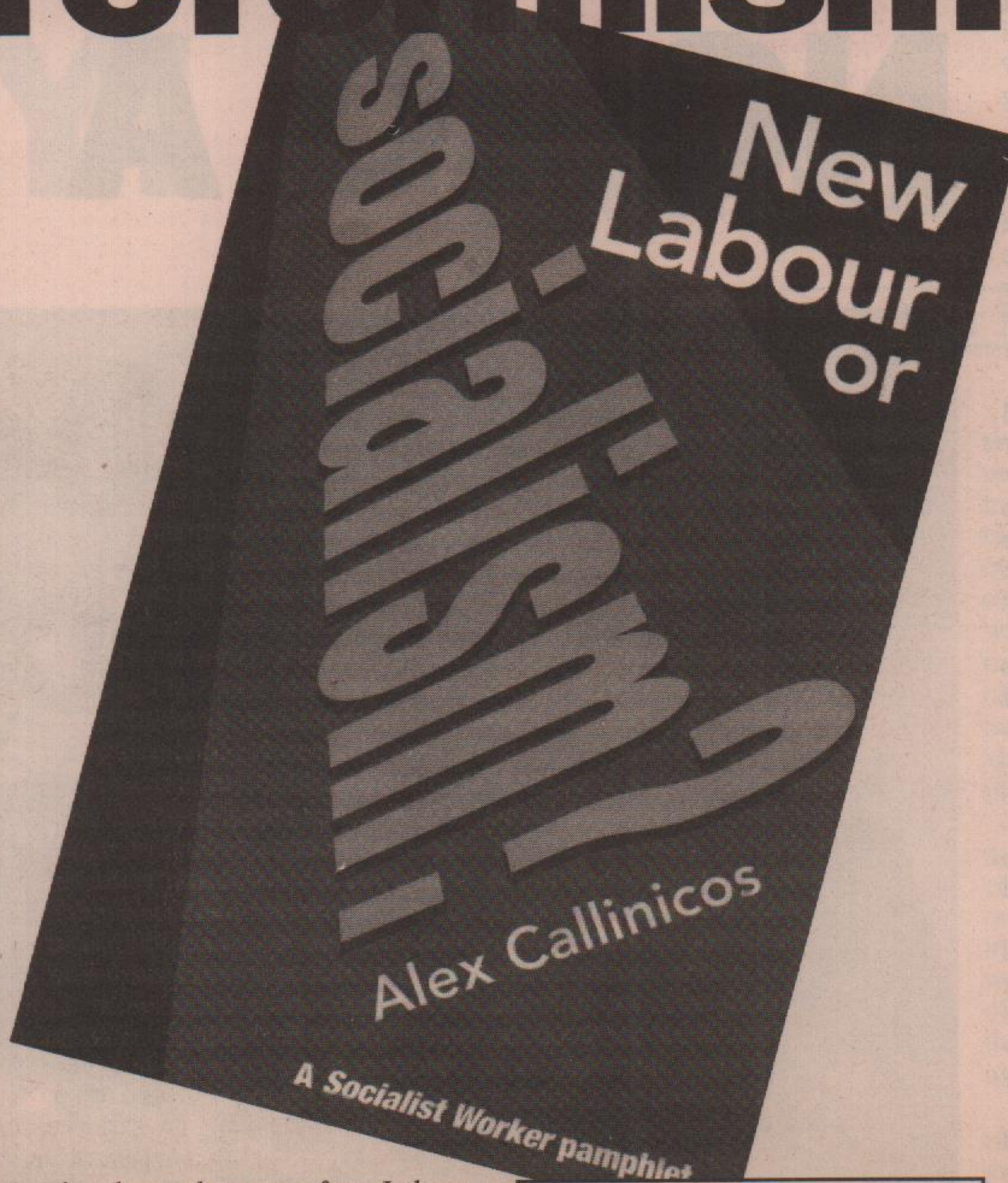
Indeed, this pressure is part of the contradiction of reformism. Workers expect something in return for their support and, given a lead, fight for that something. This flows from the character of the party. It is, as Callinicos rightly observes, "a capitalist workers' party. It rests upon organised workers and reflects their aspiration for a better society. But it seeks to reconcile this desire with the existence of capitalism. This has consistently led Labour governments to act as doctors of capitalism at working people's expense."

Callinicos stops there. He doesn't draw any conclusions from this contradiction, other than that Labour will betray.

Revolutionaries have to relate to the entire contradiction, not just part of it. We have to take up what is progressive

SWP Pamphlet

Misunderstanding reformism



in what the workers want from Labour. We have to give it both coherence and force.

This means organising workers to challenge their leaders. It means fighting for the workers' needs, and demanding that Labour meet these needs. In short, we do it by organising workers to put demands on Labour and fight within the unions, the Labour Party and the workplaces to force Labour to meet those demands.

These demands express the workers' vague desire for a better society in a more conscious form - a fight for measures that will defend workers from the most immediate ravages of the capitalist system and mobilise them to fight the system as a whole. They form the basis of a political challenge to reformism inside the labour movement. That challenge can organise workers in such a way that they can resist Labour's betrayals. They are prepared for them through struggle. Their consciousness is raised. The possibility of transcending reformism is increased.

This should be obvious to any revolutionary socialist in Britain - where reformism remains so strong. It isn't. It is ignored by ultra lefts who think their own hatred of Labour is shared by mil-

lions of ordinary workers and who act accordingly: cursing reformism but not fighting it. And it is ignored by opportunists who concede the dominance of reformism inside the class but who think this overcome by avoiding a political struggle with Labourism while conducting an "economic" struggle against the bosses.

Callinicos and the SWP fall into the latter category. This pamphlet does not contain so much as a sentence about what workers should do to force a Blair government to meet their needs. Not a single word. Not a single demand. Not a single reference to the issue at all.

At first sight this might appear curious. After all, the newspaper, *Socialist Worker*, is prepared to say what Labour in power ought to do about, for example, the anti-union laws or the NHS. The explanation of this is that the SWP has always been prepared to echo what militants are already saying. *Socialist Worker* (29 June) for example carried the headline: "We want Labour to give us something" over its report of the Unison conference.

What it will not do is either define systematically what Labour *should* do for the whole class, or campaign alongside militants who believe in Labour to force the party and unions to implement those demands.

For the SWP, that would be wrong because it would create illusions in Labour. Whilst this appears very uncompromising, it actually avoids political struggle. In fact, it expresses a fear that the SWP's politics are not strong enough to resist the illusions that exist inside the labour movement. Safer to stand aside from that part of the struggle. Safer to oppose unions affiliating to the Labour Party that most union members and, ironically, the SWP itself, will be voting for. Safer just to predict betrayal and hope to benefit from it when it comes.

Callinicos rightly calls for the building of a revolutionary socialist organisation as an alternative to Labour. But his words to describe that alternative are instructive. It will "knit together working class activists", it will "provide them with the arguments", it will "help people develop a vision of a different kind of society". This, he tells us, is what the SWP is doing.

The SWP is extremely active. Its members do a lot of work around strikes and other areas of struggle. But their conception of themselves is summed up in Callinicos' talk of "arguments" and "vision". They do not fight for an alternative strategy, for an action programme that can take workers from their immediate struggles towards the struggle for socialism.

Come the election, the SWP will say "Vote Labour, Join the SWP!". They will justify voting Labour by referring to its working class base. But they won't say or do anything to organise that base into a force that can challenge Blair now. They will abstain from the political struggle to place demands on Labour and wait for the economic struggle to do the job for them. Alone, it never will. ■

Splits in the SWP International:

Lesley Day surveys the fall-out from recent splits in the SWP's international organisation and urges a break with the political method of Tony Cliff. In *Trotskyist International* 20, out now price £1.50

Mark Harrison
reviews
New Labour or Socialism?
by Alex Callinicos
A Socialist Worker Pamphlet

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Christopher Hill

Culture of resistance

THE HISTORY of the "great and good" is well recorded. It is transcribed in the records of Parliament, the newspapers and books of the day, and in the diaries and letters of the learned. The history of the dispossessed, on the other hand, is not so easy to discover.

Liberty Against the Law, Christopher Hill's latest book, shows how the ballads, plays and popular pamphlets of the 16th and 17th centuries, reflected the struggles of the common people—driven from their land into wage slavery, and mobilised by the English revolution of

1642—50.

Starting around 1580 the enclosure of common lands destroyed the independence of the English peasants. Common rights to graze cattle, collect wood and kill wild animals were an essential part of the peasants' life.

A class of urban poor and landless peasantry was created, forced to wander the countryside in a desperate scramble to survive.

The poor expressed their anger through the popular folk heroes of the age, such as Robin Hood, who lived free in the woods and rejected the church:

Bill Jenkins
reviews
Liberty Against the Law
by Christopher Hill
Penguin £25 pp354

"From wealthy abbots' chests, and churls' abundant store
What oftentimes he took he shared amongst the poor." (p79).

Counterposing the words of the plays, songs and the pamphlets of English revolutionaries to those of the rulers who censored them, Hill shows

that the law was *class* law. It was created by and for the rich. It was defended by a legal system which excluded the commoners from upholding even their limited rights.

In an age when the poor could be plucked off the streets by the navy's press gangs, pirates—who freed slaves, elected their captains and allowed women to join them as equals—were treated as heroes. Hill reports the words of Captain Bellamy who:

"would not submit to be governed by laws which rich men have made for their own security...They rob the poor under

cover of law, forsooth, and we plunder the rich under the protection of our own courage."

Christopher Hill's book shows how the labouring poor never surrendered their belief in a better world, their hatred for the oppression of the rich, or their hope for the future. He shows how the most advanced thinkers of this period understood that only the abolition of private property could usher in a new age.

He shows how, for the first time, communism was advocated not just as an idea but as a realisable ideal. ■

THE LABOUR Party's sudden announcement that it will hold referendums on Scottish and Welsh devolution was greeted with howls of rage from all sides.

Alex Salmond of the Scottish Nationalist Party (SNP) called it a "betrayal". John Major declared that anything undermining the central role of the Westminster parliament threatens "our unity and stability". A Labour front-bench spokesman on Scotland, John McAllion, resigned.

Why the outrage? For the Tories the answer is simple. Major has decided that wrapping himself in the Union Jack and defending "the union" will win a few votes. He will go into the election fighting for God, Harry, Gazza and St George.

By contrast, the Scottish nationalists and Labour's pro-devolutionists see the call for a referendum as a retreat by the Labour leadership. And indeed it is. The decision, taken by Blair and his inner circle, and announced only later to Scottish and Welsh MPs, was not made for any democratic reasons.

Asking "the people" what they wanted was the last thing on Blair's mind. Rather he was running scared before a Tory campaign against a Labour commitment to give a Scottish parliament the power to raise taxes by an extra 3p in the pound if it so decided, dubbed by the Tories the "tartan tax".

Labour is so terrified of being seen as the "tax raising party" that, instead of making a devolved parliament for Scotland a manifesto commitment, to be introduced automatically following an election victory, it is going to poll the Scottish electorate on two questions—"Do you want a Scottish parliament?", and "Do you want it to have tax raising powers?" But Blair wants to spell out to all sections of the Labour party that what he says goes. He can reassure the City's financial institutions still further by demonstrating his autocratic command over almost every policy question.

Labour's proposals on devolution had been a long time in the making. Since 1989 a Labour-initiated "Scottish Constitutional Convention" has been discussing the question. The convention's proposals for a 129-member Scottish Assembly, to be elected partly on the basis of proportional representation, were endorsed by the Labour leadership.

This assembly is to be directly funded from Westminster and have all the powers currently wielded by the Scottish Office. It will deal with housing, education, transport and so on. It would also have the power to increase or decrease direct taxation by up to 3p in the pound.

Michael Forsyth, Scottish Secretary, declared "the Convention's plans are dangerous and irresponsible and will lead to constant confrontation between the Scottish Parliament and Westminster." Forsyth led the Tory campaign in Scotland, arguing not only against the "tartan tax" but accusing Labour of "threatening the union".

It is far from Labour's intention to

SCOTLAND: YES TO A REFERENDUM NO TO A SCOTTISH

John McKee examines the Assembly U-turn and socialist reformism and nationalism



Snakes have more spine: shadow Scottish Secretary, George Robertson (right), with chief whip Donald Dewar

undermine the union. The Labour Party, especially in Scotland, believes that devolution is the best way of heading off the SNP's demand for full independence.

The Labour Party is right to be worried by the growth of the Scottish National Party (SNP). Sudden upsurges in support for the SNP are nothing new. The SNP has been very successful in directing discontent with the ruling party in Westminster in a nationalist direction.

Its previous periods of growth took place in the late 1960s—the period of disillusion with Wilson—and in the late 1970s under the Callaghan government. And when the convention was convened

in 1989, Jim Sillars had just overturned a Labour majority of 19,000 to win the Govan seat for the SNP. Labour was running scared.

As in the rest of Britain, more than a decade and a half of Tory rule has produced for Scotland dramatic falls in living standards for working people: mass unemployment, destruction of traditional industries, the privatisation of utilities, attacks on hospitals, education and other social services.

While in England class-conscious workers have identified the root cause of this in the Tories' anti-working class policies, in Scotland the nationalists have

been arguing that the real cause is the national oppression and exploitation of Scotland by England, by a Westminster parliament.

The SNP, a bourgeois nationalist party, dominated politically by its small business and rural interests, has been attempting to divert Scottish workers' attention away from the real cause of their suffering—a Tory government attacking the workers on behalf of the capitalist class—into the dead end of nationalism. The solution to workers' problems, they argue, is to unite the people of Scotland—that is all classes—in a fight for independence from Britain.

In this they have been aided for many years by the Communist Party which saw the struggle for devolution as part of their "popular front" strategy, uniting all classes in Scotland, including "patriotic" capitalists, behind "progressive policies".

SNP support now runs at an average of 26% in elections. But it has failed to make a significant breakthrough in the central working class belt of Scotland in the Strathclyde and Lothian regions. While the Conservative Party has been reduced to a rump, Labour has maintained its dominance in Scotland's working class heartlands.

For this reason the SNP has shifted its policies to the left, just as "new" Labour has moved rightwards. The SNP projects itself as anti-nuclear and anti-NATO, calls for the re-nationalisation of utilities privatised by the Tories and supports a minimum wage. For the time being the SNP right wing has been told to pipe down while Alex Salmond attempts to win disaffected Labour voters. Such voters are not hard to find, at least in by-elections and council elections. Labour's rotten record in implementing every Tory attack at local government level has helped the SNP peddle its "left" image.

This is the reason why the Labour Party has resurrected the idea of a Scottish Assembly. It hopes that it can ride the tiger of nationalism by offering a half-way house. It had the added advantage of putting the SNP on the defensive by

exacerbating the divisions between the "fundamentalists" and the "gradualists". The fundamentalists rejected anything short of full independence and there were cries of outrage when Alex Salmond shifted ground, winning the SNP executive to a position of supporting the assembly as a "highway to independence".

This is indeed what the proposed Scottish Assembly could become. By endorsing the idea of a Scottish Assembly as some sort of "solution" to their problems, the Labour and trade union leaders have made a serious concession to the nationalist argument. They are in effect saying to workers that the SNP is half right, that the problems they have experienced over the last decade and a half do indeed have their roots in a lack of Scottish "control" over the economy.

Instead of directing the workers towards the real cause of their problems—the rule of capital in both London and Edinburgh—they are offering them an assembly, powerless to change anything in any significant way.

This of course plays straight into the hands of the nationalists, as Salmond knows only too well. It is the so-called socialist wing of the SNP that has taken up this strategy with enthusiasm. Alex Wood, ex-Labour leader of Edinburgh District Council, now part of the SNP "left", summed up how the Assembly can be used to further the nationalist cause in a recent article in the Scottish magazine *Liberation*:

"There would be no coinage for the SNP in being seen to wreck an Assembly. We surely start anyway from the perspective that what will disillusion the Scottish people with the Assembly is its very toothlessness, its inability to tackle real problems... An independent Parliament is our priority. But an assembly is our second choice: because it re-establishes a truly national political forum within which real issues can be debated; and because it will fail, and its failure will convince far more Scots of the need for independence than a thousand conference speeches."

("Only Independence..." *Liberation* No.11)

This is precisely what socialists have to fight against.

We are in favour of maintaining and developing a working class movement that is as united as possible, of promoting a common struggle against a common enemy, the British ruling class. Struggles such as the miners' strike of 1984/85 showed that the British working class needs maximum unity, north and south of the border. Any attempt to fragment that unity along national lines must be doggedly resisted by revolutionaries in Scotland, Wales and England.

But how do we resist it? We certainly do not undermine nationalism by denying the Scots the right to independence or autonomy if they want it. A labour movement that adopted such a purblind, undemocratic attitude, would be playing into the hands of the nationalists. The SNP would be able to show that the working class movement in England would be prepared to maintain the union against the will of the Scottish people, and therefore disregarded the democratic wishes of the Scots. Class independence would be eclipsed by middle class nationalism.

But supporting the right to separation does not mean that revolutionary socialists should advocate separation and an independent Scotland. Quite the opposite.

Socialists and referendums

IT IS A SIGN of the growing instability of bourgeois politics in Britain that the ruling class increasingly has to talk about referendums. Blair has promised referendums not only on devolution proposals, but on Europe and on the reform of the electoral system.

Marxists are consistent democrats. We believe in the most direct working class democracy in society, where workplaces, factories, estates, offices, and schools elect their own delegates to workers' councils. These are bodies which can really administer society in workers' interests because the workers can immediately replace their delegates if they think they do not represent their views.

This is a far cry from bourgeois, parliamentary democracy, where the electorate is called out only every four or five years to give a "mandate" to a government which is then legally irremovable by the voters. Everyone knows the result. The Tories are elected on a tax cutting programme and then proceed to pile tax increase after tax increase on to the working

class and the poor.

Every measure which makes it more difficult for the bourgeoisie to ignore the electorate, and to take decisions behind its back, is supportable by socialists, including referendums.

We are in favour of such issues as devolution and the electoral system being put before the people. We want to expose the bankruptcy of the bourgeoisie's solutions and put forward a working class alternative. Indeed we are in favour of "initiative and referendum": a right which exists in many states as a result of democratic struggles. Under this system, citizens and their parties can collect signatures for a referendum that binds a legislature to change the law.

These measures are not substitutes for the struggle for workers' democracy. They are measures that restrict the untrammelled power of a bourgeois parliament. But we do not just accept referendums as given. We demand:

- No advisory referendums—the voters' decision must become law.
- No thresholds—a simple majority will decide.
- For the right of initiative as well as

referendum: questions should be tabled by collecting voter signatures.

Of course even if these demands were met referendums would still be biased against the masses. The capitalists have at their disposal a monopoly of the means of mass communication. Big business can pour millions of pounds into its press and advertising machine. It can exclude the workers from access to TV and radio. In this situation elections and referendums will be manipulated against the workers.

Without the right of the masses to pose the questions, referendums are often used by semi-dictatorial regimes to gain legitimacy. Back me or sack me, order or chaos—these are the only questions that dictators put to the masses. That is why Marxists do not unconditionally support referendums.

Only the overthrow of the bourgeois state and its limited form of democracy and its replacement by democracy of a working class type will guarantee working people real control over their lives. ■

the fallout from Labour's Scottish
 calls out a revolutionary alternative to
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ASSEMBLY!

Socialists must attack the myth of a "nationally oppressed" Scotland. Scotland has never been an oppressed nation like Ireland. The history of Scotland and England's union is one of joint collaboration in the oppression and exploitation of nations all over the world, and especially of Ireland on their own doorstep. The cross of St Andrew has as bloody an imperialist history as the cross of St George.

But the Scots should have the right to independence. Marxists support the *right* of self-determination up to and including secession, i.e. independence for Scotland. But as long as the demand for independence does not achieve a majority, as it *has not done* in Scotland, then we will fight against it tooth and nail. To break up the British working class along national lines would be a major setback for our class.

We defend the right of the Scots to make such a choice and denounce the national chauvinism of "unionist" Tories who deny the Scottish people that right. The will of the majority on this question

can only be determined by regular referendums, asking the Scottish people a clear and simple question: "Do you want independence and separation from the United Kingdom?" If the majority, against our advice, vote yes, then revolutionaries should be the first to support that decision being made a reality. This is why we believe that this is the question that should be on any referendum ballot carried out by Labour.

What about a Scottish Assembly? Again we are absolutely in favour of the Scottish people having the right to choose whether to have their own assembly. That is why we are in favour of a referendum on this question as well as on independence.

But in such a referendum socialists must argue for a "No" vote. We are completely opposed to this toothless concession to nationalism.

Marxists do not believe that real power lies in parliamentary bodies but with the armed forces and unelected bureaucracy of the ruling class. We do not aim for the proliferation of democratic talking shops

within the state itself.

Even if a Scottish assembly were to take over major powers from Westminster, this would not provide an instrument through which the struggle for a workers' republic throughout Britain could be better pursued.

But in any case Blair is offering nothing along these lines. The powers of the assembly will be laid down by Westminster, giving another weapon to the nationalists. Even the powers to raise taxes will be limited both in amount and in type. The same tax system which makes the workers pay while the rich and the big business gets off with paying a pittance will be enshrined in the Scottish Assembly's powers.

The real struggles of the Scottish workers must be directed to end the root cause of their exploitation. This means a united revolutionary struggle with their sisters and brothers in England and Wales for the destruction of British capitalism and its replacement by a socialist Britain as part of the struggle for a Socialist United States of Europe. ■

The left tails nationalism

LABOUR IS not the only party that has been pandering to nationalist ideas in Scotland.

In 1979 the Socialist Workers Party (SWP) correctly argued against a Scottish Assembly and for a "No" vote in the 1979 referendum. But by the late 1980s, with nationalism gaining support amongst Scottish workers, the SWP predictably adapted its position to the prevailing mood. Chris Bambery declared:

"We champion a Scottish Assembly only in the sense that it can become a means of confrontation with Thatcher and the British state, something the SNP wishes to avoid."

Since then the SWP has repeated an idiotic formula that the break-up of the British state would be a step forward "by any means". Consistent Marxists, by contrast, know that states can be "broken up" in a progressive way (the seizure of state power by the workers) or with reactionary consequences, as in Yugoslavia for example. To break up the unity of the British working class along national lines—Scots, Welsh, English—would not be positive. It would be a major blow to the class struggle against capitalism and the British state.

In Scotland the recently formed Scottish Socialist Alliance (SSA), a coalition of left-nationalists, ex-Labour Party members and Scottish Militant Labour (SML), has its eyes firmly set on supporting, and winning seats in, the Scottish Assembly.

Its draft *Charter for Socialist Change* is a completely reformist document, little different to the SNP's "left" policies. The SSA in its "Aims and Objectives" declares that it is for "a sovereign Scottish Parliament which has the right to decide

which powers to retain in Scotland and to determine its relationship with Britain and the rest of Europe."

The major force in the Alliance is Scottish Militant Labour, which claims to be a Marxist and Trotskyist organisation. Since SML was launched as a Scottish party in 1991, instead of combating the poisonous influence of nationalism, it has been making strenuous efforts to adapt itself to nationalism.

A recent SML *Statement on the National Question* does not call for an independent Scotland "at this stage", but actively supports and *advocates* a Scottish Assembly. It argues that the major struggle should be to give it "sweeping" and "sovereign" powers. It argues that such a Scottish Parliament, based in Edinburgh, would mean that the "entire British state would be undermined". Unveiling what they call "a transitional programme for the dismantling of the centralised capitalist British state", it declares:

"We should state openly that we oppose the centralised British state, with power concentrated in Westminster and Whitehall, and in its place stand for a Socialist Federation of Britain, with full autonomy for Scotland."

This position has nothing in common with Marxism. As early as 1848 Marx was attacking those bourgeois democrats in Germany who supported federation and sought to weaken the central power by strengthening the independence of the regions. He argued that "the workers must use their influence not only for the one and indivisible German Republic, but for a decisive centralisation of force within it in the hands of the state power"

(*Address to the Communist League, 1850*).

Lenin, who constantly battled against Russian chauvinism and in defence of

the right of nations to self-determination, put the case for a centralised state even more sharply. In *Critical Remarks on the National Question* he declared:

"Marxists are, of course, opposed to federation and decentralisation, for the simple reason that capitalism requires for its development the largest and most centralised possible states. *Other conditions being equal*, the class conscious proletariat will always stand for the larger state. It will always fight against medieval particularism, and will always welcome the closest possible economic amalgamation of large territories in which the proletariat's struggle against the bourgeoisie can develop on a broad basis."

Does this mean Marxists are against local democracy? Far from it. Not only do we advocate centralism, but as Lenin pointed out "we advocate exclusively *democratic* centralism", that is we advocate democratic local self-government. That is why we denounce the Tories for attacking local democracy, for removing regional councils like Strathclyde and the GLC.

SML's positive espousal of breaking up the British state into a federation would clearly be a step back from the point of view of the proletariat. Not only would it divide working class struggles against British and international capital, but it strikes at the very heart of the socialist programme.

A proletarian government needs a *centralised state* in order to develop a socialist plan which can redistribute resources, plan national energy needs, transport, education and the pre-requisites of a free and prosperous socialist society. ■

The A-Z of Marxism

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is for

Nationalism

by Peter Main

NATIONALISATION has become a dirty word.

The dominant capitalist economic policy—neo-liberalism—says nationalisation and public spending are the causes of all economic crises. With the collapse of Stalinism the former Stalinist bureaucrats are greedily de-nationalising whole chunks of the economy. Blair's New Labour, like many western "socialist" parties, has abandoned any commitment to renationalising privatised industries.

Nationalisation's bad reputation doesn't stop there. The bureaucracy, inefficiency and corruption rife in nationalised public services gave them a terrible reputation with working class consumers. Those who worked for the National Coal Board, British Gas and Telecom were never very starry-eyed about their bosses either.

For Marxists, however, nationalisation is a key element of the socialist programme. It forms an indispensable part of the path to human liberation. Why?

The capitalist economic system is run for profit alone, for the bosses. The power of the bosses comes from their ownership of the "commanding heights" of the economy. To reorient production to meet human need we have to remove the power of the capitalists at its source. The "market" simply cannot be used to meet human needs in full.

By taking the big firms and banks into state ownership the working class can give itself the most powerful social and economic lever to meet the needs of the majority.

"But nationalisation's been tried and it doesn't work": this is the refrain you will hear whenever you argue for nationalisation.

This century has seen two kinds of nationalisation:

- Capitalist nationalisations carried out by Labour and Conservative governments across the globe, mainly in the 1940s, 50s and 60s

- Stalinist nationalisations, carried out as Stalinism expanded after 1945

Neither of these constituted real, socialist nationalisation; neither of them worked.

Capitalist nationalisation, what Marxists call "state capitalism", was carried out to ensure that the capitalist system as a whole survived and under conditions where the capitalists whose firms were nationalised received generous compensation.

In short, the social power of the capitalists remained intact.

Essential services such as rail, electricity and gas were nationalised together with those rendered practically moribund by the capitalist profit motive, such as coal.

Former coal owners were paid £3,000 million in compensation plus £164,660,000 in government bonds. These will continue to pay annuities to the former coal owners and their descendants until the year 2000.

In other industries, such as rail and electricity, general taxation was used to fund modernisation creating a cheap resource for the capitalist class. Since the rest of the economy remained privately owned, there were also plenty of ways in which the funding of the nationalised industries became a means of channelling public money into private hands. The NHS has always been a lucrative market for the drug companies.

However, nationalisations were not the solution to the economic crises created by capitalism. Not only did they leave most property in private capitalist hands, but they were never integrated into a plan of production aimed at harnessing the power of nationalised industries to meet human need.

Planning is the vital adjunct to state ownership in the Marxist programme.

But, once you try to plan from above, the argument goes, you are meddling with a natural process called the market. Shortages, bottlenecks and inefficiency inevitably result. "Just look at Russia" is the refrain.

This brings us to the second, failed, form of nationalisation

Stalinism did destroy the social power of the capitalists. It nationalised *without compensation*. It also organised production across society through a centralised plan. But the plan was a bureaucratic plan, not controlled democratically by the mass of workers. That is why it failed.

The key to the revolutionary socialist strategy is the recognition that, if socialism is to mean the democratic control of society's resources by the workers themselves, then the organisations for exercising that control have to be built in the course of the struggle against capitalism.

Consequently, in all working class struggles, revolutionaries raise the question of *workers' control*. Whether the issue is one of pay, jobs, working conditions, housing, safety, investment or whatever, at heart there would always be the simple question, who is to be in control?

For the workers in any industry to know how it is being run, they need access to the accounts and order books. They have to have the time and training necessary to exercise control.

Ultimately they need the means by which to enforce their decisions. None of this existed under Stalinism. Nor was it present under state capitalist nationalisation.

Against the right wing who argue that nationalisation has been proved not to work, and that we should not go too far, revolutionaries argue that it failed because it never went far enough.

As a policy and as a slogan, "nationalisation" is inadequate. That is why we fight for:

- Nationalisation, without compensation and under workers' control. ■

Argentina

The workers in struggle, the left in confusion

Alejandra Martin and Mario Gomez of the Workers' Party for Socialism (PTS) bring us up to date on current developments in the class struggle in Argentina.

1 995 AND the beginning of 1996 saw a sharp economic recession in Argentina. Budgetary crises in the regions led to hard fought struggles in the interior and a government crisis. But in recent months the Argentinian economy has experienced a degree of recovery. The rate of economic growth in April was the highest since the recession following the Mexican crisis of December 1994.

This has permitted the government to take a number of measures to raise consumption amongst the middle classes, such as mortgage loans, options to buy for leaseholders and putting pressure on the banks to reduce interest rates. In return, the middle classes supported the government, pushing conflicts into the background for the moment and suppressing recurring scandals such as the recent arms sales to Ecuador. In this way the government tried to recover some of its electoral base, which was badly affected by the sharp recession of 1995, and thus avoid a drubbing in the capital's mayoral elections.

Nevertheless, this incipient recovery is very far from being another "consumer boom", and it cannot give way to a new short cycle of growth such as developed between 1991-94. The Argentine economy is confronted with serious structural problems (deficit budgets, growing foreign indebtedness etc.) which have forced the bosses on to the attack and pressured the government to extend its "adjustment" plan. An offensive against the workers' movement after the capital's elections is in preparation. The victor of the elections will probably be De La Rúa, the Radical candidate linked to the economic group, "Bunge y Born".

Resistance struggles

At the moment the workers are continuing to throw up resistance struggles. There are isolated conflicts in a number of sectors: electrical goods factories, freezers and the docks. Each in turn has gone into struggle in the regions, as in Neuquén, Jujuy, Córdoba and Tucumán. In the latter huge mobilisations forced

the governor to backtrack on his adjustment plan and privatisations.

The trade union bureaucracy continues to collaborate with these policies, signing slaves charters in a number of factories (such as that signed between the mechanics' union SMATA and Fiat) and leaving hard fought struggles isolated, like the metalworkers in the Aurora factory.

A democratic movement arose at the beginning of this year in response to the discrediting of all the regime's institutions (justice, police, parliament) in the eyes of the popular and middle classes, but was derailed. Nevertheless it put a brake on the government's more Bonapartist measures, leaving a dispersed and widespread vanguard which is now undergoing a rich process of political reflection.

The politics of the left

Unfortunately, the majority of the "Trotskyist" left is playing an unfortunate role. The Socialist Workers' Movement (MST) has formed a political, trade union and electoral bloc with two Stalinist parties: the Maoist PTP and the Communist Party. They intervene together in the capital's federal elections and in a number of different elections of the vanguard. They act like a left wing of the "oppositional" bureaucracy in the workers' movement, and the radical and centre-left leadership in the student

movement. The MST displays a shameful opportunism towards the treacherous leaderships of the mass movement and subordinates its politics totally to Stalinism.

The Movement for Socialism (MAS) continues to be in a grave crisis, adopting positions which are more and more social democratic and adaptationist in relation to the bourgeois democratic regime. They have refused to initiate a class based bloc in the struggle to liberate the prisoners, focusing their actions on getting declarations from "oppositional" sectors of the bourgeoisie.

The Workers Party (PO), which pleaded at the last minute to be allowed into the front with the MST and the Stalinists, finally went into the elections alone with a political line adapted to the concerns of the middle classes, with a light centre-left tint. Its main thrust was to denounce government corruption, thus fostering illusions in the autonomy and worth of the Federal Capital, without raising any transitional programme for a workers' answer to the crisis.

Our party, the PTS, has been arguing for the need for co-ordination of the current struggles, raising a programme which would make the capitalists, not the workers, pay for the crisis. It raises demands such as nationalisation under workers' control of every business which closes or makes redundancies, dividing

up working hours between those in and those out of work with a minimum salary of \$1,000 and the defence of the rights of immigrant workers. These policies have enabled us to link up with activists in a number of the key resistance struggles. The PTS has been organising activities together with these worker activists, such as workers' discussion days and factory bulletins. We are now preparing a festival calling for the freedom of the worker prisoners, together with a number of youth groups and rank and file committees for the freedom of imprisoned militants Panario and Christensen.

Amongst the youth we continue to struggle alongside groups of young workers and students in the Revolutionary Working Class Youth Movement (MOJUVOR), which will be holding its first national conference at the end of July.

In the mayoral elections in the Federal Capital, the PTS, in addition to the programmatic points above, raised a series of democratic demands such as the fight for free abortion on demand, denouncing the Videla-Menem-Radical justice system and raising the need for election of the judiciary by universal suffrage.

● For full background on the class struggle in Argentina read the latest issue of *Trotskyist International*, details on page 15. ■

Germany

Mass movement against Maastricht austerity plans

OVER 350,000 German workers marched in Bonn on 15 June against the government of Helmut Kohl. It was the biggest trade union demonstration since the war. Called by the DGB (the German TUC), the march was a clear sign of the massive strength of the working class in Europe's richest capitalist country.

Kohl's government is committed to a "Programme to Increase Growth and Employment", which it claims is essential if Germany is to meet the convergence criteria set out in the Maastricht Treaty. It is designed to make the working class pay for Maastricht.

Benefits, pensions and sick pay are to be slashed and employment protection laws will be weakened. At the same time the rich will receive a tidy bonus in the form of tax cuts.

The real threat to Germany meeting the Maastricht criteria is the growth of budget deficits in the public sector. The bosses want swingeing cuts, targeting first of all public sector workers, from education through to social security and welfare. But they also have private sector wages in their sights.

The German employers' federation rejected a national minimum wage in the building industry of 19 DM an hour, (£8.94 - Tony Blair please note!) even though the figure had already been agreed between the unions, government and construction bosses. Such a deal ran counter to the employers' overall target of reducing the average wage across industry by 20%.

There have been increasing signs of militancy among German workers. The metal workers' strike of spring 1995



Striking street cleaners march through Hamburg

scored a partial victory. After this leaders of the massive union IG Metall offered the bosses a so-called "pact for work": a wage freeze in return for new jobs. The bosses accepted the idea of a pay freeze, called for further cuts in wages... and ruled out any new jobs.

This put the DGB under enormous pressure. Finally they could see no alternative but to display the muscle of the organised workers. And a greatly encouraging and impressive spectacle it was. The 15 June march in Bonn was enor-

mous by any standard, and marked by a mood of militancy from the workers. Nor has the pressure yet let up. On 27 June, the day Kohl's "Programme" was due to be debated in parliament, 200,000 took part in demos and pickets.

These actions show tremendous potential. But the weakness of the leadership of the working class was also starkly revealed.

The union officials did not use the mass march in Bonn to combine and bring forward pay claims in the public,

finance and steel sectors, nor to mobilise the unions against the government's whole cuts package. Neither did they mobilise for strike action.

Instead a public sector pay dispute was settled just three days before the march! A wage round involving four million workers ended with only a 1.9% average increase. Worse still, the bureaucracy completely sold out public sector workers from the former East Germany. They dropped the claim for equal wages and agreed an increase of only 1% - still

just 86% of the Western wage next year, the seventh anniversary of national reunification. At the same time Eastern workers work an average 40 hour week, compared to 38.5 in the West.

The union leaders' approach closely follows the political strategy of the Social Democrats. The unions and SPD want to unite with all those bosses who still hold to "social partnership" - class collaboration with the unions rather than outright conflict, like the owners and management of Volkswagen and other major car firms, in which national bargaining has been replaced by company agreements with the consent of IG Metall.

On the mass demonstration, a very large number of SPD banners and flags were visible.

This shows that the SPD, despite its right wing policies, still has a real relationship to the working class movement which supports it and is linked to it with a thousand ties.

Support for the SPD on the demonstration revealed that there is a sizeable layer of class-conscious workers who see the need for a political, not just a trade union, solution to the crisis.

The problem is the right-wing reformist character of the politics they are turning to.

There is a diverse and under-organised opposition to the union and SPD leaders at shopfloor level.

These militants need a clear programme for resolving the crisis at the expense of the bosses, not the workers: a programme that would mean real inroads into the wealth, power and privileges of the German bosses. ■

Russia finds its new dictator?

IN THE first round of the Russian presidential elections on 16 June, Boris Yeltsin narrowly beat the Communist Party (KPRF) candidate Gennady Zyuganov. Yeltsin received 25.1 million votes (34.8%) and Zyuganov 23.2 million (32.1%). In third place was the recently retired Lieutenant-General Alexander Lebed who gained 14.7% of the vote. Since then, Lebed has emerged as the real victor. On the eve of the second round, Lebed's power has grown massively, effectively making him Yeltsin's right hand man and chosen heir.

Until a few weeks ago, Lebed had bitterly criticised Yeltsin from numerous angles. He campaigned under the slogan "Truth and Order". He was highly critical of the war in Chechnya, blaming the corrupt head of the army Pavel Grachev, and Yeltsin's ally Alexander Korshakov, head of the presidential security guard, for having stoked up the war to preserve their power.

Lebed argued for immediate negotiations with the rebel Chechens. Whilst

Who is General Lebed? On the eve of the second round of Russia's presidential election, Dave Stockton finds out.

spouting Great Russian nationalist rhetoric, Lebed was not opposed to Nato expansion into Eastern Europe. At a recent meeting of Russian leaders with Clinton in Moscow, the US president said: "Of course you are all opposed to Nato expansion eastwards". Lebed alone growled "Not me!".

Until the late spring Lebed had been part of an attempt to create a third force—an alternative to both Yeltsin and Zyuganov. This project involved at various times Grigory Yavlinsky, leader of the Yabloko Party, and Svyatoslav Fedorov of the Party of Workers' Self-Government. Attempts to unite these forces failed, partly because of conflicting egos, but also because of their different platforms: nationalist, neo-liberal and social democratic.

In the weeks immediately before poll-

ing day a series of media interviews and well-made TV adverts for Lebed appeared. This was a sure sign that Lebed had done a back-room deal with Yeltsin. Even western observers commented on the Yeltsin campaign's grotesque media monopoly, which got 75% of the print coverage and 90% of TV and radio time. Zyuganov got little coverage apart from the formal broadcasts specified by law on the state channel alone. At the same time, the media churned out every sort of anti-communist film and documentary that it could.

"Wrong choice"

On top of this, both the Russian media and the Western press implied that if Russian electors made the "wrong choice" in the first round, they would probably be "saved" from making this mistake a second time by a military coup.

The Western press has contained views from "authoritative" (i.e. government) sources that if Yeltsin did not either safely win the first round or look certain to win the second, he would simply cancel the second round altogether—or falsify the results. Washington, Paris, London and Bonn made it clear that they would treat such an outcome as a "lesser evil" than a Zyuganov victory. As the US magazine *Transition* commented in late May:

"Based on recent experiences in Azerbaijan and elsewhere, Western observers could well turn a blind eye. Western statesmen have made extraordinary efforts to aid Yeltsin's re-election efforts, pledging about \$15 billion in aid over the past two months. It is now too late for them to change course, and they would not let a few arithmetical 'errors' interfere with their national interests."

Lebed's high vote was due to a sudden opening to him by the media as well as his mopping up of the ultra-nationalist supporters of Vladimir Zhirinovskiy (whose electoral support slid further to only 5.84%).

The significant difference between Yeltsin and Zyuganov's vote was social position:

"Entrepreneurs, people with high incomes, professionals and military personnel vote for Yeltsin. Workers, peasants and pensioners vote for Zyuganov," said Yuri Levada from the All-Russia Centre for the Study of Public Opinion.

Zyuganov started his campaign claiming to stand for those who suffered most from Yeltsin's disastrous policies to promote the restoration of capitalism. But as the campaign proceeded Zyuganov made ever greater concessions to Yeltsin. Most recently, after the first round, he suggested that one-third of his future cabinet would be made up of Yeltsin supporters, and that he would actually give the premiership to Lebed.

Narrow

But even with his narrow win Yeltsin's position was not secure. There was no military coup, but a definite palace coup occurred amongst the warring cliques that surround Yeltsin.

The clique which has been dominant since the storming of the White House in late 1993 and the launching of the Chechen War consists of Korshakov, Mikhail Barsakov (head of the secret police), Pavel Grachev (war minister) and deputy prime minister Oleg Soskovets. They were known collectively



General Lebed: the real winner of the Russian elections?

as the "war party" and had pressurised Yeltsin for months to cancel the elections (see *Workers Power* 201).

On the other hand there were the remaining "economic reformers" headed by Anatoly Chubais, former deputy premier and head of the privatisation programme. Chubais, with the support (and maybe collusion) of Lebed, seized on a bizarre incident when three of the "reformers" were arrested by Korshakov's Kremlin guard in possession of a suitcase with hundreds of thousands of dollars in it.

Access

Denied access to the president, Chubais managed to break through Yeltsin's "praetorian guard" via the latter's daughter. They convinced the president that what was underway was a coup to oust the reformers and cancel the elections. Yeltsin received an offer of support from Lebed, who promised to help control the army and take action against Korshakov and co.

Whether this was a pantomime for the media or a pretext for announcing Yeltsin's new bloc with Lebed remains unclear. But it represented an attempt to junk the "war party", including the unpopular Grachev, in order to ensure that all of Lebed's votes pass to Yeltsin in the second round.

Yeltsin could still be in for a nasty second-round surprise. It is far from certain that all of Lebed's votes will simply transfer. Zyuganov's voters are far more likely to turn out. Any sharp fall in voter participation, out of disgust with Yeltsin's cynical manoeuvres, could yet cost him the election. If, however, his tricks work and Yeltsin does indeed win the second round, then millions of Rus-

sians who hate all of his policies will have been conned into voting for their continuation. The majority of votes were cast for savage critics of Yeltsin.

One of Lebed's advisers has already remarked that if Yeltsin wins, "policy won't change much from what we've seen over the past two years" (*Herald Tribune* 24 June). One of Chubais' advisers warns, however, that "there is going to be a day of reckoning after the election", because of the expenditure and wild promises. Putting these quotes together gives a good prediction: "more of the same—only much worse".

The causes for this, in the short term, lie in the price of Yeltsin's victory. Yeltsin has toured Russia handing out cash and promises of cash to ailing industries. Giving a whole new meaning to the term "sweeteners", he offered \$10 million to one sweet factory alone. The cost of his campaign promises by early May was estimated at between \$5.6 and \$10 billion. With tax revenues crumbling this year, the gap has been plugged by the IMF (\$10bn), Germany (\$1.7bn) and France (\$245m). Most of these donations have been delivered in person, as one western leader after another trooped to Moscow to pay tribute.

After the elections there is likely to be a wholesale collapse of tax revenues; a major banking crisis is just around the corner. The printing presses have been running overtime to create enough roubles to pay the enormous back wages. Another inflationary surge will wipe out the value of these increases. The misled and swindled electorate will soon get the bill: cuts in state funding, loans to industry and social facilities will form part of a savage austerity package in the autumn. ■

Stalinists on the run

IN THE UNCERTAIN world of Russian politics, one thing is sure: Gennady Zyuganov does not deserve the confidence of those millions of workers, pensioners and collective farmers who voted for him. As early as the February World Economic Forum in Davos, he promised the imperialists that he would not fundamentally reverse the economic reforms or "persecute" his opponents.

His campaign platform, "Russian, Motherland and the People!", omitted the calls for full-scale re-nationalisation which the membership of the KPRF had inserted in the party's programme in January 1995. Instead he talks only of re-nationalising "illegal privatisation". Though this is far from negligible in Russia, it is not the main problem.

Zyuganov has insisted that he respects "all forms of property" though he has refused to say exactly what the proportions of state and private property should be.

His main enthusiasm is for a noxious brew of Russian chauvinism distilled by 19th century reactionary thinkers and Joseph Stalin. The author of two leaden books, *Over the Horizon* and *Russia and the Contemporary World*, Zyuganov's thoughts on religion, patriotism and Russia's national destiny have been widely denounced as un-Marxist, even from within the KPRF's Stalinist ranks.

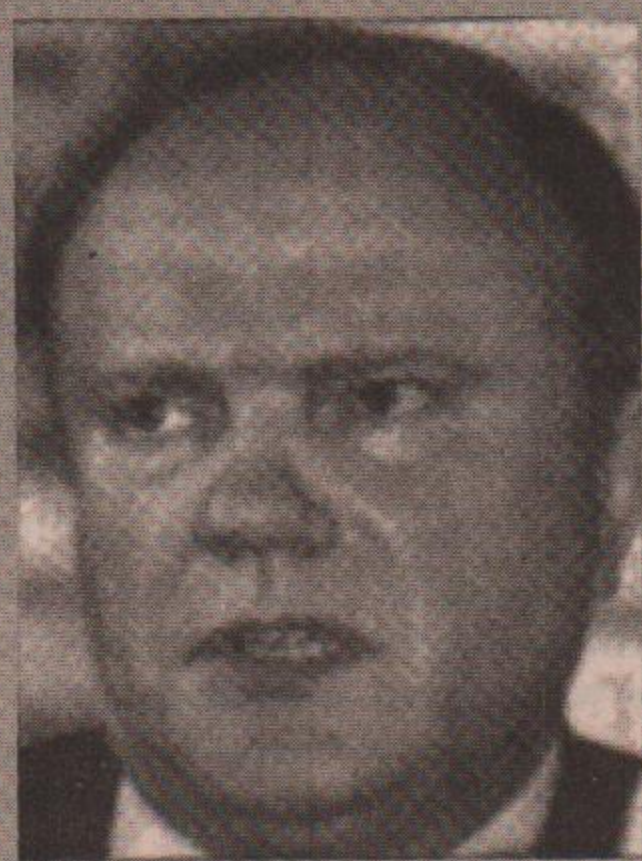
Even Zyuganov's anti-capitalist rhetoric is drenched in nationalism: "Capitalism organically does not fit with the flesh and blood, the way

of life, the habits and the psychology of our society. It already led once to a civil war, and today it is not taking root—and will not take root—in Russian soil." (*Transition* 31 May 1996)

Zyuganov has shamelessly ditched his promises to sweep out Yeltsin's regime by offering the latter a share in the new government. This could also be a recognition that with major economic storms brewing a "sacred union" between the KPRF and Yeltsin might soon be needed to ensure social stability. Yeltsin, having thrown himself into Lebed's arms, may still need to call in Zyuganov to restore the balance. Millions of workers, who voted for Zyuganov hoping to get rid of Yeltsin must speedily realise that voting

alone will not stop the capitalist restoration process. The answer is strike action, such as the miners took in the winter, which forced Yeltsin's hand on the question of back pay.

The KPRF vote hints at the mass disillusionment with Yeltsin. The collapse of Zhirinovskiy's vote indicates that the Russian workers have turned not to the far right but to the left—albeit a reformist and nationalistic left. But the bureaucratic structures of the KPRF and the unions cannot and will not mobilise a real fight against Yeltsin. They are contemplating a deal with him, not a fight to the death. It is not ideologically decaying Stalinism but only a renewed Trotskyism that can provide a strategy for action against the impending attacks. ■



KPRF's Zyuganov offered coalition with Yeltsin



Part 5: Towards the 2nd World Congress

Building the international in war-shattered Europe

A new leadership came out of the 1946 conference of the Fourth International (FI), based in Europe rather than the USA. At the core of the new leadership was the International Secretariat (IS) of seven based in Paris which included Michel Pablo, the International Secretary, Pierre Frank, Ernest Mandel and US Trotskyist Sherry Mangan.

The IS faced immediate problems in two of its important European sections which had been formed from the post war unifications of former warring factions. In France the Parti Communiste Internationaliste (PCI) was deeply divided between its right and a minority, left wing. In Britain the Revolutionary Communist Party (RCP) was divided over an assessment of perspectives, especially on the question of entry into the Labour Party. In both cases the IS confronted majorities which disagreed with its own orientation.

The French PCI had grown considerably after the war; it had over a thousand members by 1948. It faced a powerful French Communist Party (PCF) which became the largest party in the Assembly after the 1945 elections and was part of the coalition government with the SFIO (the French socialists) and the MPR, a bourgeois republican party.

When this coalition government put forward a new Constitution to a referendum in 1946 the PCI leadership changed its line, moving from a position of boycott to one of voting yes. This was clearly an opportunist position. It involved a revolutionary organisation voting for a bourgeois constitution designed to swindle the masses. The PCI majority argued that, since the right wing opposed the Constitution because of its democratic elements, then the PCI should vote for it.

The IS rejected these arguments and opposed the PCI's call for a "yes" vote. But it did not overrule the leadership, fearing that such an intervention would have blown apart the fragile unity that existed in the PCI. It produced two internal bulletins specially devoted to the disputed questions.

Further friction arose around the PCI's intervention in the major 1947 Renault strike which was actively sabotaged by the PCF. The IS and the PCI left-wing criticised the PCI leadership for tailing the strikers' demands and failing to demand the spreading of the strike. This would have brought the PCI into direct conflict with the PCF and its union organisation the CGT.

The IS and IEC's attempts to preserve unity failed. Their arguments certainly helped to strengthen the left in the PCI which won a clear majority at the November 1947 conference. As a result the right wing split; it broke with the PCI and the International. Several hundred members left, dealing a severe blow to the French section.

In Britain an organisation unifying virtually all the British Trotskyists, the RCP, had been set up in March 1944, with about 300 members. It threw itself into a series of strikes and struggles which erupted at the end of the war. It played a leading role in organising and supporting an important apprentices' strike in Tyne and Wear.

For this activity it suffered government repression. Several of its leaders were arrested and put on trial for their activity in the strike. The government was aided and abetted by the Communist Party of Great Britain (CPGB) who, as social patriots, saw every strike as sabotage of the war effort.

"Let the Government deal with these saboteurs with a strong hand", screamed one typical *Daily Worker* editorial during the trial.

In May 1945 the RCP stood a candi-

In both Britain and France the resumption of peacetime politics opened up new opportunities for the FI's growth. It also produced differences on perspectives and on tactics towards reformism.



Neath by-election 1945: Stalinists hound Trotskyist candidate

date against Labour in the Neath by-election, a constituency in the heart of the South Wales coal field. Labour was standing as the wartime coalition candidate supported by the Tories, Liberals and of course by the CPGB. The RCP demanded Labour should break from the Tory led coalition and held large and successful election meetings of up to 1,500 to put across its arguments.

While the RCP only received 1,750 votes compared to the Labour/coalition's 30,847, the results of the by-election were good.

Over 30,000 leaflets had been given out and a special issue of *Socialist Appeal* had gone through 7,500 copies. The RCP's meetings and propaganda had

and Ted Grant argued that total entry along the lines of the "French Turn" suggested by Trotsky in the 1930s should be based on evidence that significant forces in the LP were moving to the left. This was not the case in the post war Labour Party, they argued. They favoured instead fractional entry both into Labour and in the Independent Labour Party (ILP).

A minority around Gerry Healy and John Lawrence, supported by members of the IS, favoured total entry: first into the ILP and later into the Labour Party.

Healy moved his proposals for entry at the August 1945 RCP conference where they were rejected by a majority. The discussion was also linked to differ-

ediction, one to be repeated many times throughout Healy's decades of centrist misleadership. A far more accurate estimation of the period was argued by the RCP majority at the 1946 conference in an amendment: "All the factors on a European and world scale indicate that the economic activity in Western Europe in the next period is not one of 'stagnation and slump' but one of revival and boom".

This analysis was rejected by the international but remained the view of the British majority.

The RCP continued a policy of fractional entry into both the ILP and the Labour Party. It had something like 60 members involved in this work, from

"Our perspectives must be based upon the developing crisis which will exceed in magnitude the depression that set in during the winter of 1920". Gerry Healy 1946

resulted in several groups of workers joining the organisation.

But the initial success of the RCP was to be short lived. Only a week after the Neath election Churchill resigned and a general election was called for July 1945. Labour had already made clear that it would not remain in coalition. The RCP soon found itself facing a Labour government carrying out a radical reformist programme supported not only by the trade union bureaucracy but by millions of workers. As a result the RCP needed to adapt quickly to a situation that saw a dramatic decline in the levels of industrial struggle.

These developments deepened existing differences in the RCP. Its founding conference had recognised that a swing to the left in the Labour party could involve the RCP in a total entry tactic, but this was thought to be unlikely. The RCP leadership majority around Jock Haston

ences over the characterisation of the class struggle situation in Europe after the war.

The RCP was the only section at the 1946 conference to challenge the Fourth International's dogmatic defence of Trotsky's perspectives developed in the pre-war period. This perspective was embodied in the resolution *The New Imperialist Peace* which declared that the war had "destroyed the last possibilities of a relatively stable (capitalist) equilibrium" (See Part 4: "The tide of revolution ebbs" in WP201).

Healy linked his proposals for total entry to this analysis declaring, "Our perspectives must be based upon the developing crisis which will exceed in magnitude the depression that set in during the winter of 1920".

The British capitalist recession of 1920 was the most severe of the century, so this was indeed a dramatic pre-

both the majority and the minority, with its own entrism paper *The Militant*.

This was not sufficient for the IS. In a series of letters in 1946 and 1947 the IS attempted to convince the majority of the need for long-term entry into the Labour Party. What was new in these proposals, compared to what was argued by Trotsky in the 1930s, was both the long term perspective and suggestions that the development of a revolutionary working class party would take place exclusively through work inside the Labour Party.

Thus an IS letter in January 1947 declared: "The present situation sets new objectives for entry: the setting into motion of the entire awakened British working class along the path of revolutionary action, this time within the framework of the Labour Party itself."

This perspective opened the way to Healy and Lawrence to pioneer what was

to become a generalised tactic for the FI: "entryism sui generis". That is, entryism of a special type, which involved deep entry into the Labour Party adapting revolutionary politics to varieties of left reformism. But this was some way ahead. In 1947 the IS, whatever its mistakes, was still trying to convince the majority, not impose a centrist perspective.

As divisions hardened, the minority led by Healy moved towards a split. In June 1947 they held a meeting before the RCP conference, declared themselves a faction and declared that if they lost their position at conference they would appeal to the IEC to allow them to enter the LP "under their own control".

The RCP conference rejected their perspective and proposal but a commission set up by the IEC, which included Jock Haston, agreed to split the section. From October 1947 there were effectively two sections of the FI in Britain working under the direction of the IS. One, under the Healy/Lawrence leadership, was only doing work in the LP. The principle of only recognising one section in each country—adopted at the foundation of the FI—had been abandoned.

Despite these problems the Second World Congress of the FI which took place in Paris from 2 to 21 April 1948 marked a further step forward in the organisational strengthening of the world party. Fifty delegates attended, representing 22 organisations from 19 different countries. The Congress discussed four key documents: a manifesto, a perspectives document and a set of theses on the colonial revolution and on Stalinism.

While clinging to the main outlines of the now outmoded pre-war perspectives (see Part 4, WP201) the Congress began to recognise the role of the USA in helping to stabilise Europe. But it still declared:

"The polarisation of social forces is accentuated under the pressure of US-Soviet antagonism and the persistent crisis in most capitalist and colonial countries. This crisis, which the traditional parties show themselves incapable of solving, leads to ever greater class struggles. The outcome of these struggles in a number of key countries in the present international situation will determine the possibility of the relative stability of capitalism, or will accelerate revolutionary developments".

Thus, in 1948 the International did not rule out the possibility, under certain circumstances, of a new period of relative stability for imperialism. But this aspect of the agreed perspectives was quickly forgotten after 1948. Rather it was the emphasis on the possibility of an outbreak of war between the west and the Soviet Union, and of this being turned into an "international civil war" between the proletariat and the bourgeoisie—certainly present in the 1948 documents—which came to dominate the international's analysis after 1948.

This, as we shall see, was a wrong perspective. It increasingly disoriented the International and its sections. Combined with a sudden and unexpected division in international Stalinism, the Tito-Stalin split of 1948, it was to throw the international leadership into centrist confusion within months of this Congress. ■

● Next month: The FI hails Tito: centrist degeneration begins

● "Trotsky's fight for the Fourth International"—a major article by Dave Stockton surveys Trotsky's fight for revolutionary unity in the 1930s: *Trotskyist International 20*, out now (see page 15 for details).

As right win Israeli election . . .

Can the peace process survive?

In May Israelis went to the polls and narrowly elected a new prime minister, the leader of the right wing Likud Party. **Richard Brenner** explains how the election has affected the prospects for peace in the Middle East.

THE QUESTION on everyone's lips after the Israeli elections has been: "Is the Peace Process Over?"

Binyamin Netanyahu, leader of the right-wing Likud party, now heads the Israeli government. His campaign played on the fears of the Israeli-Jewish population that even the token concessions made to the Palestinians by outgoing premier Shimon Peres threatened their security.

The 1993 Oslo Accord between Israel and the PLO now appears stretched to breaking point. Whilst declaring publicly that he will stand by the "peace process", Netanyahu has stated that his government will make no further concessions and will ignore agreed commitments. The new Likud-led coalition has announced a set of policy guidelines—reiterated by Netanyahu in his inaugural speech to Israel's parliament, the Knesset:

- no further withdrawals from occupied territory;
- no negotiations over the occupied Golan Heights;
- no discussions over Jerusalem, which is to remain under exclusive Israeli sovereignty;
- continuation and expansion of the policy of building Jewish settlements on Palestinian territory as "an expression of Zionist fulfilment";
- no return of Palestinian refugees expelled in 1948 or 1967;
- the Israeli Army will now re-enter any areas in the occupied territories it wishes—including the "autonomous" zones administered by the new Palestine National Authority (PNA) of Yasir Arafat.

These policy changes are not mere rhetoric. Netanyahu is in a stronger position than most Israeli prime ministers when it comes to getting his own way, although he won by the narrowest of margins. Under new electoral rules, voters chose not only parties but also directly elected the premier. A simple realignment in the Knesset would not be enough to bring him down; a formal vote of no confidence would be neces-

sary. He therefore has greater freedom of action than former Israeli leaders—and he certainly intends to use it.

Whilst Netanyahu has only been able to form a government through constructing a coalition of smaller parties, which contains different and often antagonistic interests and ideologies, he has already stamped his authority on the new cabinet. Ariel Sharon, the virulently racist military man and butcher of Lebanon in 1982, refused the post of housing minister but was later obliged to accept the lesser post of minister without portfolio. Netanyahu has involved the far-right Tzomet party, which has been subsumed within the Likud list. The pro-settler National Religious Party is also in the coalition, and will be pushing for greater restrictions on urban Israelis' rights to entertainment on the sabbath.

But he has also won support from the Russian Immigrants' Party headed by former Soviet dissident Nathan Shcharansky. Already deeply unsettled at being defined by the Orthodox Ashkenazi bigots as "not strictly Jewish", they are resisting tougher religious laws. The Russian and religious lobbies are also set to clash over priorities in housing allocation. Netanyahu's quasi-presidential powers will be tested further when he has to square this circle.

As always in Israeli politics, the fundamental issues pertain to Israel's very existence as a state: the occupation and the Palestinians.

Diplomatic

The major imperialist powers have couched their responses to Netanyahu's victory in highly diplomatic terms—but their disappointment and frustration have been ill-concealed. Clinton's support for Peres was manifest throughout the election campaign. And British Foreign Secretary Malcolm Rifkind has been surprisingly frank in expressing his fears for the future. In an article in the *Guardian* on 28 June, he explained that British capitalists' rising exports to the Middle East (£6 billion last year; £1.6 billion to

Saudi Arabia and £1.1 billion to Israel) require the maintenance of tranquility in the region:

"The Middle East peace process must not be allowed to fail. The arrival of a new government will pose a serious challenge. The language of the new government is strong: no deal on the Golan or Jerusalem, no discussion of Palestinian statehood, the expansion of settlements. If this remains Israel's position then negotiations would be extremely difficult."

The imperialists understand not only their own national interests but also the ultimate interest of their watchdog in the region. The Oslo Accord involved absolutely minimal concessions by the Zionists: staged troop redeployments that have not yet happened and deadlines that they may ignore with impunity. The PLO has abandoned its historic aim of a democratic and secular state in Palestine in return for a toothless PNA without sovereign powers in a fraction of the occupied territories.

Yet the Jewish population, and a substantial faction of the bourgeois establishment, were not even content with this. The policy of negotiating with the PLO arose as a result of external pressure, most importantly the US threat to withdraw £10 billion in loan guarantees. Yet Israel's history and origins as a colonial settlement founded on land conquered by armed force has necessarily created a population infused with anti-Arab racism. This is the only ideology that can confer legitimacy on such an illegitimate project.

Thus, a conviction that the land "belongs" to the Jews, expansionist territorial claims and a deep-seated fear of the victims of national oppression pervade the Jewish population. The resumption of the bombing campaign by the Islamic resistance movement, Hamas, obliterated Peres' lead in the polls.

If the imperialist leaders were unsettled by the election result, PLO leader Yasir Arafat was reportedly "devastated". Bereft of any strategy to secure democratic gains for the Palestinians, he

has willingly accepted every demand of the Zionists in the course of negotiations, from the most minor to the most impermanent (see *Workers Power* 199, April 1996). Arafat signed what Palestinian writer Edward Said has justly described as "a Palestinian Versailles", in return for presiding over the PNA. Now he has willingly converted his former guerrilla army into a police force which has eagerly repressed all remaining Palestinian opposition to Israel, including democratic dissent and Hamas militants. His plan for the Palestinians had but one element: concessions from Peres. But calling on Arabs to vote for "the peacemaker"—even in the midst of Peres' brutal invasion of Lebanon—has secured nothing.

Discontent

Aware of rising discontent among the Palestinians themselves, Arafat responded to Netanyahu's election with the only weapon he had left: empty rhetoric. With an incredible disregard for reality, Arafat "declared" a Palestinian state in Gaza and the West Bank, "with Jerusalem as its capital". This hollow claim is all the more pathetic in the light of Arafat's agreement not to oppose the expansion of Jewish settlements around Jerusalem—a policy specifically aimed at squeezing Arabs from the city altogether in order to make Zionist control irreversible.

Likud plans to take this further. Secret documents leaked to the *Observer* reveal that Bedouin residents are to be evicted in favour of 20,000 new Jewish settlers. Two thousand Arab homes are to be bulldozed to make way for 6,500 new homes for Jews. Jewish businessmen living outside Israel are busily buying up land to help this process of ethnic cleansing by stealth. As one of Netanyahu's spokesmen explained:

"Every time [Arafat] says Jerusalem is his, we will respond by building a thousand homes for Jews."

The Arab regimes of the region are likely to be almost as weak as Arafat in their opposition to Netanyahu. The recent Arab summit in Cairo saw Jordan arguing that relations with Israel should be "normalised", irrespective of any reversal of the peace process. The Saudis and Egyptians made clear that they would issue no call for any change in policy. Even the Syrians, who formally reject the deal and were hoping for an agreement over the Golan Heights, made no serious challenge to this approach.

Resistance to Netanyahu will be left to the only force that has a consistent interest in fighting national oppression: the Palestinian working class, peasantry and urban poor. Already Netanyahu's doubtful commitment to the agreed redeployment of Israeli troops from Hebron in the West Bank has prompted angry demonstrations. Elections to the student council at the important Palestinian university of Bir Zeit recorded substantial losses for Arafat's Fatah faction, and gains for the left, as well as for the Islamists.

The peace process was always a fraud. With a government in Tel Aviv that is not even committed to pursuing that peace, Palestinian activists, workers and youth must break with Arafat—the architect of impotence—and set about the task of building a working class political party committed to national liberation and socialism. ■

Burundi On the brink of slaughter?

A DEATHLY feeling of déjà vu is descending on Burundi. Like Rwanda, its northern neighbour, Burundi is a desperately poor country, deeply divided between minority Tutsi and majority Hutu peoples.

Unlike Rwanda, Burundi has been ruled since independence in 1959 by an almost exclusively Tutsi elite.

A steadily rising civil war has raged since Burundi's first and only Hutu president was murdered in 1993 by Tutsi chauvinists. Over 1000 people a month are being killed by the Tutsi-dominated army and Hutu rebels influenced and infiltrated by Hutu chauvinist refugees from Rwanda.

Burundi has no key resources or military worth, so at one level Western leaders couldn't care less about the place. But at another level they are concerned.

A full-blown civil war would aggravate the already chronic refugee crisis in Zaire and Tanzania, threatening to destabilise the whole region.

That is why the Western powers have been pressurising regional leaders, through the Organisation of African Unity (OAU), to put together a "peace keeping" force to quell the civil war.

On 25 June, prime minister Antoine Nduwayo agreed to such a force. He was immediately denounced by his own party, UPRONA. Yet their opposition owes less to hostility to imperialism's designs than it does to a desire to pursue a genocidal civil war without restraint by any "peace deal".

Will Nduwayo meet the same fate as Rwanda's president Habyarimana who was murdered by his own troops in 1994 after signing a peace deal?

No OAU force can bring peace or justice to Burundi.

All the regional leaders have a history of using ethnic divisions, which are a legacy of colonial rule, for their own ends.

Nor would an imperialist force—most likely led by France—solve the crisis. After all it is imperialist institutions like the International Monetary Fund that has imposed "structural adjustment programmes" on the region, leaving it chronically underdeveloped and poverty stricken.

The only solution is for those workers and poor peasants—of all ethnic groups—who oppose genocide and chauvinism to unite and build alternative fighting organisations to those of the pogromists on both sides.

● No foreign intervention in Burundi

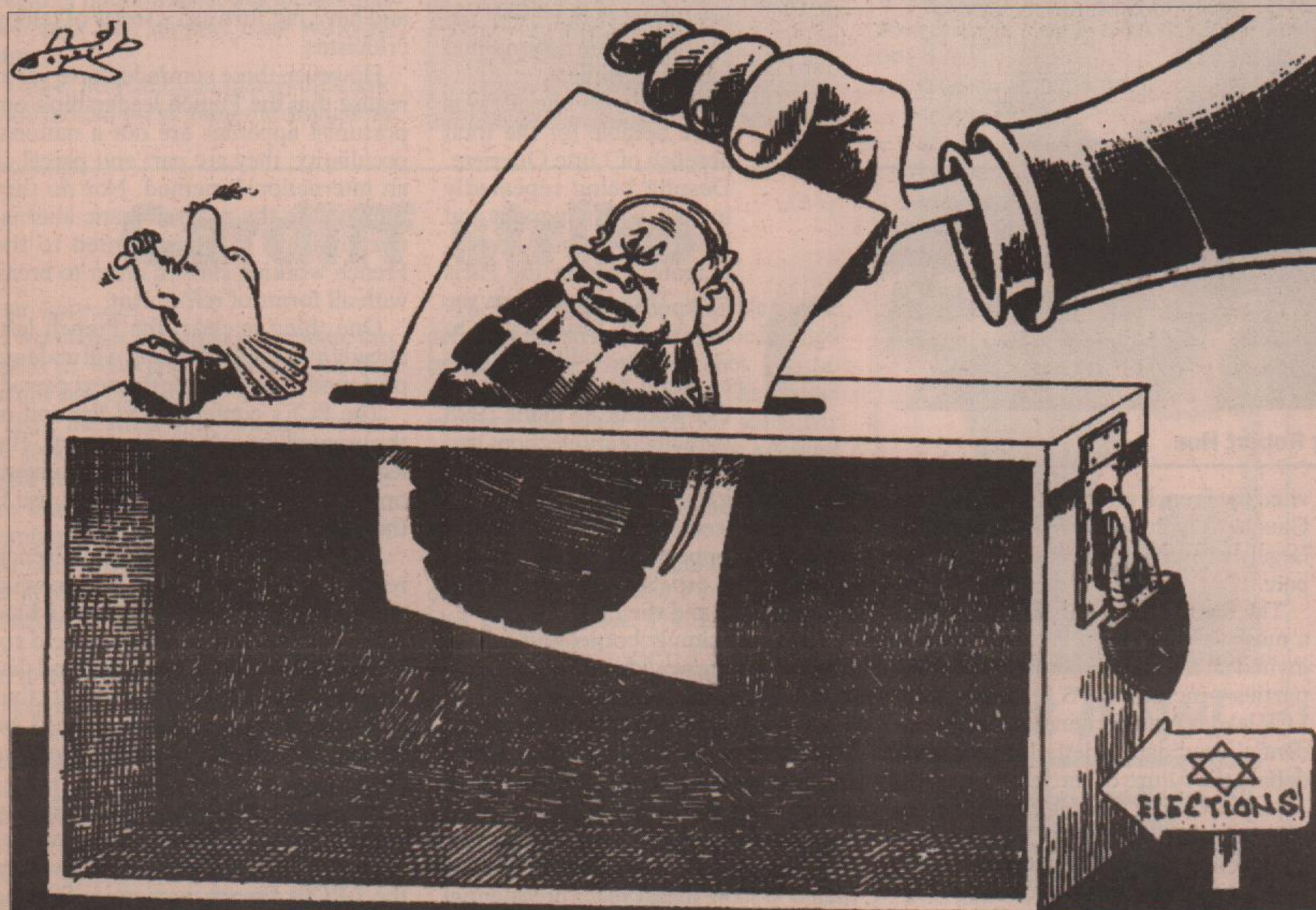
● Workers' and peasants' militia to halt the pogroms

● For a workers' and peasants government and a Socialist Federation of Africa. ■

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Stalinism in turmoil

All change on the French left

All over Europe, once-powerful Communist Parties have abandoned the most obvious elements of their Stalinist past and have created left-reformist parties with sections of the non-Stalinist left. Until recently, the French Communist Party—once one of the most powerful in Western Europe—was immune from this development. But not any more, writes **Emile Gallet**.

IN 1978, THE French Communist Party (PCF) was the largest party in the country. With 22% of the electorate, it dominated working class life and was a key factor in French politics. Despite its treacherous role in selling short the massive strike wave of May '68, the PCF held the working class in an iron grip, reinforced by its close links with the principal French union confederation, the CGT.

One of the most Stalinist communist parties on the face of the planet, the French party would stomach no opposition whatsoever. Its "relations" with Trotskyist parties were often of the distinctly physical kind. The PCF was a monolithic bloc, an impenetrable and violent obstacle to any kind of independent working class action.

Today, all that has changed. Reduced to 8% in most elections, having lost the massive financial support of its one-time Moscow masters, and increasingly uncertain in a post-Stalinist world, the PCF has opened-up. As well as debating with far-left organisations claiming to be Trotskyist, the PCF has clearly stated its willingness—indeed, its desire—to create a new, broad, left reformist party incorporating Trotskyists, Greens and many of those hounded out of the party in the past for advocating such a turn.

The reason for the PCF's initial decline can be given a name and a face: François Mitterrand. When Mitterrand relaunched the Socialist Party (PS) in 1971, his avowed intention was to destroy the PCF's electoral base and to reshape French politics. It only took him 13 years.

In 1981, Mitterrand was elected President and promptly invited the PCF into the government. After a year of raising wages and increasing state spending in order to encourage the recovery, Mitterrand and the PCF made a turn to austerity.

In the years that followed unemployment rocketed, "unprofitable" industries such as steel were wiped off the face of the map and the working-class, tied to government by its political and union leaders, failed to fight back.

The PCF paid the price. In the 1984 Euro-elections the PCF's vote plummeted to 9%. Despite immediately leaving the government the PCF's overwhelming electoral support had melted away. Too many workers were either disgusted to bother voting, or they preferred to "vote useful" and simply voted for the PS.

In 1988, the PCF suffered both its lowest Presidential score ever (a mere 8% for the hangdog hack André Lajoinie) and a split led by a man who had long been the cynical spokesman of the party, Pierre Juquin.

Juquin, today a rank-and-file member of the minuscule Green party, led a group of PCF parliamentary and municipal representatives who feared that the Party's electoral support would collapse totally.

Enthusiastically supported by the French LCR (sister organisation of *Socialist Outlook* in Britain), Juquin argued for the creation of a new party, rid of the worst excesses of Stalinism, but nonetheless thoroughly reformist. The new party would embrace all those to the left of the PS.

The LCR hoped to gain from mass desertions from the PCF, but this never happened. Juquin's wet reformism was not more inspirational than the thuggish nationalism of the PCF, just different.

The collapse of the USSR led to growing bewilderment at all levels of the PCF. The rank and file, severely battered by the party's electoral decline and by its



Striking French workers: Manoeuvres on the French left offer them no way forward

role in government, continued to leave the party in dribs and drabs. The leadership, uncertain as to its future, began to lose confidence in its past. In 1994 George Marchais, a sombre career Stalinist, handed over the reins of power in the PCF to a nowhere-man called Robert Hue, an obscure mayor from the Paris suburbs.

Hue has gradually proved himself to be more than a mere front-man for the bureaucratic conservatives around Marchais. Hue has to find a political space for the PCF in a situation in which there is already one non-Stalinist reformist party, in the shape of the PS.

At first, Hue tacked to the right. Following Chirac's election in May last year, the PCF adopted a policy of "constructive opposition", hoping to find itself as Chirac's preferred partner on the left. When Chirac's election promises unsurprisingly turned out to be cynical vote-catching rhetoric, and his neo-liberal programme came to the fore, the PCF quietly abandoned a policy that had been met with mute incomprehension by most of the membership.

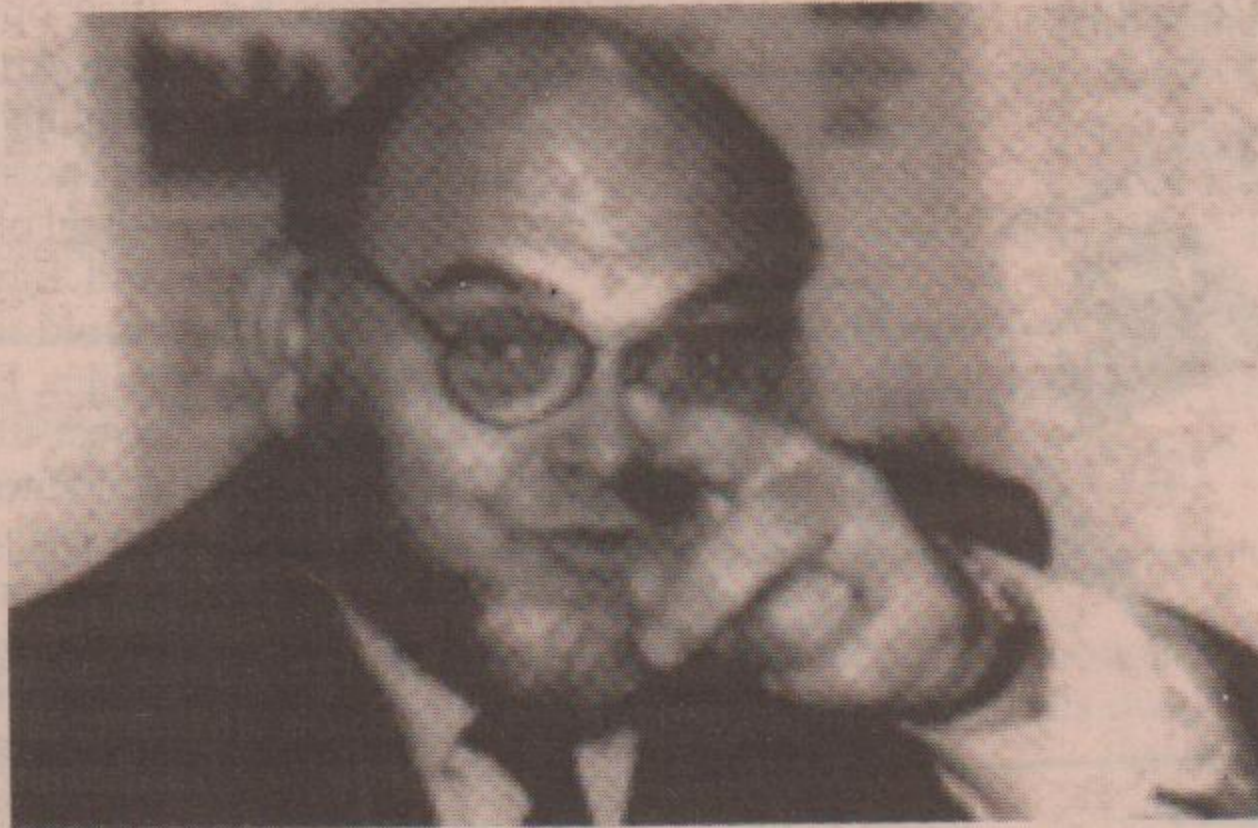
Faced with the massive strike wave of November-December 1995, the PCF simply went quiet. Hue did not go on any of the demonstrations, arguing that this was a "social" question and not a political one!

Hue then decided to tack to the "left" by launching a new policy, which goes under the highly appropriate name of "the mutation", and which has led to some unprecedented changes in the PCF's politics and practice.

Jovially admitting the Party's total

confusion, Hue launched a series of 600 local debates, in which the PCF's electorate was invited to come and provide some answers to the leadership's questions. Similar stunts had been organised in the past, but Hue's version was very different.

The PCF systematically invited far-left groups such as the LCR and Lutte Ouvrière (LO) to participate. Given the physical attacks of the not-so distant past, this sea-change was astonishing. In some local debates, the PCF even in-



PCF leader Robert Hue

vited the French affiliate of Militant, the Gauche Révolutionnaire, a tiny group largely composed of youth, to participate.

The high point of this campaign was a massive meeting in Paris when Hue invited all the representatives of the left parties—including PS leader Jospin, LCR leader Alain Krivine and LO presidential candidate Arlette Laguiller—to debate the future of the left.

Jospin, clearly arguing for a continuation of the Socialist Party's pro-capitalist policies, was met first with whistles, then with stoney silence. Krivine, however, got some of the warmest applause

of the night with his (uncharacteristic) defence of the revolutionary communist tradition, of the red flag, and of the class struggle. It was clear in which direction the participants at that meeting wanted to go.

In response the LCR has gone into overdrive in its orientation to the PCF's new direction. Sensing that the new party might actually happen, the LCR wants very much to be part of it, whatever the programmatic and organisational cost. Thus Krivine's intervention, which whilst heavy on the "communist" rhetoric, was light in its criticisms of the PCF's record in national and local government.

In contrast the forums were notable for the total absence of Lutte Ouvrière. Despite being repeatedly invited, both nationally and locally, LO refused to participate, even in the Paris rally. They argued that the aim of the forums was to create the conditions for an electoral pact between the PCF and the PS in the 1998 parliamentary elections and that revolutionaries should have nothing to do with it.

This is indeed one of Hue's aims. But what better opportunity could there be to attack the pro-capitalist strategy of both the PCF and the PS?

LO quite simply bottled-out, afraid either that they wouldn't have the nerve to tell the truth, or that this would go down badly with those sections of the PCF membership to whom they orient.

LO's absence from the forums is merely the latest in a series of astonishingly inept turns that have made them look increasingly ridiculous. Following their 5% score in last year's presidential elections, Laguiller launched a call on

national TV for a new mass workers' party. LO organised a series of public debates and abandoned its usual sect-like existence in an unprecedented manner.

Then, in the autumn, they declared that "of course" this call had never been anything other than a piece of propaganda, and they promptly abandoned it without any other explanation whatsoever!

Finally, having sulked and refused to participate in the PCF's forums, LO suddenly declared that they would support PCF candidates in the 1998 elections, on condition that Hue adopt the left-reformist "emergency plan" put forward by Laguiller during the 1995 Presidential election campaign.

These developments have not gone unopposed.

Within LO, an unprecedented situation has developed. A tendency, initially founded in 1991 on the (wrong) basis that Russia had gone capitalist, and having no more than 3% of the membership behind it, declared itself a Faction. It demanded—and got—a weekly column in LO's paper, and the right to produce its own factory bulletins.

The Faction's disagreements have gradually extended to more general questions of party-building and LO's orientation to the PCF. In particular, they have recently attacked the leadership's pledge to support the PCF in 1998 as revealing an unhealthy obsession with elections.

For the moment, the Faction's break with LO's politics is incomplete. They have yet to challenge LO's deeply pessimistic analysis of the period. Their criticisms of LO's passivity faced with the November-December strike wave have been muted to say the least. And they have yet to fully realise the distance that separates LO's method from that of Lenin and Trotsky.

However, it is clear that this tiny group of comrades represents an extremely important potential. How long LO—used to unanimous votes—will tolerate their existence is another matter.

Within the ranks of the LCR the leadership's desire to dissolve itself into some promised new party has also provoked opposition. In particular, the comrades who had fought the leadership's opportunism with regard to Juquin have once again raised the programmatic stakes and have put forward a series of telling criticisms.

However, these comrades have yet to realise that the French leadership's opportunist appetites are not a national peculiarity: they are part and parcel of an international method. Nor do they fully realise the programmatic alternative that has to be presented to the French working class in order to break with all forms of reformism.

One thing is clear: the French left, already in a state of disarray, will undergo profound changes over the next period.

The PCF's conference at the end of the year will be a decisive moment. The leadership's first conference document opens with the question: "What use is the Communist Party?"

The real question, which all French revolutionaries must face, is this: what use is a revamped Stalinist Party, a bloc of greens and left reformists, held together by a bunch of confused and discredited centrists? Any new party that is formed on this basis would be doomed to repeat the errors of the past.

French workers need a revolutionary alternative to reformism, Stalinism and centrism. That is what Pouvoir Ouvrier, the LRCI's French section, is fighting for. ■

LETTERS

WORKERS POWER 202 JULY/AUGUST 1996

Repression in Turkey

Dear Comrades

In May, I had the opportunity to witness first-hand the brutal reality of state repression in Turkey as a member of the British delegation to an international human rights conference, organised by the Democratic Struggle Platform (DMP). The DMP is a recently formed coalition of Turkish left and Kurdish groups, seeking to publicise the gross human rights abuses perpetrated by the Turkish regime.

I went as a representative of the Colin Roach Centre, based in Hackney, which has long supported struggles by sections of the Turkish and Kurdish immigrant and refugee communities in the East London borough. The DMP had originally received permission from the Turkish authorities to stage the conference in Istanbul. But when we arrived at the agreed venue, riot police and British-built tanks blocked our entry to the building.

The conference eventually went ahead at another location. This experience left me shocked and frightened but worse was to follow. Later in the day riot police stormed a peaceful vigil at the spot where a young boy selling a leftist paper was gunned down. They arrested doz-

ens of the demonstrators, including a fellow London teacher, who was struck, deprived of food during her day-long detention and branded a "terrorist" in an official statement to the British consul in Istanbul.

"Disappearances" at the hands of the Turkish police and military have become a regular phenomenon in recent years, even as the Turkish government seeks to demonstrate its democratic credentials to Europe's imperialist powers to ensure the eventual ratification of the customs union agreement.

We saw many bitterly sad individuals forlornly holding pictures of their missing loved ones. I saw them sitting in a small peaceful group at Galatasaray, surrounded by riot police. A similar gathering was recently brutally attacked by the police.

The conference focused on the question of disappearances and it agreed plans to hold a series of conferences on the question, rotating the host country.

Some may say this is duplicating the work of Amnesty International. An Amnesty representative did attend the first session of the DMP conference but she left and withdrew her speech. I spoke to her and she told me she was leaving

because the people involved were "too extreme and political". I had noticed that she looked very annoyed when we sang the Internationale! She said that Amnesty had to be very careful if they are to be allowed to continue working in Turkey. But just how 'careful' can an organisation be when it is supposed to be standing up against human rights abuses? I think we need a different response.

Since my return to London, I have raised some of the issues highlighted by my experience. I proposed a resolution at my union branch, the Hackney Teachers' Association (NUT), which included a call for a boycott of tourism to Turkey—a call made by Turkish and Kurdish organisations. The resolution, which was carried unanimously, also called for support of the recent 21-day hunger strike by more than 50 refugees in Hackney, part of a Europe-wide protest in solidarity with some 1,500 Turkish and Kurdish political prisoners.

My Turkish trip reinforced my belief that international workers' solidarity and the struggle for human rights are indivisible.

Socialist greetings
Angela
Colin Roach Centre/Resistance

Win when you're singing?

Dear comrades,

Your article in Workers Power 201 on Euro 96 was doubly wrong. Not only did it misunderstand what football fans get out of watching the game, it was also rather wooden—and therefore wrong—about the nature of patriotism.

Marxists distinguish between the patriotism of the workers and that of the bosses. In the Transitional Programme, Trotsky wrote:

"Bourgeois pacifism and patriotism are shot through with deceit. In the pacifism and even patriotism of the oppressed, there are elements which reflect on the one hand a hatred of destructive war, and on the other a clinging to what they believe to be their own good."

So what does the patriotism of a football fan really signify?

Football encourages the spectator to take sides. I found myself during Euro 96 taking a liking to certain teams because of their style of play, their commitment or even because I felt for their ups and downs. Most fans also support their home team because they know their players better and because they feel proud that their team can play as well as, or better, than any other. Under a system of nation states, this means that most fans will support their national team.

This is, however, completely different to the tabloid press' (and the disgusting

Daily Mirror's, in particular) xenophobic hate campaign. In fact, most fans were angry as this threatened to destroy the tournament. Marxists need to fight all manifestations of racism and xenophobia at Euro 96 and elsewhere. But this is not helped by berating workers who passionately support their national team.

The other thing about Euro 96, and international sport in general, is that it also breaks down prejudices. Every fan

Dear comrades,

Over 14,000 of the 77,000 watching England lose to Germany were guests of "corporate hospitality". The vast majority of these, according to the *Guardian*, were managers in advertising, newspapers and broadcasting.

George Orwell once joked that "one bomb under the stand at Twickenham" could have wiped out British fascism in the 1930s. By comparison, one bomb under the VIP stand at Wembley could have wiped out the bosses of the *Mail*, the *Mirror*, the *Sun* and the *Star*. It makes you think...

Don Green,
Harlesden, North London

who went to a game where they had no home team to cheer mixed with the foreigners, adopted a team or simply joined in the singing of football chants which by now have nearly all become international.

I saw two games: Scotland v England in a London pub, and the Czech Republic v Portugal at Villa Park. As a Welshman, I was not patriotically attached to any side in either match. However, the fervour for England in the pub made it impossible not to get involved. When Scotland were awarded a penalty, two lone Scots voices cheered with delight...until two minutes later when Gascoigne turned the table. I couldn't help laughing my head off at this comic twist. The Scots were humiliated, but threatened? Never.

At the other game, British, Czech and Portuguese drank and sang together before and even after the game, only breaking for two hours of intense rivalry in the middle. This was the true face of football, the national game of the international proletariat. Without understanding a word of each other's languages, we can gasp, cry and laugh at the skill and humour on display. Wish it was all over? Can't wait for France 98—and, yes, I do hope Wales will be there this time!

Communist greetings,
Jeremy Dewar

Cardiff strike

Dear comrades,

I would like to correct and update the article in *Workers Power* 201 on the Cardiff housing strike.

First, the strike was not, as stated in the article, led by members of the Socialist Workers' Party (SWP). In fact the two branch officers concerned are ex-members. Indeed, the local SWP branch was correctly very critical of them for not arguing for the strike to be spread immediately to Marland House (the central Housing Office), a key office to pull out if the strike was to win.

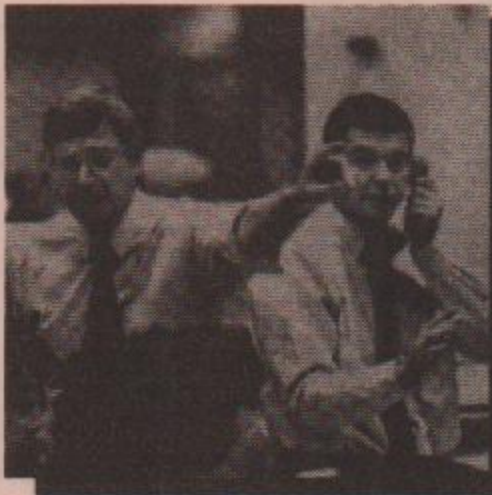
As a result of the failure of the strike to spread, the strikers became demoralised, with the picket lines shrinking to a handful of activists. The eventual outcome was a vote to return to work without any concessions being won from the Labour council i.e. a complete defeat. This will no doubt lead to further similar attacks on its workforce from the council in the near future.

The SWP were not responsible for the defeat of the strike, as might be implied by the article. However, they had no strategy for it to win either. They failed to argue the clear need for solidarity action from the rest of the council workforce, or to organise for rank and file strikers to lead the running of the dispute.

Finally, the Cardiff branch of the Socialist Labour Party (SLP) did not even visit the picket line. This is a worrying sign given that the strike was a key local struggle which every socialist organisation had an absolute duty to build support for. Clearly, if the SLP is to have any relevance to the labour movement, and to grow significantly, it will have to actively intervene into any future struggles, rather than just sitting on the sidelines.

Yours in comradeship,
Pete Taylor
Cardiff

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.



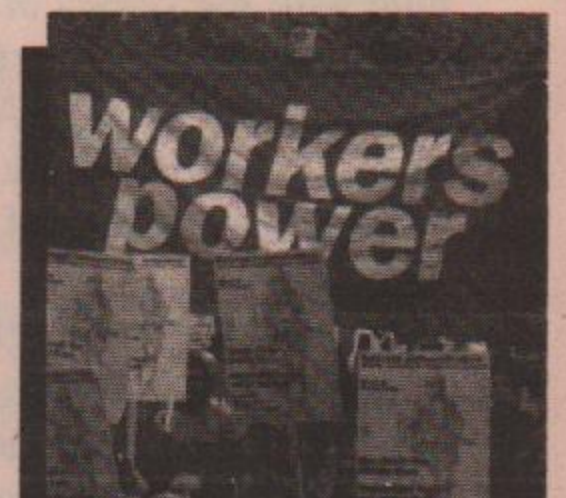
Imperialism

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!★



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marxism for the new millennium **Details on page 2**

Postal workers tell bosses...

Stuff your teamwork!

IN JUNE the sun came out: so did the postal workers—and the temperature of the class struggle soared.

140,000 members of the Communications Workers Union (CWU) are, as we go to press, engaged in a long-running dispute with the bosses of Royal Mail over the introduction of the so-called Employee Agenda (EA): a concerted attack on the terms and conditions of postal workers.

Royal Mail management turned up the heat with a productivity offensive in the guise of Total Quality Management (TQM). The bosses have unleashed this attack in an industry where many workers are on a basic wage of £160 for a 41.5 hour week. Since the early

1990s the bosses have axed 20,000 full-time jobs, while refusing to cut a working week agreed in the 19th century.

One expert on TQM has described the Royal Mail package as "the most upfront, concerted attempt I have seen to introduce TQM. They are trying to bring in 10 years of change in one go."

At the heart of the TQM proposals is a move to "team-working". This would mean the scrapping of demarcation and seniority principles for promotion that have given workers some protection against the arbitrary use of management power.

In practice, teamworking will mean:

- team members covering for all absences;
- no rotation of duties;
- management control over breaks.

Applied to a football team that would mean no substitutes for injured players, and no half-time!

In addition, the bosses want to scrap existing bonus schemes in favour of performance related pay. That will mean a pay cut for nearly 30% of the workforce.

Prior to the official national dispute, postal workers have fought a guerilla war of largely unofficial strikes to fend off management attacks. Up to 6,000 CWU members in Scotland staged a week-long, "il-

legal" and highly effective walk-out against Royal Mail last November. Similar local disputes have flared from Liverpool to London in the past two years.

They are fighting to defend the very heart of their union organisation. In the words of a management briefing on the EA:

"Matters will be discussed between the team leader and other team members but will normally be dealt with best within the team, leaving local union representatives to focus on areas where their expertise can be best used."

Postal workers deserve maximum support from all trade unionists. Across factories, offices and other workplaces, union activists should be organising meetings with postal

workers on the platform and collecting levies in support of strikers. If the dispute escalates, financial support will be vital since postal workers have no official strike fund.

The outcome of the postal workers' dispute over the EA is critical for other sections of workers.

The EA is not unique attack. Across many industries bosses have launched, or are thinking about, productivity offensives, whether in the form of "teamworking" or demands for ever more flexible hours.

Management on London Underground have provoked

strikes by drivers angered by the bosses' failure to honour an agreement on a shorter working week, while demanding workers do ever more overtime. On the recently privatised East Coast Intercity line a dispute is brewing over the imposition of teamworking.

The post strike is an opportunity to stop the employers' offensive in its tracks. Millions of workers will take heart if postal workers can win. We should all tell our managers: stuff your teamwork and your "flexible" hours: we need decent pay and sound conditions for all. ■

★ **Postal workers speak out - page 4**