

workers POWER

British justice, British police

Racist to the core

**Lawrence inquiry exposes
Met cover-up – page 16**



INSIDE

**At war
with the
truth?**

**Taking sides in
America's
"science wars"**

THEORY & PRACTICE PAGE 12-13

UNION RIGHTS

**Who
benefits
from new
charter?**

Labour's "fairness at work" law gives massive concessions to the employers

FIGHTBACK PAGE 5

INTERVIEW

Ken Loach

Film director takes the class struggle into the multiplex

BUZZWORDS PAGE 6

ROMANIA

**March to
stop pit
closures**

Strikers in pitched battle with paramilitary cops

INTERNATIONAL PAGE 8

ACTION PROGRAMME

**Right foot
forward**

Why the left fights shy of a revolutionary answer to the crisis

THEORY & PRACTICE PAGE 14-15

PUBLIC SECTOR PAY

"Job satisfaction does not pay the rent"

Pay is soaring in Blair's Britain – for the bosses, that is. On average, company directors earn 16 times more than their employees, according to a TUC survey.

And it's not just in the private sector. "Senior jobs" in the public sector – from the civil service, to local government and the NHS – carry average salaries in excess of £60,000 a year. Meanwhile a qualified nurse starts on £14,000 even after the long-awaited pay

award, and a qualified teacher starts below £16,000.

As the winter flu epidemics exposed an acute staff shortage of nurses and other skilled health workers, the pressure for a headline grabbing pay increase became overwhelming. But the nurses' and teachers' pay awards are too little: too little to make up for the years of real pay cuts and, because they will be underfunded by central government, they will mean cuts

elsewhere in education, health and local government.

According to Tony Blair, public sector workers should be thankful for their job satisfaction and accept what's offered. Tell that to the nurses, teachers and care workers who face a daily battle with the effects of staff shortage and service cuts!

No one-off pay settlement can solve the problem of low pay and skills shortages. Public sector workers need to

reject Blair's pay offer and fight for a fully funded, across the board, increase for all workers. Since Labour's spin doctors have been touting the figure of 11 per cent for nurses (in reality only the lowest paid nurse will get this) let them give us 11 per cent across the board – fully funded from central government.

As the government prepares to ride the storm on pay, MPs are settling in to their new Westminster offices. Each

member's office will be furnished to the tune of £14,000 – just what they expect a nurse to live on for a year. And our rulers are spending £30 million to clad the new parliamentary office building in "blast proof bronze".

Tony Blair is going to need his blast proofing: because millions of low paid public sector workers have had enough of "job satisfaction": you can't pay the rent with it.

■ **Low pay protest – page 5**

IN BRIEF

On Thursday 28 January a squad of armed paramilitaries arrived at the offices of the Instituto Popular de Capacitacion (a workers' education and research organisation) in Medellin, Colombia. The paramilitaries seized four members of staff. Computers and files containing research on links between paramilitarism and narco-trafficking and the state were stolen. None of the disappeared has been heard of since and there are grave fears for their safety. Messages of solidarity and protest should be sent to Tel: 00 57 4 2541515, 00 57 4 2541577 cppipc@col3.telecom.com.co

Anti-fascist Michal Patera is facing a jail sentence of up to 25 years in the Czech Republic. Michal was attacked by a group of neo-Nazi thugs in a bar in Prague. In self-defence Michal shot one of them three times. He is now facing a charge of "ideologically motivated" attempted murder. It is estimated that there are 30,000 organised fascists in the Czech Republic, 3,000 in Prague. Send letters of support to Michal Patera (1976), PO Box 5, 14057 Praha 4, Czech Republic. Send donations to Michal's defence fund: SF-International Secretariat, PO Box 1681, London N8 7LE

New Jersey police are attempting to stop a benefit concert for Mumia Abu-Jamal. The Beastie Boys and Rage Against the Machine are headlining the concert for Abu-Jamal who remains on death row after a racist frame-up for the murder of a policeman. Local officials have failed to find any legal grounds to stop the benefit. If it goes ahead on 4 February, the police will be required to provide security.

England manager Glenn Hoddle shared his thoughts on the causes of disability last month. His qualification to opine on the subject? No, he is not a scientist or a doctor, but a born-again Christian. Hoddle told the *Times* newspaper "what you sow, you have to reap". Having a disability means you, or someone in your family, must have upset God, possibly in a previous life, and so you are being punished. After his comments caused outrage and demands to sack him, Hoddle attempted to apologise. He claimed he hadn't meant to offend and was simply trying to explain why some people were born into poverty. So, Glenn - let's get it right: if you're poor or disabled it is your own fault. But he still hasn't come up with an answer to whose fault it is if you are a crap football manager!

STOP PRESS: INCREASED ATTACKS ON IRAQ in event of bombardment demonstrate 6.00pm, Downing St.

CONTENTS

Fightback	2-5
Buzzwords	6
Marxism: The Basics	7
International	8-11
Theory & Practice	12-15
Where We Stand	16

ADOPTION

BY KATE FOSTER

Straw threatens single mothers with workhouse

In a speech to a conference organised by the Family Policy Studies Centre in late January, Jack Straw put the Victorian morality of the New Labour government on public display. And with it came the threat of the return of the Victorian workhouse!

Straw expressed dismay at the fact that 3,500 children under the age of two are in care and went on to suggest that this was all the fault of teenage mothers. They were selfishly trying to keep their children and stopping nice, middle class couples from adopting them.

Straw suggested that young mothers should be persuaded early in their child's life to agree to adoption if it was felt that the mother would not be able to cope. Taking a side swipe at social workers as well, he stated:

"It is in no one's interest, not the mother's, not the child's, nor the prospective parents', to allow a situation to develop whereby a crisis point is reached in the baby's first year because the ability of the mother, often a teenage mother, to cope has been misjudged by well-meaning but misguided

people."

Straw's speech was not only disgusting in its callous disregard for the feelings and wishes of young mothers, it was totally misleading. Many of the 3,500 children in care are there temporarily. Seventy per cent will be returned to their mothers. Some are in care because of their mother's ill health or financial difficulties. When these are overcome, they are reunited with their mothers.

If decent mother and baby care units existed, if single mothers received adequate benefits they would not have had to be taken into care in the first place. Many social workers feel that Straw's speech will actually make the situation worse. Some teenage mothers, fearing that they may be forced into agreeing to the adoption of their child, may not seek even the basic level of help to which they are entitled.

It is also wrong to imply that all the 3,500 children in care are the children of teenage mothers. Simply being young does not make you a bad mother.

Teenage mothers are a favourite target of the Blairites

at the moment. On 30 January it was revealed that Tony Blair, on the advice of his "social exclusion unit", is considering setting up hostels for young mothers and babies. They would be offered accommodation, but only in hostels with other single mothers, in blocks attached to job clubs and health care facilities.

Welcome to the workhouse! Straw's speech was a green light for a riot of reaction against the threat to Britain, embodied by the "single young mum". *Daily Mail* columnist, and noted scumbag, Melanie Phillips wrote:

"A mother who brings a child into the world when she cannot look after it practically, emotionally or financially forfeits her 'right' over it. Parents don't have rights over their children but duties towards them."

Presumably Phillips is in favour of vetting all women as to their suitability for motherhood. If you are poor, unemployed, single, don't own your own home and don't follow a diet approved by the Home Office, the likes of Phillips will have the babyhood watch check

that you are using contraception - or perhaps even propose sterilisation.

Welcome to a brave new Britain!

Britain does have the highest teenage pregnancy rate in Western Europe. Understanding the reasons for this might be more useful than punishing young women who get pregnant. Part of the reason lies in the oppression of young people - especially of their sexuality.

Abortion and contraceptive advice is increasingly difficult for young women to access. The imposition of the National Curriculum in schools has meant that there is less time available for sex education. The National Curriculum for science only covers the basic biology of reproduction.

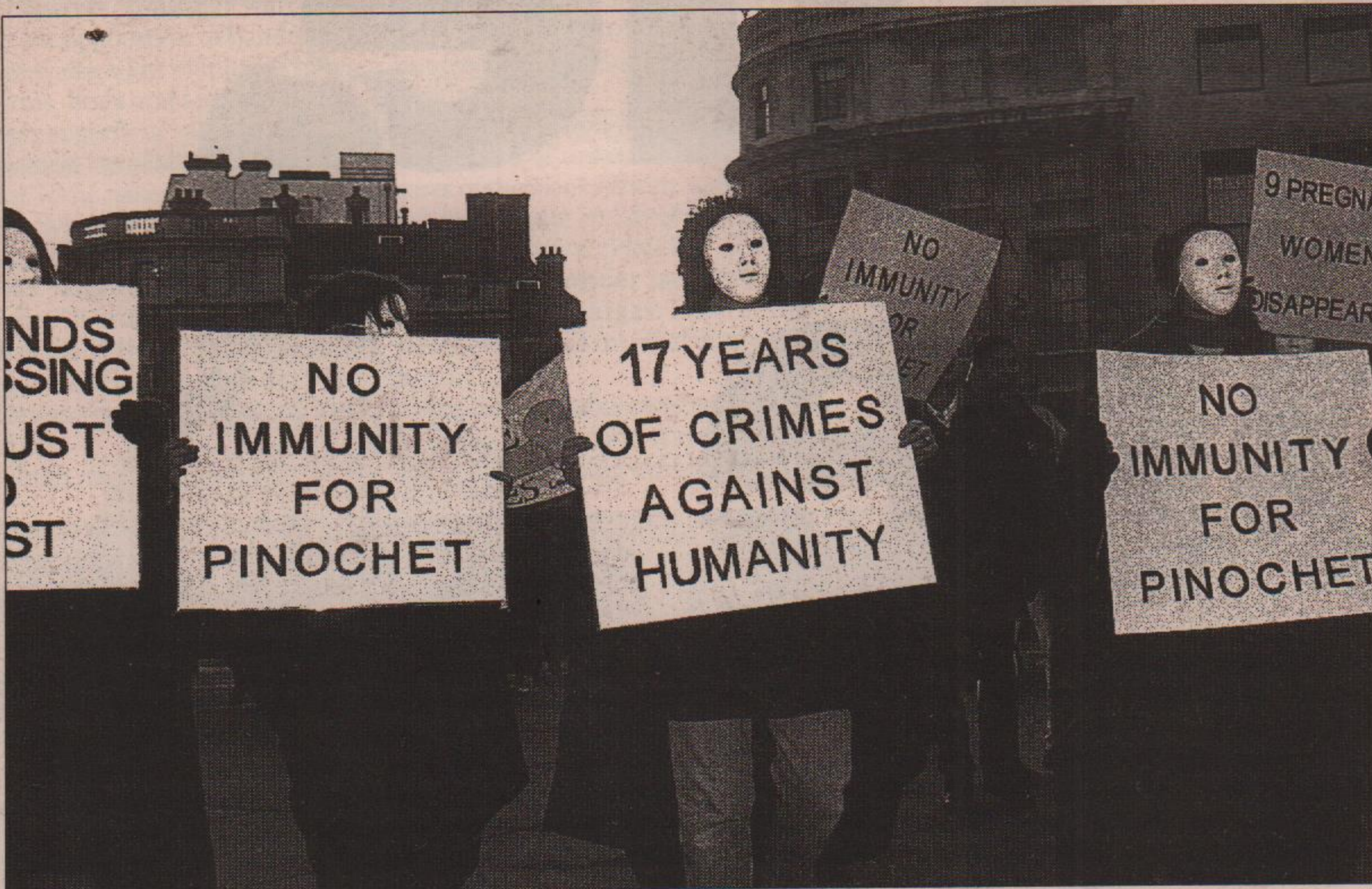
Under the Tories parents were given the right to refuse sex education for their children. If a girl under 16 goes to a doctor to ask for contraceptive advice the doctor has a legal duty, unless there are exceptional circumstances, to inform the girl's parents. The same applies to teachers if they are approached for such advice.

In addition to all this, NHS cuts make it difficult for women to obtain abortions. Even if you can find two doctors who will agree that you have the right to an abortion, it may not be available through the NHS. The result? If you are a young, working class woman abortion is not even an option because of the high cost of going private.

Jack Straw is a wretched little "new Victorian", politically shaped by implacable hostility to the radicalism of the student movement in the late 1960s and 1970s (participation was a career move not a progressive impulse for Jack the lad). He was then mesmerised by every reactionary fad that the Thatcherites dreamed up in the 1980s and 90s. And now he has the chance to turn his narrow-minded prejudices into public policy.

We need to stop him quick. Rather than threatening young women with having their babies taken from them or the prospect of the workhouse, Labour should be taxing the rich and putting money into health, housing and education to ensure all children have a decent chance in life.

PINOCHET



MARCHERS IN white masks led a 2,000-strong demonstration of Chilean exiles, British workers and youth in mid-January demanding the extradition to Spain of ex-dictator, General Augusto Pinochet. As we go to press, seven Law Lords were due to deliver their judgements on an earlier High Court ruling that would have let Pinochet off the hook for the thousands of murders and "disappearances" committed by his regime. The Lords' first decision ruled that Pinochet should face trial - so the ruling class law lords overturned their own "final" decision and called this new hearing. Whatever the verdict at this latest hearing, all our readers should join the central London demonstrations called by the Chile Committee Against Impunity being held over the next few weeks. Contact the committee on 0403 660128 or 0795 7650209.

COLOMBIA

Masses suffer more in earthquake aftermath

ON TUESDAY 26 January the world woke up to news that the city of Armenia, capital of Colombia's coffee farming region, Quindio, was devastated by a huge earthquake.

Such acts of nature are indiscriminate and initially threaten all in their path. But within a couple of days it was increasingly clear how, even in the depths of humanitarian crisis, capital never forgets its priorities.

Indeed, the capitalist class lost no time in reacting to the disaster. Coffee prices immediately soared on the international markets.

Meanwhile, the city of Armenia had

lost more than half of its buildings. At least 2,000 of its citizens lay entombed beneath the rubble. There was no water or electricity. Emergency services' vehicles and equipment lay crushed and useless. Most hospitals had collapsed.

Emergency supplies were being stockpiled in the capital, Bogota, 400 kilometres to the north east, while Armenia's mayor squabbled with the governor of the Quindio province about how to manage the crisis. It was abundantly clear that neither city nor province had any contingency plans, despite several earthquakes in the region in the last decade.

Four days after the quake, thermal

imaging equipment had just arrived from abroad as hope was being given up on those still missing in the ruins. But while heavy lifting gear was being used to pull corpses from city centre buildings, not a single rescue team had arrived in the working class neighbourhoods to the south to look for the living.

The urban poor were stranded, trying to dig their loved ones from the wreckage with sticks and bare hands. Nor did the administration send them even a single truckload of food or water.

Small wonder then, that rioting broke out, with starving survivors raid-

ing supermarkets and warehouses in an effort to feed themselves and their families. Thousands of soldiers were quickly sent in to keep public order, aided by agents of the notorious DAS, Colombia's intelligence and counter-insurgency service.

And if disease spreads in the aftermath of the earthquake we can be sure that it will be the poor who will suffer.

Conference Paramilitarism, Drug Trafficking and the Army in Colombia 3.30pm 5 February Lambeth College, Brixton Centre 56 Brixton Hill, London SW2

GR McColl takes issue with Blair's vision of a middle class future

New Britain: Tony's middle class utopia

THE ARCHITECTS of New Labour ideology at the Institute for Public Policy Research fervently applauded Blair's forecast of a "middle class that will include millions of people who traditionally may see themselves as working class, but whose ambitions are far broader than those of their parents and grandparents".

"We're all middle class now" screamed the headlines – or, at least, soon would be when the Prime Minister has time to complete the miraculous transformation of society into "a modern Britain, [where] everyone must have the chance to fulfil their potential, whatever their background, age, sex or race".

The barriers to development are not objective – not rooted in society – but in the individual. Lack of jobs, training and a decent standard of living can be overcome by individuals, preaches Blair, if only they would show a bit of drive, maybe even "get on their bikes", as Tebbit famously put it.

Blair's grasp of class structure in Britain is tenuous, to say the least. But the real purpose of his speech was to put further distance between the New Labour Party and the working class. He wants his party to serve the bosses and satisfy the prejudices of "Middle England", not the trade unions and working class voters who constitute its electoral base.

The idea that Britain is moving towards greater equality and the levelling out of class differences is wrong on two counts. First, Britain is an ever more polarised society: inequality is increasing. Second, despite the decline in traditional areas of working class employment, the working class in Britain is not disappearing. More and more of its ranks are realising that, despite their supposedly professional status (e.g. teachers), they are under attack as workers by a capitalist system and its state.

At the end of the 1970s, the richest fifth of the population controlled 37 per cent of total wealth in Britain, now it controls 43 per cent. For those in the top 10 per cent of households real disposable income rose by more than 60 per cent between 1979 and 1994/95. If, however, you were among the society's poorest 10 per cent your real income, after housing costs, actually fell by 8 per cent.

The number of households in Britain whose real incomes fell below half the national average – the European Union's definition of the poverty line – stood at 17 per cent in 1995, significantly more than the 10 per cent recorded in 1961. Such relative poverty has a particularly harsh impact on children: one third of all children in Britain – 2.2 million individual kids – are living in households receiving Income Support.

The numbers accepted as homeless by local authorities peaked in 1992 and have fallen slightly since. A recent survey in London, however, indicates that the number of families living in bed and breakfast accommodation has nearly doubled in the capital between 1996 and 1998 to more than 5,000.

The Acheson report on inequalities in health in England offered further evi-

dence of a persistent and growing class-based gap. Take the difference in mortality and the experience of ill health between those in the "highest" occupational groups (social classes I and II in the official statistics) and those in the lowest (classes IV and V), composed mainly of semi- and unskilled manual workers. For men in the higher occupational groups mortality rates dropped by 40 per cent from the 1970s to the early 1990s, while for men in classes IV and V the drop was only 10 per cent.

By the start of the 1990s if you were a man at the bottom of the occupational status hierarchy your life expectancy was five years less than for a man at the top. For both men and women in social classes IV and V the chances of suffering a long-term limiting illness were substantially greater than in the higher status groups – nearly three times greater for men.

One chilling statistic in the Acheson report was the rise among unskilled manual workers in the rate for suicide and serious self-inflicted injuries. In the early 1970s this figure stood at 32 per 100,000. By 1993 it had risen to 47 per 100,000, even as the rate for those in social class I actually fell. This made for a class-related differential of more than 350 per cent.

In short, class still matters profoundly in shaping what some sociologists would call your "life chances".

But what of the "disappearing working class"? The absolute size of the manual working class has shrunk. The proportion of the population now employed in manufacturing and extractive industries has fallen almost every year for more than 30 years and now accounts for less than 20% of the working population.

This decline is a significant fact, but it is not the whole story.

Official data about occupational "class" obscures as much as it illuminates. The typology of five social classes has been in use with little modification for 75 years. The Office of National Statistics is about to abandon the current classification scheme for an even worse model of eight grades that rests on assumptions placing less emphasis on the significance of work in determining class position. In this model the Blairite vision might be realised: both company directors and telephone operators would fit into the "middle classes".

The old model suffered from its emphasis on the strict division between blue and white collar work, between manual and mental labour. The distribution of occupations between the five classes betrays the influence of the early twentieth century German sociologist, Max Weber, whose work sought to downplay the decisive importance of the economic base – the capitalist system – in shaping social relations.

As a result of a conception of class



Blair's vision of a meritocratic society means riches for City traders and poverty for low-paid nurses

that focuses on the vague notion of "status", teachers figure in the same social class as £200,000 a year barristers (like Cherie Blair), despite enormous differences in earnings potential, hours of work and control over details of the job.

Class is not simply about income (though class position usually determines it) nor is it about your region of origin, accent or preferred tipple. Your position in the class structure may, of course, severely limit your consumer

Blair is absolutely committed to maintaining a social order where classes continue and where the ruling class will never be obliged to part with a substantially bigger share of its enormous wealth.

choices and cultural options, but the stereotypical details of cloth caps and whippets were only ever incidental and not essential to defining social class. Ultimately, the difficulty with any attempt to construct a model typology for class is that it seeks to freeze into a static structure what is a dynamic,

often bitterly contested social relationship. But what is clear is that the multi-millioned working class is shaped by its economic position. The fact that you are economically compelled – because you do not own or control any of the means of production – to work for wages (to sell your labour power, in Marxist terms) makes you a worker.

These workers – not some nebulous creation of Blair's advisers called the middle classes – are the future, because their class position compels them to struggle against capitalism, to advance society beyond the regime of production for private profit and towards a

regime of production for human need.

More than 150 years ago Karl Marx summarised the relationship between the objective class structure that industrial capitalism was creating, and the potential for revolutionary social change lodged within it. He described this relationship as between "a class in itself" and "a class for itself".

Marx argued that a combination of everyday experiences of work under capitalism, struggle against the exploitation underpinning the mode of production, and the conscious involvement of committed intellectuals fighting alongside workers could bring about a transformation of atomised individual workers into a class-conscious proletariat. This self-conscious working class would have the capacity not only to defend its own immediate pay and conditions, but to overthrow the social relations predicated on their exploitation.

At the turn of the last century between 750,000 and one million men worked in privately-owned coal mines across Britain. As the century draws to a close only a few thousand remain in collieries. Today in Britain there are hundreds of thousands of teachers in state schools – the majority women who are members of legitimate trade unions.

The dangers to life and limb at the coalface as opposed to the chalkface are clear. But this is a difference of degree, not a class divide. Teachers obviously lack the strategic economic power once possessed by miners, but the relative privileges of their "profession" have seen a slow yet substantial erosion over recent years. Regardless of their position on the old official scale for social class – or indeed how some teachers may still see themselves – they have, in reality, become ever more obviously "working

class".

According to the left-leaning playwright, Howard Brenton, Tony Blair has even paid teachers a back-handed compliment. Off the record, the Prime Minister apparently labelled teachers as his "enemy within", borrowing the infamous phrase used by Margaret Thatcher to describe striking miners during the heroic 1984/85 strike.

Blair is absolutely committed to maintaining a social order where classes continue and where the ruling class will never be obliged to part with a substantially bigger share of its enormous wealth.

But at the same time, he wishes to banish the very notion of a "class for itself". He recognises the need to divide and rule the working class through a combination of the occasional use of a big stick, the rhetoric of moral persuasion and the occasional cash incentive.

No working class activist should underestimate Blair's real determination to turn the clock back. He wants to return to a situation that prevailed at the very start of the century, when the Labour Party did not exist.

Blair has often argued that the so-called progressive movement in the early twentieth century should never have split and that, in short, the Labour Party should have never been born. The Labour Party, although always inadequate for the task of abolishing capitalist exploitation, was a limited expression of the British working class becoming a "class for itself".

The fact that this assertion of class independence was immediately subverted by a pro-capitalist leadership does not diminish the importance of the trade unions' original decision to break with the one of the open parties of the British bosses, the Liberals. This decision was not wrong, despite its reformist outcome. Yet now Blair wants to reverse it and obliterate any trace of working class political independence.

Britain at the turn of the last century was in its twilight as an imperialist top dog. No doubt, the apparent political backwardness of its working class stemmed from the ability of the ruling class to cultivate an aristocracy of labour that sought nothing more than to become part of an earlier version of Blair's ever expanding middle class. Ultimately, British capitalism proved incapable of producing room for them.

History therefore suggests that Blair's vision is "utopian" at best. After all, if capitalism in Britain could not create a stable, enlarged middle class for any great length of time at its high point, the prospects must be very poor during this, its crisis-wracked dotage. But the certain failure of Blair's soft-focus vision of capitalism also guarantees the prospect of sharper attacks in the medium to long-term on ever widening sections of the working class.

Against this background, never has it been more urgent to start rebuilding the working class as a "class for itself". This means vigorously defending remaining gains, but it also means going beyond the Labour Party and forging a revolutionary party worthy of a class-conscious proletariat.

LONDON MAYOR

Force Livingstone to fight

ON 23 MARCH the Labour Party's national executive should finalise the process for selecting its candidate for London mayor. It is a decision that has been postponed more than once as the Blairites consider whether it is worth the bother of stripping constituency parties of their right to nominate candidates.

The immediate and undisguised aim of the New Labour leadership is to stop the left-winger, Ken Livingstone, from standing. Numerous opinion polls have shown that Livingstone would be the overwhelming favourite to win an easy victory if he stood for London mayor. But the Blairites, backed by a number of London Labour MPs who want to settle old scores from Livingstone's time as leader of the GLC, are opposed to his candidacy and have tried just about every trick in the book to block him.

The Millbank Tendency that controls the party apparatus fears that Livingstone would use the mayor's post as a platform for launching a high-profile campaign of opposition to the Blair government. But Livingstone, in a display of cowardice, reassured the Prime Minister that he had absolutely no cause for concern. In an open letter, published in the Guardian on 29 January, Livingstone offered what the paper's editorial described as "a Valentine to Tony Blair".

Livingstone's letter gives "a categorical assurance that... I would work with your Government, not against it." If selected as the Labour candidate he would allow his campaign to be run by New Labour's notorious Elections Unit.

He reiterates his conviction that Blair's administration "has the potential to be a great reforming government on a par with those of 1906 and 1945." He even suggests that in terms of the London mayor's remit, "Labour's policies are ones I have campaigned for over a quarter of a century", before going on to list issues ranging from poverty and police racism to public transport.

Can this be the same "Red Ken" who has joined RMT union rallies over the past year against John Prescott's moves to privatise parts of London Underground and in defence of victimised union militant Steve Hedley? Is this the man who, on the same day of his Guardian letter, blasts the government for its cut in revenue support grant to inner London councils?

Indeed it is. Though he was the scourge of the media, especially the tabloids, in the early to mid-1980s, Livingstone has time and again revealed himself to be a shrewd and slippery career politician. While still leader of the GLC in spring 1985 he bailed out of the campaign resisting the Thatcher

regime's imposition of "ratecapping" on local authorities.

His efforts to stave off abolition of the GLC relied far more on cultivating the Tory grandees in the House of Lords than on mobilising council workers and Londoners onto the capital's streets. Livingstone opted to pen a column for Murdoch's Sun when much of the labour movement was still boycotting News International products in response to the onslaught against the print unions

at Wapping.

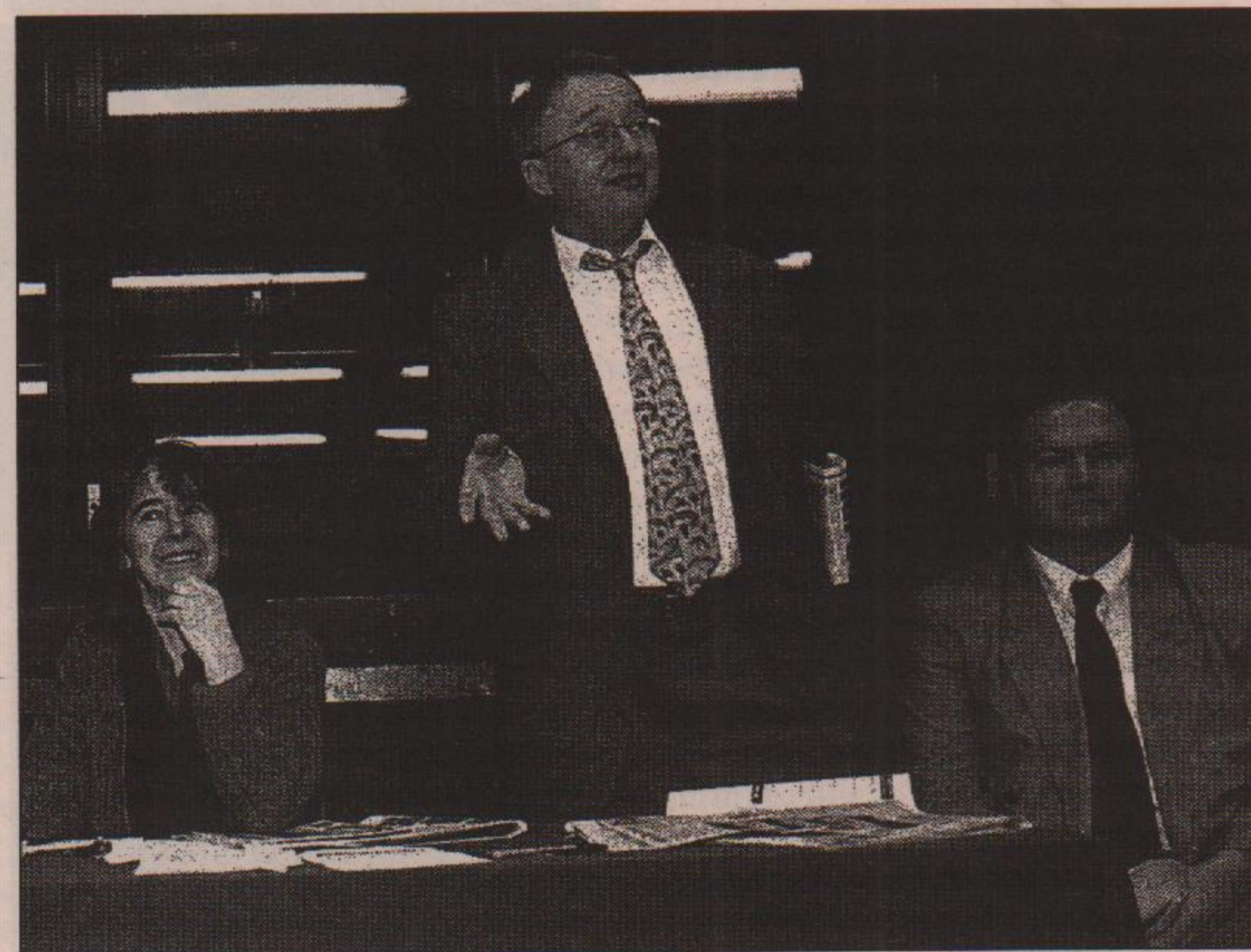
Nevertheless, Livingstone has done just about enough to retain some credibility with left activists in the Labour Party and the unions. That, combined with the fact that the Labour left has no other obvious standard-bearer in the 2000 election for mayor, makes Livingstone the obvious choice for hundreds of thousands of workers across London. Many of these supporters will be angered by the content and grovel-

ling tone of Livingstone's letter. The man himself can turn around and say that if the Blairites still block him (a distinct possibility), he has done his level best and that he is not prepared to risk expulsion from the party after more than 30 years.

If this happens the response of the labour movement should be to demand that Livingstone publicly break with Blair and sacrifice his own career aims by standing without the Labour Party's official stamp of approval. Falkirk West MP Dennis Canavan has been prepared to do this in the context of the anti-democratic selection procedures for candidates for the Edinburgh parliament.

By forcing Livingstone to do the same we could strike a real blow against the Blairites in the London elections and provoke a real fight in the ranks of the Labour Party.

If, however, Livingstone is true to form and ducks the challenge, socialists still within and beyond the Labour Party's ranks, along with trade union militants must build a campaign for an alternative at the May 2000 mayoral election. Democratically run and genuinely accountable conferences of union and working class community organisations should hammer out the programme and select the candidates for mayor and the 25 seats on the Greater London Authority.



Molly Cooper

TEACHERS

Stop the attack on teachers' pay

THE CURRENT pay offer to teachers will do nothing to tackle the crisis facing education, particularly in London.

The statistics for retention and recruitment are damning. A third of all schools in London started this academic year without enough teachers. Forty three per cent of London primary schools could not find a head teacher. Sixty per cent of all London schools could not employ a head on the first attempt.

New entrants to teaching are hardly queuing up. On secondary teacher training courses only two subjects were able to fill their places. Some subjects, such as Maths, Technology and Modern Languages, had a third of their places unfilled. Applications to train as a primary school teacher were down by 15.4 per cent.

The government has been forced to act by these shortages – but not in a way that will solve the problem. New Labour aims to spend more on heads and offer less to newly qualified teachers. Primary school heads, in response to the recruitment problems, will receive between 6 and 9 per cent. Most ordinary teachers can only expect around 3 or 4 per cent. This is just above the headline inflation rate and will do nothing to stop teachers leaving or address the recruitment crisis.

The reason for the government's approach is that it plans to attack teachers. The Green Paper issued at the end of 1998 contains plans for a radical restructuring of teachers' pay. The proposals would come into effect in 2001.

Graduates are to be attracted into teaching with specially enhanced salaries

and the possibility of being "fast-tracked" up the salary scale. Meanwhile, heads will be essential if the new performance related pay system is to be implemented. The government recognise they need a financial sweetener to get these people "on-side".

The end result will be a grossly unfair pay system in which teachers doing the same work are paid totally different rates. And the bonus for the government is that this system will divide teachers and weaken their trade union organisation.

Against this we say:
● decent pay for all. The NUT leadership have put in a 10 per cent pay claim. This was overturned by delegates at a special pay conference in Harrogate in the autumn in favour of a flat rate increase of £2,000 for all teachers. We should take strike action

to win these demands.

● decent conditions. Teachers' workloads have increased significantly since New Labour won the election. This is particularly the case for primary school teachers who are bogged down in the demands of the literacy hour, SATs and baseline testing. On top of all this the government want annual appraisal and targets for individual teachers, linked to your pay. Scrapping a restrictive curriculum, SATs, Ofsted and PRP would immediately improve the conditions of all teachers.

But New Labour is not interested in improving pay and conditions for teachers. If they are not challenged there will be fewer teachers. Some, particularly heads, will be relatively well paid. They will spend most of their time assessing others. Teachers will be expect-

ed to take on larger classes or even teach via computer link-ups. The job of actually supervising the children will be done by classroom assistants, cheaper by far both in terms of wages and training costs.

NUT members need to build action now, both to defeat the Green Paper and win a decent pay rise. We can start by demanding the union calls a one-day national strike on pay. If they refuse, unofficial action will be necessary.

In the schools we can organise boycotts of appraisal, of SATs and inspections by Ofsted – all of which will be used to introduce performance related pay.

Determined and decisive action, called and controlled by rank and file teachers, can win.

SEXUAL OFFENCES

Straw comforts homophobes

HOPES ARE high among campaigners that the equalisation of the age of consent for homosexual and heterosexual sex will finally be won.

The Sexual Offences (Amendment) Bill was carried with a majority of 183 in the House of Commons last month. Disgracefully, 15 Labour MPs voted against. The Bill is now set to go to the House of Lords. On past experience the Lords will attempt to throw out the equalisation clauses but the government has made it clear that it will use the Parliament Act to force the measure through.

But before we start thanking New Labour too profusely we need to look at the whole package they are pushing through. In order to "reassure" certain of their lordships, the government has linked the equalisation with a

new measure making it an offence to have any kind of sexual relationship with a young person up to the age of 18 "in your trust".

When the equalisation of the age of consent was last debated in parliament one of the homophobic arguments used against it was that this would somehow allow older men to prey on young people, particularly where they were in a position of authority.

This homophobic slur on gays is made by the very same people whose care system is rife with sexual and physical abusers of children "in positions of trust". The actions of these abusers were systematically covered up by the police, the courts, the local authorities and the government for years in order to defend the integrity of an inhuman care system.

To equate this regime of institutionalised sexual terror against children with consenting relationships – gay or straight for that matter – between younger and older adults is hypocrisy, laced with anti-gay bigotry.

Rather than challenging such blatantly homophobic ideas, by abolishing Section 28 which prohibits teachers from "promoting" (i.e. conducting any informed or positive discussion of homosexuality in a class room), New Labour has capitulated. The effect of the Bill will be to:

● Reduce the age at which certain sexual acts are lawful; to make it an offence for a person aged 18 or over to engage in sexual activity with or directed towards a person under that age if he is in a position of trust in relation to that person; and for connected purposes."

So while it will no longer be illegal to have homosexual sex if you are 16, any sort of sexual activity will be illegal if your partner happens to be 16 and you are over 18 and employed as a teacher or social worker.

The definition of sexual activity within the Bill is vague and is designed to intimidate young people with the threat of criminalisation. Any kind of sexual activity is proscribed under the law. It is clear that this does not simply cover vaginal or anal intercourse. Exactly what it does include (kissing, caressing?) will presumably have to be tested in the law, since there is no definition in the Bill.

Teachers, residential social workers, hospital workers are all designated as being in a position of trust. Interestingly the police, priests and scout masters are

not included. Clearly these are people no one should trust!

The double standards and double thinking involved are stupendous.

Having sex is not illegal if you are married. Of course if on the night before you get married you indulge in some heavy petting then the prospective bridegroom or bride could end up in prison, if someone's the wrong age.

The provisions within the Bill which will equalise the age of consent should be strongly supported. But criminalising those who may have a completely consenting relationship, simply because they work in the same institution and their partner happens to be under 18 is reactionary nonsense and we must organise to get it thrown out now, raising the issue in union branches and workplaces.

Fairness at work, or a fraud to workers

UNION ACTIVISTS are preparing for a rash of victimisations and disputes after the government published its "fairness at work" legislation, the Employment Relations Bill, last month.

The new law promises improvements in individual rights at work – for example on unfair dismissal – and promotes "family friendly" policies like time-off for family emergencies. But its proposals on collective rights and union recognition have been the subject of a three-cornered argument between Labour, the union leaders and the Confederation of British Industry.

We already knew that the legislation would leave Britain with the most draconian anti-union legislation of any West European state. All the key elements of the Tory anti-union arsenal will remain in place. There will be no legal right to strike or take any other form of industrial action.

Battles are, though, set to erupt in workplaces as employers try to undermine the Bill's already meagre provisions by sacking militants, enforcing no-strike agreements and re-ordering their affairs to skirt the law.

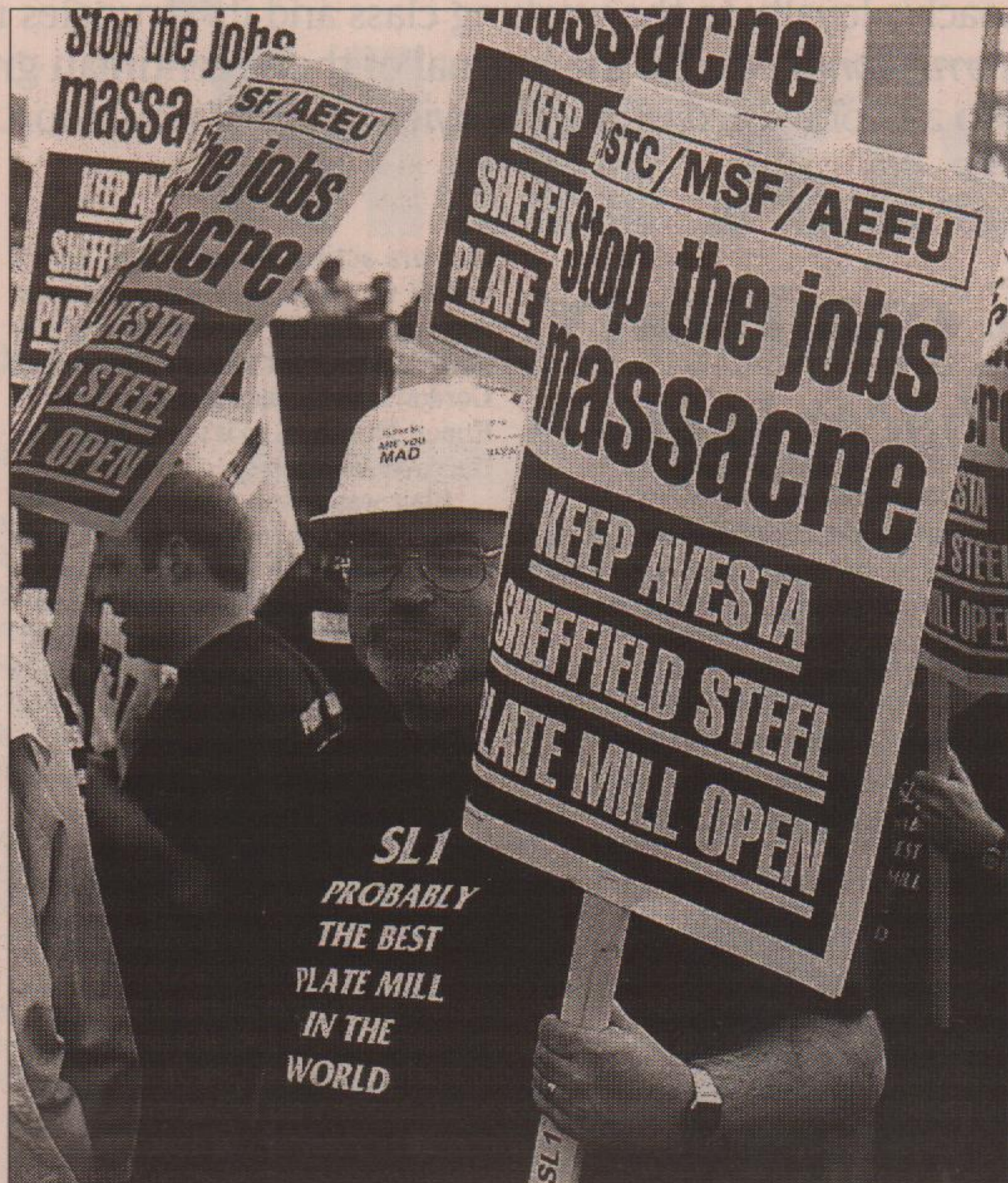
Under the legislation:

- Parental leave will be improved with mothers and fathers of young children getting up to three months unpaid leave and time-off for family emergencies.
- Part-time workers get equal rights to full-timers – providing they earn more than £67 a week.
- Unions will get automatic recognition if they can prove that more than 50 per cent of workers in a "relevant bargaining unit" are members. If membership is lower a union can gain recognition, assuming more than 40 per cent of the relevant workforce vote for it in a secret ballot.
- The cap on awards for unfair dismissal will be raised from £12,000 to £50,000, and workers will get employment protection rights after 12 months instead of the current two years.
- Blacklisting will be outlawed.
- Sacking workers on official strike will be outlawed, but only for the first eight weeks of a dispute.

On every count the new law dilutes the original proposals and marks a major retreat compared to the promises of the late Labour leader John Smith. Even the improvements are full of loopholes, with many powers resting with the "Secretary of State", currently arch-Blairite Stephen Byers, who replaced Peter Mandelson as trade and industry secretary. Workers still have no rights in their first year of employment: so the current practice of two-year contracts will simply be replaced by one-year temporary contracts. And the "zero hours" contracts used by outfits like Pizza Hut – where you can be sent home for two hours on no pay and told to come back "when it gets busy" – have not been outlawed.

The Bill's provisions for union recognition are laced with all sorts of undemocratic conditions. Every abstention will count as a "no" vote: already the anti-union bosses are lining up professional US union-busters to run their campaigns against recognition.

At the regional newspaper group RMI, for example, managed by Tory Norman Fowler and looking to take over *The Mirror*, militants are already being victimised in advance of an all-out



Workers Power

union-busting campaign. There is a Wapping-style contingency plan for scabbing and "key personnel" will be forced onto no-strike contracts. Other major employers in the print, other media, cowboy construction firms and the privatised transport companies are watching RMI with keen interest.

The current legislation also puts considerable powers into the hands of an arbitration committee (the CAC) and ministers. Employers will have the right to appeal against recognition decisions if they feel it harms business. For example, in a recognition ballot, the CAC has the final power to decide:

- who is balloted
- whether the ballot is in the interest of business or
- if there are concerns about the way in which workers became union members and under what circumstances".

Unpaid maternity leave rights are a joke if you are single, or if you are a couple on low pay. The new law still leaves Britain with some of Europe's worst statutory provision for paid maternity leave.

Millions of part-time workers are with small employers. But enterprises employing 20 or fewer workers are exempt. That includes most shops, many nursing and care homes, and many contract cleaning firms. And the exemption lets rip-off employers redefine their business units and bully their workers to get round the law – just as they have done with the European Working Time Directive.

Originally, it was proposed to abolish the cap on unfair dismissal awards, but as a result of employers' lobbying it was reinstated. If you are victimised there is still no guarantee you will get your job back, and no guarantee you'll get anywhere near £50,000. Again the focus is on individual rights. And decisions will be made by an unelected body stuffed full of "employment relations" specialists from the bosses' side and – if we're lucky – a few renegade union officials who will be desperate to deliver the odd kick in the teeth to their

"own" side, just to prove their objectivity.

The Bill does, however, open up the possibility of a fight that militants in derecognised workplaces have awaited for years. But the response of union leaders has been pathetic. TUC General Secretary John Monks welcomed the Bill: "Far from this leading to more conflict or difficulties in the workplace, as the critics will say, the new law will provide a big boost to partnership at work. Macho-management now looks as dated as flared trousers and flower power. It does not go as far as unions would like, but no one can deny that today marks a milestone in bringing some balance back to Britain's workplaces."

This is ostrich-like complacency. Macho management is not declining: it is on the increase. Now the bosses know that this is the full extent of reforms they have to deal with from Labour, they will go on the offensive in the workplace.

Meanwhile, the "centre-left" union leaders – Unison's Rodney Bickerstaffe, the GMB's John Edmonds and the T&G's Bill Morris – lined up to criticise the concessions to employers "more in sorrow than in anger". None of them have proposed direct action to force changes: most are only too relieved that the rich-man's pawn, Peter Mandelson, had to go before he could gut the legislation even further.

The Bill has to go through parliament and here New Labour thinks it will silence all opposition to its left by pointing to Tory sabotage attempts, especially in the House of Lords.

But Labour MPs must be forced to table amendments and the campaign to strengthen the Bill – crucially to remove the 40 per cent threshold on recognition ballots – must put pressure on with a mass lobby of parliament.

The coming union conference season has to be focused not on self-congratulation but on how to fight for recognition in the union-busting industries and workplaces. The task of trade unionists in the coming period remains the development of a strategy to force the scrapping of all the anti-union laws.

workers POWER

BCM BOX 7750 LONDON WC1N 3XX ★ 0181 981 0602

COMMENT

10 April: march against low pay

This month opened with the annual ritual of government announcements on public sector pay. The Tories took away our negotiating rights and New Labour has done nothing to restore them. The unelected and unaccountable pay review bodies – who have already reported to the government – decide what we are worth.

For years our pay was, in reality, cut by below-inflation awards. This year the furore over skill shortages in teaching and the NHS has produced a different message from the review bodies – divide and rule.

Some nurses are to get 11 per cent, others only 4.75 per cent. Primary school head teachers will get between 6 and 9 per cent, whereas most classroom teachers will get less than 4 per cent.

Much will be made of the 11 per cent being proposed for new nurses. Frank Dobson will boast about New Labour's fairness and generosity. But it won't solve the crisis facing the NHS. With the average wage currently standing at £19,561, a student nurse even with the 11 per cent rise will receive £14,080. After tax and national insurance, this comes to just over £820 a month.

This is pathetic. It marks the public sector – and the NHS in particular – as a low pay zone.

Both health and education are facing severe staff shortages. Why? Because for the last ten years they have been getting lower and lower pay. *Labour Research* estimates that public sector pay has fallen behind private sector pay by as much as 10 per cent. According to the *Average Earnings Index* private sector pay went up by 31 per cent between January 1992 and April 1998, while public sector pay rose by only 20 per cent in the same period. Pay rises this year of 3 or 4 per cent – which is what is on offer for most public sector workers – will not redress this slide in pay.

Low pay is combined with declining working conditions. Underfunding means having to carry out duties in worse conditions, with fewer staff and resources. It is hardly surprising that many teachers and nurses are leaving their jobs to go and work in the private sector.

Is Blair's New Britain becoming a fairer more equal place? No.

Blair has done little to help those on low pay and absolutely nothing to stop the rich getting richer and the fat cats getting fatter.

The introduction of a national minimum wage was a key part of Labour's election manifesto. The TUC called for £4.60 an hour, the CBI suggested £3.10. New Labour finally decided on a minimum wage of £3.60 an hour, with a lower rate of £3 for those between 18 and 21. Anyone under 18 is not covered by the legislation.

The rate is a disgrace. The exemptions are a disgrace. The living standards of the bosses put Labour's minimum wage in a very clear perspective.

Blair has done little to help those on low pay and absolutely nothing to stop the rich getting richer.

The boss of Boots the Chemist, Lord Blyth, receives £279 an hour – a bit more than what a nurse can expect to take home in a week. Clearly there is more money to be made in selling drugs than in administering them to patients.

Blyth is far from being the fattest fat cat. That position goes to CBI president Sir Clive Thompson of Rentokil. This firm, which pays its workers peanuts, has led opposition to the government's minimum wage, because £3.60 is well above what it pays its workers. Thompson himself earns £466.34 per hour – 130 times the minimum wage rate. British Telecom boss, Sir Peter Bonfield earns 98 times the minimum wage and BP boss Sir John Browne earns 83.5 times the minimum wage.

The whole labour movement needs to take up the fight against low pay. The 10 April demonstration in Newcastle demanding an increase in the minimum wage, called by Unison and now backed by most of the unions and the TUC, must become a focus for this fight.

We should start building for this now. The trade union leaders see the demo as a polite reminder to Blair that they are supporting him and want some improvements they can sell to their members in return.

We want to turn it into a gigantic and militant march that will inspire a real fightback against low pay. That is why getting every working class organisation to back it, to fill coaches and trains for it, to take its message out to millions of workers in a campaign to mobilise for it now are all vital.

That is what Workers Power members will be doing between now and 10 April. And the Equalize! campaign launched by the socialist youth movement, Revolution, is building a youth contingent on the demo.

We urge all our readers to help us build for this march and to support our demand that Labour immediately introduces an equal minimum wage of £6 per hour for all, with no exemptions; no discrimination against youth or trainees.

Film and Freedom

We print here an interview with the British film director Ken Loach. Ken Loach has made many memorable films, most recently *My Name is Joe*, favourably reviewed in *Workers Power* two months ago. An earlier Loach film, *Land and Freedom*, dealt with the Spanish Civil war of the late 1930s. As in all his films Loach's loyalty to the working class and its struggles is evident. The interview, by *Alejandra Ríos*, was for *Estrategia Internacional No. 10*, the journal of the Argentinian group, the PTS. This version has been abridged for reasons of space. Thanks are due to all concerned in the interview and its translation.

What motivated you to make the film *Land and Freedom*?

Well, I guess Jim Allen, the writer, and I had the idea to make the film for a long time, because the question of the Spanish War, as you know, is a big subject for people on the left and in some ways it is one of the most critical events of the century – the first war against fascism and a great international effort by working people, and the possibility of a revolution in Spain. To tell that story is very important, because it was a moment when everybody's position was revealed. The western powers were very happy to see fascism win because of their investments in Spain, so all their kind of anti-fascist rhetoric in the second world war is seen actually as very hollow because they gave tacit support to Franco.

And you can see that there was a very clear revolutionary movement to appropriate the owners of the land and of the factories – it was very clear that the working class was a revolutionary class. The position of the church was very clear, they stood four-square with the owners, with the bourgeoisie. And also the position of the Soviet Communist Party was very clear in that they were looking to do a deal with the western countries and they were not going to risk that by supporting a workers' revolution.

So, for a few months it was very clear, there was no hiding place, it was like a shaft of light shining on all the political parties and powers. We just wanted to find a way of telling that story, through people, real people.

We have heard that you sometimes use non-professional actors in your films. Could you explain why you do this?

It is a question of who is going to make the movie live, really. So, it is not a fixed thing, I will work with non-professionals or not. You try and put a group of people together who really have the experience and the ability to make the event live. So some of the people in, for instance, the militia [in *Land and Freedom*], some of them are actors, some are not: there is a carpenter, there is an electrician, there is a guy who repairs motorbikes, all mixed in with the actors.

What they had to have in common was that they were political, so they had to understand the politics. We tried to find the sort of people who, if it were to happen again, would go and fight. So it is a mixture really, some are actors and some are not.

And the villagers, in the long discussion about the land, mainly they are people who live nearby – some were active in the CNT union in a nearby town, so they were quite political. There are a couple of actors in among them, because the actors are sometimes useful to get it started, they facilitate it.

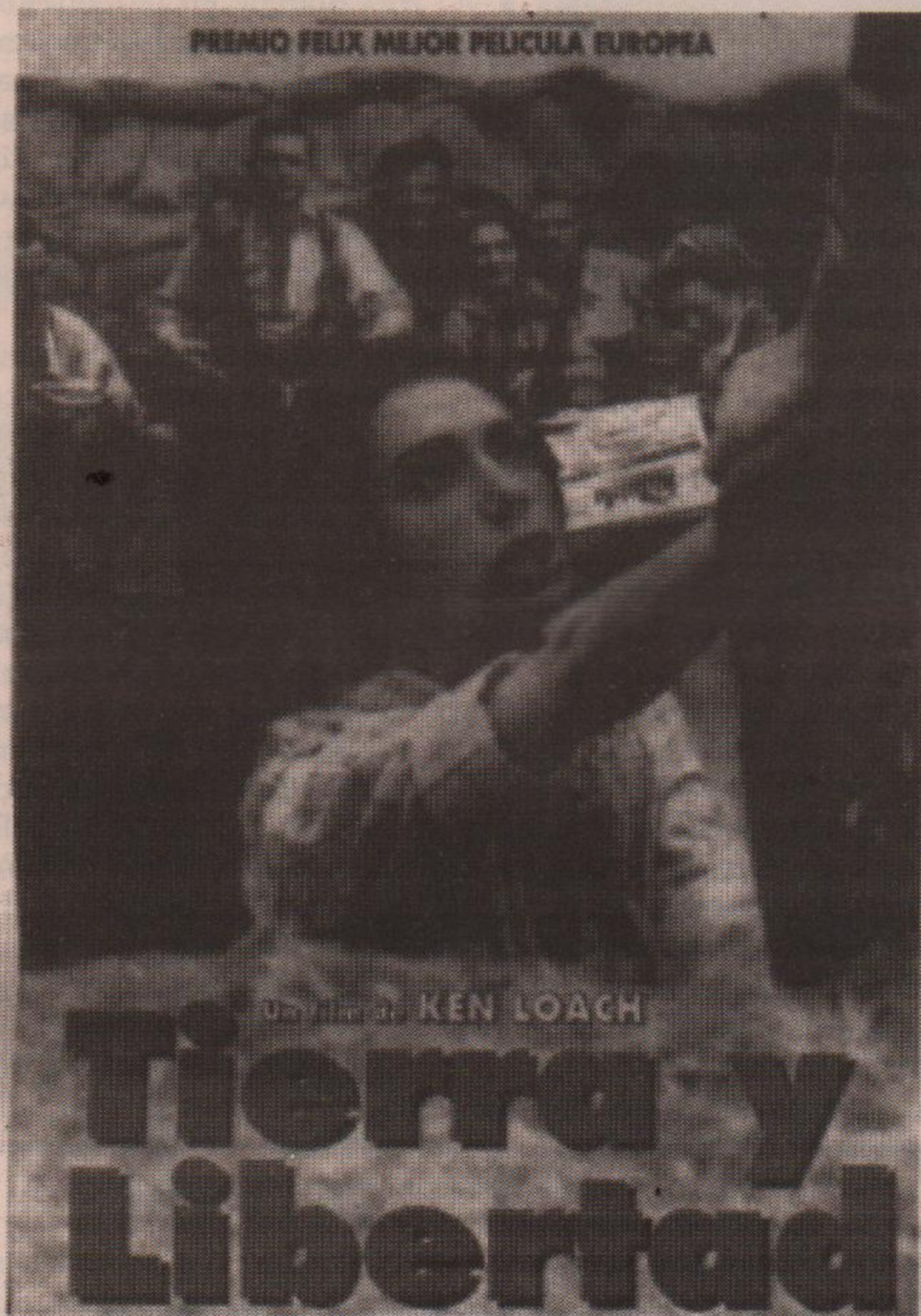
I mean, the guy who objects is an actor because I had to work with him on what his line of argument would be. He was terrific, actually, in working in with the non-actors because most of them were just saying what they believed, what they passionately believed.

Entrevista exclusiva:

“Uno tiene que hacer lo que le

Estrategia Internacional tiene la gran satisfacción de presentar un reportaje exclusivo al director de cine británico Ken Loach, realizado recientemente por nuestra corresponsal en Londres, Alejandra Ríos.

El realizador de *Riff Raff*, *Tierra y Libertad*, y *Lady Bird*, entre otras, refleja en esta entrevista sus posturas frente al arte, el llamado “nuevo cine británico”, el sistema capitalista, el nuevo gobierno laborista, y la relación que tuvo con las corrientes que se reclaman del trotskismo en su país.



EL: ¿CUÁLES FUERON LOS MOTIVOS QUE LO LLEVARON A REALIZAR LA PELÍCULA TIERRA Y LIBERTAD?

KL: Es una pregunta difícil de contestar. Supongo que Jim Allen, que es el guionista, y yo ya teníamos desde hace un tiempo la idea de hacer la película porque el tema de la Guerra Civil Española, como ustedes saben, es un tema muy importante para la gente de izquierda y en algún

entrevista de *Estrategia Internacional No. 10*

And he had to be very clever to make certain that he provoked them, but in a way that was also believable.

The guy who played the leader of the village, he is an actor, a very political guy. The old man is an anarchist who fought in the war, and he had had to live in France, but he was a friend of the people from the CNT so they brought him along. He was very good. He didn't quite understand that it was a film, actually.

At the beginning, when we started the film, Jordi Dauder, who played the main man from the village, started to speak and the old guy said “Wait a minute, wait a minute, who elected you?”, and Jordi answered “I am sorry, I am an actor. We are doing the film”. And the old man replied “Yes, but we

don't do things like that. We have to elect you first”. So we had to stop the filming while we elected him to do this part that we had cast him in! So, it was very good like that. The gap between fact and fiction was very narrow sometimes.

In Britain, a Labour government is now in office. You were one of the most important critics of the Thatcher period and its social consequences for the working class, which you portrayed in films like *Riff-Raff* and *Raining Stones*. What is your opinion of the Blair government, which is keeping the anti-union laws from that period?

They are a party and a government

that are acting for capital in a very naked way and they were put into power by the big capitalists. It's very graphic that Blair and his Chancellor, Gordon Brown, keep going to speak to Rupert Murdoch, so it's very clear who the paymasters are.

Blair was put in power by the City and big business to do their work. They have clearly acted in a very anti-working class way. All the schemes apparently to soften the impact of unemployment, like Welfare to Work, plainly cannot be successful because at the same time as those schemes are in place, they allow the Bank of England to set the interest rates, the effect of which is to steer economic policy.

The Deputy Governor of the Bank of England said something very revealing, he said that unemployment was below its natural level. So whatever government schemes you have, they won't be allowed to work because the Bank of England will make certain that industry is sufficiently depressed to create unemployment so that workers will have to work for low wages, because if they don't want to work for low wages there are ten people who will.

So there is a very naked hypocrisy about it all. A whole day on the radio and television was given over to talking about social exclusion. But nobody mentioned unemployment, and if you don't have a job you are excluded. That's the defining thing. It isn't a case of slightly better housing or slightly better welfare provisions. You are excluded, you are alienated, if you have no work. This clearly has to continue until the Bank of England achieves what it calls the natural rate of unemployment.

It's as though it's part of the natural world – you know, nature and the seasons – it's as though there's something entirely natural about it, which is a big fallacy. That's part of the consciousness that they have established, that capitalism is the natural way to live. It's as though we forget that it's only a couple of centuries old. In no way is it natural. It's certainly not natural for some people to be very, very wealthy and other people to be desperately poor. It's very interesting how they use language to justify their interests.

The PTS publishing a series of articles about the meetings between Breton and Trotsky and their manifesto *Towards a Free Revolutionary Art*. Would you like to express your view on this issue?

A line which has always stayed with me [from Trotsky's writings on art and literature], which I think is very important, is that the party should have no line about art, that it's not in the business of developing a cultural taste or anything like that. It must be absolutely separate, independent. Stalinism used art only for propaganda and in a very mechanical way. This dreadful phrase “socialist realism” – if anything was ever dead, it is that.

What role do you think artists should play in society?

I think the word “art” is very danger-

ous, really. I think you just have to communicate what you want to communicate in the way that seems best to you. Perhaps we should say “communicator” rather than “artist” because it's less pretentious. Anybody who has the possibility of communicating, I think you just have a responsibility as a human being to try to make sense of the world you are in, and to express that and to share it. I find it quite difficult to be entirely inward-looking.

On the other hand, you have to do what you have to do, and if people have an idea they have to pursue it so I think it's very difficult to generalise. The danger is that if you generalise too much, you end up doing the opposite of what Trotsky says in the pamphlet. I think particularly in the more public communications, if you work in television, or you make films for the cinema, or you write books that are quite popular, you can't abdicate your social situation entirely. Particularly for films and theatre, that is a very public art, it's not like you are writing poetry that you keep and very few people see it. If it's a public communication and it's widely seen I think you do have a responsibility to try to understand the way the world is and share it.

The trouble is the cinema is basically a commodity. It's not a communication, it's a commodity. It's an investment in which people look to recoup their investment and make profits. Most people who go into it, most directors see it as: they are given a script, they will do it to the best of their ability, they will make good wages, and that's it.

And a lot of people are in love with the idea of cinema rather than the idea of what cinema can be, and I think that's very reactionary really – to worship the form above everything. I think that happens a lot. It happens a lot particularly with people who come from film schools who talk about nothing but “genres”, which is a word I hate, and have no conception of content but they have a great knowledge and understanding of genres, so they can do you a pastiche of a western or a pastiche of a horror film or a pastiche of a thriller or a pastiche of something else. But what the content is, what is actually the heart of the story, is something that they don't have a view about, something they are not interested in.

I think that has been an unfortunate consequence of the development of film schools over the last 20 years – that the style is everything, the surface is everything, but that the actual heart, the content, tends to be forgotten. Because they have to teach something in the film schools, and if you're going to spend all your time looking at films you're going to be obsessed with films. Whereas making films is very simple. You just arrange for things to happen in front of a camera, film it, and then join the bits together. I mean, that's it, you can describe it in a day, it's not difficult.

But if you're doing a course that lasts three years, then you have to fill it or you are out of a job, so you spend a lot of time talking about things that are not necessary, and do a lot of damage, I think!

marxism

THE BASICS

A BEGINNER'S GUIDE TO REVOLUTIONARY SOCIALISM

The philosophy of Marxism

Richard Brenner looks at the foundations of Marxism and argues that it is materialist and a science

The Marxist method is based on materialism. It rejects idealism.

The Russian Marxist Georgi Plekhanov gave the following definition of these terms: "Materialism is the direct opposite of idealism. Idealism strives to explain also the phenomena of nature, all the qualities of matter, by these or those qualities of the spirit. Materialism acts in the exactly opposite way. It tries to explain psychic phenomena by these or those qualities of matter, by this or that organisation of the human, or, in more general terms, of the animal body."¹

Materialism and idealism give opposite answers to what Engels called "the great basic question of all philosophy ... the relation of thinking and being", or the question of which came first, mind or matter, spirit or nature.²

Materialism was of course anathema to the theologians of the medieval world. The conceiver and creator of the universe was God. His representatives on earth were the Roman Church, the kings and the feudal landowners. God was constantly overriding the laws of nature (miracles) just as the Pope and the Kings were not bound by the laws which applied to the masses.

The rise of the merchant and capitalist classes in late 16th and early 17th century Europe unleashed a wave of scientific investigation, the discovery of the world and the universe and developments in technology. The printing press, navigational instruments, the telescope revealed and spread knowledge of a natural world greatly at variance with the church's teaching. This forced philosophers to think again – especially those no longer employed by the Roman Church.

As scientists like Gallileo and Newton identified fundamental laws that governed the motion of the physical universe, philosophers like Hobbes in England and Descartes in France began to create mechanical models for understanding both matter and mind. The old miracle-working deity had to be evicted from nature in order for natural laws and scientific method to proceed in a rational fashion.

Most philosophers turned God into a celestial watchmaker who created and wound up the universe at the beginning of time and left it to run by itself. The French materialists – Holbach, Helvetius, Diderot – however, found no evidence for God whatsoever and bravely said so!

These mechanical materialist ideas, with their stress on scientific research and practical knowledge instead of religious dogma, represented a tremendous step forward for human thought. But they eventually ran up against serious limitations.

In their eagerness to drive out the mystical and the immaterial they reduced human thinking itself to a passive role within nature. Diderot described the brain as being like a wax drum bearing the imprint of the outside world. But if this was so how did one explain human history as a continual process of change – of the environment, of social life, of human nature.

The materialist philosophers had to confront the fact that the emergence of capitalism was punctuated by great risings, civil wars and revolutions. If humans were, to a greater or lesser degree, automata which are determined by fixed natural stimuli, then how could they desire change, let alone effect it? And what was the driving force of this constant change? The eighteenth century materialists were unable to solve this.

The young Karl Marx recognised this "chief defect of all hitherto existing materialism". He observed that "it happened that the active side, in contradistinction to materialism, was developed by idealism."³

In fact it was the great German idealist philosopher Georg Hegel who addressed the problem of the evolutionary and revolutionary development of history. He saw it as a series of transformations in human thought which themselves originated in an "Absolute (unlimited) Mind" – or God in lay terms. But Hegel's Absolute

IN BRIEF

■ **Materialism asserts the existence of the material world before all thinking beings.**

■ **Dialectical materialism recognises in human labour and thought the capacity to shape not only external nature but transform human society too.**

■ **Nature and human thought consists not of fixed, homogeneous objects or ideas but of endless movement through the conflict and resolution of inner contradictions.**

■ **Marxism claims its methodology is scientific and applies it to the revolutionary liberation of the working class and all the oppressed.**

Mind was not a force outside nature who set it going like a watchmaker, nor like the medieval God a being who constantly intervened, making nonsense of natural law. "It" was the constantly changing, contradictory development both of physical nature and its comprehension within human thought.

Hegel registered all sorts of development and change, he saw that different sorts of society had existed, he even saw that revolutionary economic developments were related to political ones. But he never budged from the idea that the driving force in history was Mind – and not even individual human minds but an abstract general mind progressively realising itself in history.

Marx and Engels rejected Hegel's upside down view – based as it was on the thought process as simply preceding practice. But they also rejected the mechanical materialists failure to understand human activity as part of reality – able to shape and change it and not just a passive element responding to the forces of nature.

They focused their attention on the role of labour. They showed how humanity is a part of and product of nature (not of God or the Absolute Mind). But through labour it can and does react back on nature and change it. Just as our social and natural environment shapes us as human beings so humans constantly reshape their social and natural environment. In doing so they also change their ideas, their world view.

However, Marxism does insist that the activity of man "pursuing his aims" is not a process that takes place outside of the constraints of the real world. The motives that determine the conditions under which individuals act are ultimately economic, by which is meant not the dry book-keeping of present day financial analysts, but "the production and reproduction of human life".⁴ Before humans can write poetry, create great art and study philosophy, they must first find food and shelter and secure the necessities of life.

How was it that Marx and Engels were able to overcome the limitations of earlier forms of materialism and explain social change without giving way to idealist philosophy? The key was the way in which they incorporated into materialist thinking one powerful insight developed by Hegel, the greatest of the German Idealist philosophers.

Hegel argued that change and motion are the products of internal contradictions within all things. On the basis of this he developed a new, advanced theory of logic. This theory – dialectics – has often been attacked as mystical and obscure. And indeed, Hegel himself, as an idealist, believed that matter was only a stage of the development of something he called the Absolute Spirit.

But Marx and Engels rescued his real insights from their outlandish idealistic trappings. In doing so, they were able to solve the problem that had eluded the mechanical materialists. They showed how the impetus towards development and change in human society was provided not by some divine or spiritual force external to nature, but by the contradictions and conflicts within nature and within human society.

This allowed Marx and Engels to give a powerful explanation of how the new capitalist system had arisen out of feudal societies in Europe. The rise of great cities concentrating a new class based on trade, manufacturing and new forms of finance led eventually to large-scale industry and mass production. The rising class of capitalists was eventually brought into inevitable conflict with old dominant class of feudal landowners.

Ultimately – in England, America and France – they rebelled and overthrew the feudal system and its superstructure of absolute monarchical rule. Society was developing – through both gradual change and sharp revolutionary breaks – as a result of its own internal contradictions.

Far from being mystical or confusing, dialectical materialism is an easily comprehensible set of laws gov-

erning the logic of processes that are in motion. As Engels wrote, in his book *Anti-Dühring*, the dialectic is:

"The great basic thought that the world is not to be comprehended as a complex of ready-made things, but as a complex of processes, in which [things] ... go through an uninterrupted change of coming into being and passing away." He added that: "For dialectical philosophy nothing is sacred. It reveals the transitory character of everything and in everything; nothing can endure before it except the uninterrupted process of becoming and of passing away."⁵

All things have to be understood in their interconnections and their development, not as fixed, eternal objects isolated from one another. To achieve this, the dialectic sets out new logical laws. The three major laws of the dialectic are:

● The Unity and Interpenetration of Opposites:

No object or thing should ever be treated as if it is fixed or static forever. Each "thing", in nature and society, is composed of a complex of interacting elements and forces. Contending components of a thing exist in contradiction with one another, giving motion and development to the thing itself.

As an example of this we can look at any modern nation. "Britain" is not just an "idea" – it exists as a territorial, political and economic reality. In this sense "Britain" is a unity. But as such it is nevertheless composed of different classes, which have antagonistic interests. The struggle between these two contending features of the nation's essence will determine the fate of Britain. In every nation, the victory of the working class over the capitalists as a result of the unfolding of this contradiction would result in the abolition of the nation state itself, and the absorption of its positive achievements into an international human culture.

● The Transformation of Quantity into Quality

Gradual changes which occur to an object will eventually reach a point of rupture, at which point the thing itself is abruptly transformed.

In politics, the British Labour Party provides an example. By moving its policies to the right, criticising its links with the unions and building closer alliances with the Liberal-Democrats, Blair has attempted to break the party's links with the organised working class movement. Each political change (e.g. the reduction of the block vote, the abolition of clause four) represents a quantitative step towards his goal. But a qualitative transformation, radically redefining the nature of the party, stands as yet in the future. It would involve severing the party's organised relationship with the trade unions and their millions of working class members. Quantity has not yet been transformed into quality.

● The Negation of the Negation:

As inner contradictions unfold, a change in the quality of an object takes place. Yet the original object is not simply obliterated by a completely separate thing which takes its place. A complex process occurs in which both the original object and the prevailing force that transforms it are themselves transcended and replaced by a higher unity incorporating aspects of both in a radically different relationship.

Thus capitalism can be overthrown by the working class. Yet in abolishing or negating capitalism, the working class will also negate and transform itself, by establishing a society without classes: socialism. The negation is itself negated.

Marxism, therefore, unashamedly seeks to apply a scientific methodology to politics and the science of social change. Of course, dialectical materialism has attracted bitter opposition from the defenders of capitalism, but the theory itself can account for this and regards it as inevitable for as long as society remains divided into classes. As Lenin wrote: "If the laws of geometry affected human interests, attempts would be made to refute them."

■ See page 14 and 15 for more on debates in science

FOOTNOTES

1 *The Development of the Monist View of History*, G. Plekhanov, (Moscow 1980), p11.

2 Engels, *Ludwig Feuerbach and the end of classical German Philosophy*, M&E selected works Moscow 1977, p353.

3 *Theses on Feuerbach*, K. Marx, Marx and Engels Selected Works, op. cit., p13.

4 Engels, *Letter to J. Bloch*, Selected Works, Vol 3, op.cit, p487

5 *Anti-Dühring*, Engels, (London 1934)

ROMANIA

March stops pit closures

Michael Gatter, in Vienna, analyses the recent miners' march in Romania

WHEN THE right-wing government of Romania, headed by Radu Vasile, announced a plan to close two mines in Petrosani in the Jiu Valley, with the loss of 3,000 jobs, thousands of miners struck and occupied their pits. They knew that these closures were only the thin end of the wedge. Altogether the government wanted to close 140 mines and end subsidies to the rest by next year.

The aim is to introduce capitalist management and profitability into what remains of the industry. Tens of thousands of miners would lose their jobs. This was only part of a wider austerity package designed to transform industry, closing 49 state-enterprises and restructuring the steel industry and threatening 140,000 jobs.

The consequences of this push to finally restore capitalism would be disastrous. Whole regions, completely dependent on one industrial sector, would become a social graveyard. Since 1996 – when the right wing government came to power – tens of thousands of miners have been sacked. In the Jiu Valley alone half of the workforce have lost their jobs.

The government's reasons for taking on the miners was not purely economic. To the restorers of capitalism they are "the enemy within", just as they were for Thatcher in Britain in 1984.

In 1990 and 1991, when most other workers in Eastern Europe were welcoming capitalism in the belief that it would mean investment, modernisation and high wages, Romanian miners were fighting the restoration of exploitation. When thousands of right-wing student demonstrators attempted a coup in 1990 the miners came, en masse, to Bucharest and crushed them. One year later they returned, forcing the pro-restorationist government of Petre Roman to resign.

On 4 January this year, many miners recognised that this could be the final and decisive battle for the future of the industry. They presented the government with a list of 30 demands including re-opening of the two mines in Pet-

rosani, a wage increase of 35%, the cancellation of the debts of the state-owned mines and compensation of US \$10,000 for sacked miners. Vasile ignored their demands, so after two weeks they started a march to Bucharest – 250 km away.

They were forced to march because interior minister Gavril Dejeu closed the rail link to Bucharest. Once the march started he sent thousands of paramilitary police, who built huge road blocks and attacked the miners with tear gas and helicopters. The miners swept aside the barricades. They organised 70 buses, 220 cars and several trucks and vans to outflank the concentration of police. They seized the high ground around the blockades and pelted the police with rocks. They took large numbers of police prisoner, disarming them and arming themselves with gas grenades and stun guns.

Along the way they won massive support from the local population for their struggle against the austerity programme. Rapidly the march doubled in size. The miners from Oltenia joined despite the fact that their leaders had done a deal with the government. Other workers across Romania supported the struggle. The Transylvanian miners threatened to launch their own march. In Brasov 8,000 workers from a truck factory demonstrated and announced their intention to march with the miners. And the union leaders of the dockers called for a general strike on 15 February.

It was the militant lead which the miners gave to the entire Romanian working class which forced the government to compromise, despite their threats to call a state of emergency and send the army against the miners. They had put on a massive show of force at Rimnicu Vilcea. But to order troops to fire upon their fellow citizens is not so easy – it is a fateful either/or. Either the troops obey orders and there is a bloodbath or they fraternise with the miners. In the former case it was more than possible this would have led to a spontaneous, even an insurrectionary, general strike. In the latter there would have been revolution in Romania.

That was why the wealthy prime min-



Militant action of miners forced concessions from government

ister, who had arrogantly rejected any meeting with the "convicted criminal" Miron Cozma – the miners' union leader – had to negotiate with the marchers. In the end the government had to promise to re-open the two mines in Petrosani and to increase wages by 30%. In return the miners ended their march on 22 January.

Not all the details of the compromise are known. It is reported that Cozma has agreed to draft a plan with management to make the mines profitable over five years. This could embroil the workers' leaders in deciding how many of their members to sack – a sure way to end the solidarity of the miners and their role as the vanguard of the entire

working class.

The intrinsic limits of trade unionism at a time of acute social crisis are revealed by these events – putting the interests of the employed before the unemployed and the region or section before the class. Yet it was as a vanguard of the class that the miners won a concession. If they continued their struggle against the whole austerity package they could clearly draw other sectors of workers into a general strike. But this is where the question of a political perspective and leadership – not made up of trade union bureaucrats but of a revolutionary workers' party – is decisive.

Cozma has been persecuted and imprisoned by the government for lead-

ing the struggles of the early nineties. But more recently he has negotiated deals which meant no resistance to redundancies. Moreover, his politics are counterposed to the interests of the miners and the Romanian working class. Some time ago he joined the semi-fascist "Greater Romania party" (PRM) and became its vice-president.

This party foments hatred against Jews, Gypsies and other non-Romanian peoples and runs an aggressive nationalistic campaign against the pro-western government. But the PRM does not have serious roots among the miners. Cozma even had to give up his post as vice president. While the miners' trust him because of the imprisonment and persecution he has suffered this trust is not unlimited. When Cozma started negotiations miners chanted "Cozma, remember: We are your power base!"

The coming months will see the dangerous logic of Cozma's "alternative restructuring package". Miners should reject any job losses. Even more dangerous is the road of Romanian chauvinism. Class solidarity is the key to victory. All leaders who stand in the way of this – including Cozma – must be replaced. Miners must take action in solidarity with other sectors of the working class who enter the arena of class struggle to fight the government's plans.

The entire Romanian working class faces a decisive year. The bourgeois government has launched a final push for to transform the economy into a capitalist one. The drastic economic crisis – GDP dropped by 6.6% in 1997 and 5% last year – and the huge interest rates the government has to pay this year will force it to press on.

While determined trade union resistance can hold up capitalist restoration the entire experience of Eastern Europe proves that this alone cannot stop it. The workers need a permanent political solution: a new revolution to install a government, based on the workers' own councils, that will reverse the restoration process and create a democratically planned and socially owned economy.

GREECE

Students occupy against Pasok attacks

We received this report on the mass school student struggle in Greece from the Communist League, Athens, on 23 January

Last year the Greek Minister of Education, G. Arsenis, passed a law which introduced major changes in secondary education:

- Students will now have to be tested on at least 8 subjects to pass the university entrance exams. Previously it was four subjects

- Students will have to be examined twice, once after they have finished the fifth class of secondary education and then again after they have finished the sixth. Unless they get very good marks in both examinations, they will not be able to go to university, but also they won't get a High School degree! In other words, a large number of students will not be able to graduate from secondary education

- Previously students had the right to sit the university entrance examinations as many times as they wanted; with the new system they don't have a second chance.

- In the past, students who attended classes in Technical Colleges (Comprehensive Schools in the British system) were given the opportunity to enter certain University departments. But according to the new law, they will have to work for 18 months before they are allowed to do this. Unemployment is high in Greece and if they do get jobs it will be for low wages.

One month before the Christmas holidays, the students started to occupy their schools. There were tremendous demonstrations not only in the centre of Athens but also in all other towns. About 1,200 schools were occupied.

The government thought that the movement would not last beyond Christmas. So they showed a "tolerant" and

"democratic" face. But this hope proved to be completely unfounded. The most serious part of the struggle started immediately after Christmas.

Week 1: The government tried to mobilise its supporters against the students. Parents, school masters and members of the local committees of Pasok, the government party, gathered in front of the schools and tried to re-occupy them.

On one occasion, the headmaster and a teacher chased a student who then fell down from the first floor of the school and broke his leg. The two of them refused to give the student first aid because he was one of the occupiers!

The government instructed the authorities to enter the occupied schools and arrest the militants. The students managed to occupy their schools again despite the repression and the threats.

On Friday 15 January, 40,000 students demonstrated in Athens and

mass demonstrations took place throughout Greece.

Week 2: More violence and more injuries occurred. But the number of occupied schools is still rising. On the 21 January demonstration the police used brutal violence against the demonstrators. Thirty three people were arrested. One of them was a member of our organisation. When he was arrested, together with two other students, a lawyer intervened and asked the police to set them free because they had not committed any unlawful action. The police arrested the lawyer too!

The Minister of Education claims that he will not quit. The violence and repression have not worked. The students say that they are not satisfied with minor changes. They will continue until the law is abolished. They say that they prefer to lose one year at school rather than lose their entire future.

It is extremely important for this

struggle to win to reverse the defeats the Pasok government has inflicted on the working class during its three years in office. If the students win, the morale of the working class will rise once again and the arrogance of this government will be shattered.

■ An Albanian student was arrested on the demonstration of 15 January. The 17-year-old Albanian, Arpan Perlala, was charged with using a petrol bomb against a policeman.

The charges are false. He was arrested 45 minutes after the incident as he was getting on a bus. He was beaten savagely by the police and is now suffering very serious health problems.

The racist thugs in the police have found the "perfect criminal": he is Albanian and also a militant student!

Details can be obtained from: The Communist League, P.O. Box 8361, Athens GR 10010

e-mail: ergatikix@yahoo.com

The latest Nato plan for peace in Kosovo will not stop the massacres like Recak, says *Colin Lloyd*

Nato's double dealing on Kosovo

IN JANUARY Serb police massacred 45 civilians in the Kosovar village of Recak, under the very eyes of the OSCE "peace monitors. Serbian president Slobodan Milosevic then further humiliated the "international community" by dragging the bodies of the murdered villagers out of the local mosque to prevent verification that they had been shot in the back from close range.

Robin Cook uttered dark threats of unnamed punishments for such crimes. Milosevic's reply was swift and brutal. He threatened to expel the head of the monitors for daring to condemn the massacre and then carried on with further massacres. In the Kosovan village of Rogova, a police operation against guerrillas from the Kosovo Liberation Army turned into a killing spree, with 23 bodies left in the burning village.

Cook's response to events over the last few weeks has been sickening. In parliament he condemned both the Serb police and the KLA guerrillas - equally. He promised to mete out military punishment against both sides. In fact, the Nato military contingency plan, should the Serbs or the Kosovars refuse the Contact Group plan, will hit the KLA harder than the Serb troops, because it will place NATO ground troops in the role of disarming the KLA and blocking its supply route through Albania.

Throughout the crisis, Robin Cook and Madeleine Albright have maintained that the growing demand of the Kosovo people for total independence from Yugoslavia, is "off the agenda". So much for the principles of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights - whose 50th anniversary was celebrated so recently. Instead of the right of nations to self-determination we find the right of all states to the inviolability of their existing borders.

The reason for the imperialist powers' hostility to the Kosovan people's fight for national self-determination is easy to recognise. NATO's leaders have seen Milosevic as a lynchpin of stability in the region. The godfather of the Bosnian genocide was looked to to guarantee "peace". Now all the imperialist foreign ministries are agreed that Kosovo's independence must be sacrificed to preserve their network of alliances.

Consequently two million people should be condemned to live under a

regime that denies them any access to state employment, education or an elected assembly and whose police murder them at will.

During the entire Balkans tragedy, the imperialists' hostility to movements of national independence has been in proportion to their mass character and their independence from recognised bourgeois politicians. That is why they welcomed Tudjman's Croatia but let Milosevic strangle multi-ethnic Bosnia. And that is why they don't want a free and independent Kosovo: it will be created through the struggles of peasants, workers and youth.

The "moderate" Kosovan leadership of Ibrahim Rugova has lost face with the mass of Kosovars because of its willingness to compromise over independence. What perturbs the imperialists



most is the fact that, in the KLA, they have no trusted bourgeois politicians to negotiate with. That is why Cook calls the KLA "terrorists".

In fact, even the imperialists' own think-tanks have to recognise the popular mass character of the KLA and the absence of any virulent "greater Albanian" nationalist project in its ranks. According to the International Crisis Group (headed by Northern Ireland peace guru Senator George Mitchell):

"In March 1998, the KLA numbered no more than a few hundred hard-core cadres, who were subsequently joined by thousands of armed villagers desperate to defend their homes against Serb attacks... The KLA is still made up largely of peasant farmers and ordinary Albanians who picked up guns to defend their homes and to get rid of Serb police control. While nearly all desire inde-

pendence from Serbia, most are not fighting for greater Albania."

Faced with an upsurge in the fighting and the threat of NATO or OSCE intervention what attitude should socialists take? The Federal Republic of Yugoslavia is the wrecked remnant of a former degenerate workers' state. The ethnic conflicts that have marked the process of capitalist restoration were not inevitable: they were the result of the US and German imperialists meddling, to speed up the process of the restoration of capitalism in the choice bits - Slovenia and Croatia. They were also the result of the inability of the working class to put forward a class solution to the crisis, and its capture by nationalist demagogues.

However socialists do not stand aside from the struggle against national oppression. We recognise as justified the struggle of an oppressed people against apartheid and the threat of genocide - and that is what the Kosovo Albanians face. We support their struggle for independence and fight for it with working class, socialist means - which includes a class appeal to the Serb conscripts doing the killing, and their families who want them brought back home.

But we stand four square with the KLA against the Serb forces, and with the Kosovo Albanians in their fight for independence. They are being denied even elementary forms of democracy and national self-determination.

But we say to the Kosovars: place no trust in NATO. It will intervene only to stop full independence. It may be that sections of the European and US ruling class are, even now, moving away from Cook's line to a position that recognises the need for "limited sovereignty" for Kosovo. But even then the imperialists will demand the right to determine the form of the new autonomous state, to train the police force, to run the banks and, as sure as night follows day, own the newly privatised industries and mines.

In this country we fight to stop military intervention: NATO planes pack a bigger punch than a KLA anti-tank grenade, but they come with a high political price tag for the Kosovo people: swapping servitude to Serbia for servitude to imperialism. Instead we fight for the labour movement to provide aid, solidarity and arms to the Kosovo resistance.

THE LEFT AND KOSOVO

The position of the British left on Kosovo's independence struggle is a disgrace

The Socialist Workers Party rightly rejects NATO intervention. But its line on Kosovo is riddled with evasion: "Of course in some circumstances socialists do take sides - for example in the Spanish Civil War... But today most conflicts are not that clear. For example we are fully against the oppression of the Kosovans by the Serbian regime. But the KLA has also carried out smaller scale killings of civilians simply because they are Serbs..."

Taking each conflict case by case only leads to confusion. There is no way forward for humanity in a world where imperialist powers can determine the fate of the rest of the world, or we choose between greater or lesser sets of oppressors... Our solution is to side with the oppressed against the oppressors but also to fight for a socialist future." (SW 30 January 1999)

This is not the Marxist method. Revolutionaries do not only take sides in revolutionary wars. In fact even the Spanish Civil War, while it opened the way for workers' revolution, was fought by "greater or lesser sets of oppressors": real revolutionaries recognised this by refusing to serve in the anti-fascist government because it remained a bourgeois government. Beyond this Marx, Lenin and Trotsky all supported national liberation struggles not led by the workers because only by being the most consistent democrats do we win workers away from nationalism and transform the struggle against national oppression into a socialist revolution.

What should the Kosovans do? Wait for a socialist future is the effective answer given by the SWP. As with Bosnia, where its opposition to oppression led it to remain neutral in the fight between multi-ethnic Bosnia and Serb genocide, the SWP has no practical answer to give the Kosovans.

What is to stop the SWP condemning these atrocities while supporting the liberation movement as a whole? Atrocities will always happen in civil wars: the point is that the Kosovo people are banned from the workforce, their universities are closed down, entire villages are destroyed, and they have no civil rights. That is not true for the minority of Serb inhabitants. There is no equality of oppression here. The Kosovans are an oppressed nationality. The Serbs are not.

However, while the SWP's position is bad, first prize for hypocrisy must go to Arthur Scargill's Socialist Labour Party. Writing in December's Socialist News, one Giles Barralet-Shorter revels in the failure of the KLA to "dent Belgrade's influence" and treats readers to a half-page eulogy to the fighting spirit of the Serb people under Milosevic. It repeats the charge of Bosnian and Kosovan "atrocities", implying however that on all such charges the Serb regime is innocent.

The SWP sides clearly with the oppressors. The SWP, in the name of Marxism, washes its hands of the struggle and looks to the socialist future. Only the revolutionaries stand with the Kosovan people against genocide.

Hostile press masks Unionist delays

THE BRITISH press is making a big fuss about the killing of IRA renegade and police informer Eamon Collins and a supposed wave of punishment beatings. William Hague claims there is a reign of terror in the Six Counties and is demanding that the release of IRA prisoners be halted until "murder, intimidation and punishment beatings stop".

In fact the number of punishment beatings recorded by the RUC has halved since the peace deal was signed, showing an increase only in January though hardly sufficient to amount to a reign of terror. Still any pretext is good enough for Trimble and the Unionists to call for the release of IRA prisoners to be halted.

They know that if this demand was met it would probably end the cease-fire and the peace process at a stroke. If Sinn Fein were to accept this it would

undoubtedly split and/or be denounced by the IRA.

The Unionists want to force the government to place new conditions on Sinn Fein's entry into the bipartisan administration - in order to keep it out altogether. They have refused to approve the final constitutional documents setting up the Assembly departments and the cross border bodies.

But Blair and Mowlam are realists. They know that yesterday's "terrorists" must be brought into the political process and this means Sinn Fein and the Army Council of the IRA. They are sensible enough to know that if the Unionists are allowed a veto on who the nationalist population elect to represent them - on top of their existing veto on the broad outlines of the settlement - then the "men of peace" in the Republican movement will never win

out and the Constitutional Nationalists will not be able to go any further in collaboration with Trimble.

Trimble's repeated delays and postponement of the deadlines will bring a real crunch in the entire process nearer - namely, when the Unionist-Orange Block try to force further major concessions out of the British, the Irish government and ultimately Sinn Fein and the IRA. This crunch could come in March as the new deadline for setting up an executive approaches.

The Unionists want reform of the RUC to be purely cosmetic and they want to start the process of arms surrender. They want the oppressed to surrender their weapons and to keep the oppressors fully armed.

Sinn Fein is left complaining about Unionist intransigence and British and Irish government perfidy in letting

them get away with their stalling tactics.

An *Phoblacht/Republican News* complains: "Nationalists who voted in favour of the Good Friday Agreement also attached major importance to the remit, strength and dynamic of the Ministerial Council and the All-Ireland implementation bodies. But as the negotiations concluded, even these bodies were greatly restricted in their functions... and David Trimble is still refusing to include Sinn Fein in the power-sharing government that is one of the pillars of the Good Friday Agreement." (21 January)

It concludes by lamely hoping that there will be an end to the old Unionist policies of exclusion. Some hope! In fact the Good Friday Agreement is showing its reactionary character even before the setting up of the executive and the cross-border bodies. It is clear that even

if Blair dare not capitulate totally to Trimble's blackmail, neither will he confront the Unionists' veto head on.

Workers Power has argued for over twenty years that there are only two factors that can crack and disintegrate the Orange state - mass struggle by the Irish people north and south and the unconditional withdrawal of British troops from the Six Counties. This would lead not to a bloodbath as some on the British left claim, but to the ignominious collapse of Orangeism.

That is why LRCI members in Ireland and Britain continue to fight for both objectives. Nationalists in the North will only check this latest Orange offensive by getting out of the council chambers and Stormont and rousing the mass of the population on the streets against all aspects of British and Orange rule, economic misery and exploitation

FRANCE

Fascists fall out

A special party conference in late January confirmed the split in Europe's largest far-right organisation, the Front National (FN) of France. Boycotted by the organisation's founder, Jean-Marie LePen, the conference voted overwhelmingly in favour of Bruno Megret as the FN's new president. Amid bitter mud-slinging, there are now two FNs. They are on a collision course in June's European parliamentary elections, and set for confrontation in the courts over the party's apparatus. *Serge Godard* in Paris examines the split and how the working class can benefit from it.

THE RELENTLESS struggle between Jean-Marie LePen and Bruno Megret for control of the Front National (FN) has delighted all those who have warned of the real menace posed by the FN. But those who hoped that in tearing themselves apart the FN would rid us of the strongest extreme right party in Europe, will be disappointed.

The struggle over the succession to LePen is about much more than a simple battle between individual egos. It is a clash between two rival projects to bring the FN to power. One, supported by LePen, seeks to gain power by building itself against the traditional parties of the right. The other, backed by Megret, depends on alliances with the mainstream right to gain power.

Megret's faction wants to win control of the FN for the ideological core of racists that was attracted by the party's electoral breakthrough in the 1980s. This support was codified in the strategy of the so-called "New Right", who initially infiltrated all parties where there was any resonance for their ideas. Their aim was to create a bridge between the republican right and the fascist front. After limited success in their attempts to build influence in the traditional right-wing parties, several dozen cadres entered the FN.

They moved to the FN as a result of the explosive growth in its electoral support, beginning with the 1983 municipal elections at Dreux. The FN had grouped different organisations, grouplets and tendencies of the extreme right since its inception in 1972: old ones from the pro-German Vichy regime and the white Algerians, new ones like New Order and Occident, and even catholic fundamentalists like Bernard Antony and the "solidarity networks". These strange bedfellows lay down beside the charismatic figure of LePen, who maintained equilibrium between the different tendencies with wild verbal and physical gestures.

Since the early 1980s, after the anti-working class policies of the Socialist Party/Communist Party government started to bite, LePen played his trump card of racist and chauvinist demagoguery. Against the background of rising unemployment, the FN's propaganda scapegoated immigrants as the cause of unemployment in its "big lie." The workers' movement failed to fight consistently against the far right's racist propaganda and the big lie entered the consciousness of millions among the middle class and even the working class.

This party without cadres or militants, became in the space of five years a mouth-watering target for adherents of the "new right", whose project aimed to equip the extreme right with an ideology. These people tried with minimal success in the 1970s to establish cultural dominance over the traditional right, its intellectuals and its media networks, through meetings, magazines and other means – forging useful contacts for later.

Breaking with an earlier tradition of the extreme right, which was historically linked with catholic, nationalist



Bruno Megret

and populist values, the current around Megret adheres to an ideology bearing a Nazi pedigree. It wants to be "European", elitist and pagan.

Bruno Megret is generally portrayed as an old leader of the Gaullist RPR, a member of its central committee and a former government minister. In fact, he had infiltrated the RPR, simply following the instruction to join the parties of the right. He was only a member of the RPR from 1979–81. After that he went back with his allies into the Republican Committees of Action until 1983, when he joined the FN.

The Group for Research and Study of European Civilisation (GRECE) and the anti-egalitarian Club Horloge, which Megret once ran, are the two best known groupings of the new right. The founder of GRECE, Pierre Vial, and Yvon Blot at Horloge, are still Megret's two principal advisers. The profile of those close to Megret leaves little doubt about the fascist nature of this wing of the FN.

Vial was a long standing militant of Young Nation, a group led by Pierre Sidos, which immediately after the Second World War openly proclaimed its adherence to the pro-Nazi Vichy regime. After a spell in a network which supported the OAS, Vial became secretary general of GRECE from 1978–84. Jean Claude Bardet, an old OAS member, who is today the director of *Identite*, the FN's theoretical review, for whom ethnicity and training are crucial to a superior humanity. Neither Megret nor any of his associates have broken with the theories of GRECE or Club Horloge which, with their vision of an ethnically pure Indo-European people whose identity must be defended, mirror those of Nazism.

Megret always remained true to his racist beliefs. He stated in 1991 that "true ecology, goes together with the defence

of identity. It makes the preservation of the ethnic, cultural and national background of our people essential." Megret, as recently as 1996, promoted the idea of a fixed French identity dating from neolithic times.

Since their arrival in the FN, Megret and his collaborators have made their ideological influence felt. For example in 1985, they added to the programme a call for positive discrimination for French people in employment practices that was simply a copy of a Club Horloge document. The FN is now seeking to implement this demand where it holds power at a local level. The "51 points" of the party's 1992 economic and social programme chart the evolution of official economic policy from neo-liberalism towards Nazi-influenced corporatism.

For nearly a decade LePen had relied on Megret and his friends, offering them posts in the apparatus. Alongside the ideological successes he has achieved, Megret has restructured the party, constructing a network of militants and cadres. He is the FN's real kingpin, and directs all its electoral campaigns. For all that, Megret did not seriously threaten LePen's position for several years. Despite the Megret faction's weight, both ideological and in the apparatus, it was the fascists around LePen who kept their hands firmly on the decision-making process.

Things changed in 1994, when Megret began to push himself as LePen's successor. He announced that the ninth congress in 1994 would be one of "change". For the first time, tendencies formed around the different slates for the central committee. And LePen, who had denounced these manoeuvres, found it necessary to conceal the failure of one of his protégés in the elections.

From then on a hidden war became institutionalised inside the FN between

the two factions: LePen's, led by the late Bruno Gollnisch, and Megret's. To counter Megret's ambitions a type of dual power was enforced with Gollnisch as vice-president and Megret as "general delegate". Gollnisch's supporters, led by Samuel Marechal, engineered the turn towards "National Socialism" in 1996, summed up in the slogan "neither left nor right, but French". This marked a short-term reverse for the Megret faction, but it was they who ultimately benefited from this turn.

During the November 1996 public sector strike wave LePen denounced the "suicidal actions of irresponsible unions" and called for an end to strikes. But Megret declared in February 1996 that the FN "understood perfectly and supported this current of discontent".

Next came efforts to build up FN unions, especially among transport workers and the police, together with Megret's attempts to win discontented workers by distributing FN propaganda at the Moulinex factory at Mamers.

With electoral success in the local councils in 1995, Megret's strategy received a boost, reinforced by his own election victory at Vitrolles in 1997. The FN congress at Strasbourg in March 1997 endorsed Megret and his faction, who have since held more than half the seats on the central committee and 15 out of the political bureau's 40 posts.

Megret's immediate strategy – the electoral alliance with the right – proved successful in the regional elections of 1998. The mainstream right wing parties – UDF and RPR – went into crisis.

Politically then the split in the FN is about two ways for fascism to come to power. LePen advocated the slogan of "neither right nor left", ready to profit in the event of a major crisis for the Fifth Republic, with the bourgeoisie needing a "strong man" to re-establish order.

Megret, however, wanted to engage the right wing, forcing it into a pact with the FN so that the mainstream right would become the camouflage and source of sustenance for the FN. Megret's aim is to found a new party, with the FN at its nucleus, enabling it to compete for power directly with the RPR and the UDF.

The FN has been built as a fascist front: a fascist core, surrounded by powerful ideological right wing currents who do not yet embrace the full fascist solution of crushing the working class. The question of whether the fascist component of the party will be weakened through the alliance with the traditional republican right remains unanswered.

The case of the Italian MSI, which has since become the National Alliance and has publicly renounced its fascist past, indicates that the evolution could be towards an extremely reactionary but non-fascist party. But the increased probability of a crisis of the whole political system of the Fifth Republic, along with intensifying class struggle on the industrial front, might encourage the opposite outcome.

Sensing the danger of support for Megret as his successor, LePen decided to launch a counter-offensive before completely losing control of the apparatus.

Despite the vote at the 24 January special congress it remains difficult to forecast the winner in the battle between LePen and Megret – if, in fact, there is a winner. LePen has the obvious advantage of being the standard-bearer for all strands of fascists and racists. He remains the charismatic leader and media performer. Even so, Megret does command very substantial support, especially among the party's cadres, its MPs and within the central committee.

The strengths and weaknesses of the two camps are largely complementary. At first, a portion of the FN's electorate will disperse, weakening each camp. This is the scenario envisaged by the right-wing former justice minister, Charles Pasqua, who has launched a European election list with the hope of capturing part of this vote.

Certainly, this is no time for the left to drop its guard. Indeed, quite the opposite as racist poison runs deep in French political life. It is not about to disappear simply because of a split in the FN.

Time and again sizeable fascist organisations have been pushed back to the realm of tiny grouplets yet each time they have managed to profit from capitalist decline and the misery it inflicts to rise phoenix-like from the ashes. Only conscious and determined working class action – combining the struggle to drive the fascists off the streets with the fight for a working class answer that the socialist and communist parties cannot provide – can once and for all destroy fascist ideology and sweep away the Megrets and the Le Pens before they make us relive the historic tragedies upon which their power fantasies are based.

Masses wage war on Mugabe

A fresh round of price increases for basic foodstuffs, coupled with growing rumours of coup plots within the army, look set to re-ignite Zimbabwe in the coming months. *Geraldine Drayton reports.*

IN NOVEMBER 1998, president Robert Mugabe of Zimbabwe was rocked by two general strikes, food riots, peasant land seizures and army mutinies. If Mugabe and his friends in the ruling ZANU-PF party thought that sending 11,000 Zimbabwean troops to aid Laurent Kabila's embattled regime in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) would divert mass anger away from the government, they were wrong. Instead, the war focused discontent like never before.

Seventy five per cent of the population blame the war – and consequently, Mugabe – for the country's economic woes. As one youth's banner put it on a recent demonstration: "Mugabe you are helping Kabila in his own war, now we have started our war with you".

The Congo war did not cause the economic crisis, it merely deepened it. The 1990s have seen the disappearance of most of the gains of the national liberation struggle that brought independence to Zimbabwe in 1979.

The state-run sector is crippled by corruption and nepotism with cotton mills, for example, still using machinery from the 1950s. In a bid to compete on the world markets, the Zimbabwean dollar was devalued by 60 per cent last year. This has unleashed inflation (approaching 40 per cent) as expensive imports hit the market. Zimbabwe's trade deficit is now bigger than

Thailand's was just before its economy crashed last year.

The effect of this on workers' living standards has been enormous. Official unemployment stands at an incredible 50 per cent, while thousands of civil servants and state workers are regularly not paid their wages. Real wages are, on average, 30 per cent below their 1990 level. Seventy per cent of the population survive below the poverty line. The trigger for November's strikes was a series of price rises on basic goods and services – transport fares doubled, fuel up by 67 per cent, basic foodstuffs up 20 per cent.

Now the government has announced a new round of price increases: the staple foods – mealie-meal, bread, cooking oil and sugar – are all set to rise by a further 20 per cent in mid-February. Soft drinks and beef prices have already risen by one-third this year.

The majority of Zimbabwe's 12 million people live on the land, but the peasantry is being squeezed just as much as the working class. Four thousand white farmers own a third of all the farmland. Seven million black peasants have to scratch a living on the remainder. Despite land hunger being one of the driving factors in the liberation struggle and Mugabe's repeated promises of reform, little has changed in the countryside.

The white farmers have deliberate-

ly under-used the land: tobacco sales, Zimbabwe's key export, were down 37 per cent last year. Despite this blatant sabotage, the police and army continue to protect the big farms from spontaneous land seizures. For all his bluster, Mugabe has always sided with the capitalist farmers.

Mugabe and ZANU-PF hoped that a short, victorious war in the DRC would rebuild the government's prestige and popularity. Second, they hoped to be rewarded by Kabila in the form of contracts and key positions in the DRC's potentially lucrative copper and diamond mines. Billy Rantenbach, a ZANU-PF member, was recently appointed executive chairman of Gecamines, Congo's most important copper mining company.

On both accounts, Mugabe badly miscalculated. Rumours of mutinies are widespread. Two journalists reported last month that 23 army officers were plotting a coup. The government arrested and tortured the journalists, in order to try and extract their sources from them.

Added to this, the financial cost of the war is escalating at US\$1 million per day. Compared to the dubious prize of favourable contracts with the DRC's dilapidated mining industry, the outlay is costly – economically and politically.

What should workers, rank and file

soldiers and landless peasants do in this situation?

Clearly, the general strikes need to be relaunched. The demands of last November's strikes were:

- Lower prices, higher wages
- Slash military spending on the DRC war
- Reschedule the national debt
- Freedom of information
- For a new constitution in 1999.

The political nature of the strikes needs to be strengthened; the movement needs to focus on driving Mugabe and ZANU-PF from office and bringing a workers' and peasants' government to power.

With inflation soaring there should be a sliding scale of wages – with an automatic 1 per cent increase for every 1 per cent rise in inflation. Pricing committees from the trade unions and workers' districts need to monitor shop prices, not government officials who will seek to cheat the workers out of their wages.

Mugabe should be forced to withdraw troops from the DRC immediately. Workers and peasants should form direct links with rank and file soldiers, supporting their democratic rights and encouraging mutinies. An officers' coup would not guarantee an end to the war, far less civilian rule. Workers should demand the replacement of the army with an armed population and workers'

and peasants' defence guards, answerable to popular assemblies.

The national debt should be renounced, not rescheduled. All the multinational companies should be nationalised under workers' control with no compensation. Likewise, the big farms should be nationalised. Those peasants who want individual parcels of land should be given the means to farm them, while the tobacco plantations should be run under the control of agricultural workers collectively.

Workers should demand the convening of a sovereign constituent assembly, elected by all over 16 years of age. To fight for this, workers', soldiers' and peasants' councils will need to be built out of the committees organising the strikes, mutinies and land grabs. In the struggle such organisations can become the basis of an alternative, workers' state.

The immediate demands of the impoverished Zimbabwean masses are for bread, peace and land. When the Russian workers and peasants faced a ruling class which was incapable of delivering these basic necessities in 1917, they rallied to the Bolshevik Party and overthrew the capitalist system. The burning task for the Zimbabwean workers is to build their own revolutionary party that can lead a socialist revolution and spread the fight to form a socialist federation of southern Africa.

Nigeria fails at peace-keeping

The war in Sierra Leone has been portrayed as a modern-day "Apocalypse Now", with boy soldiers senselessly murdering, and the west powerless to stop the slaughter. But, writes *Keith Spencer*, imperialism has a serious stake in the outcome.

GENERAL ABSALAAMI Abubaker was heralded as the man to lead Nigeria's transition to democracy. But he is acting increasingly like all his military predecessors. A stage-managed election process culminates this month with elections to the national State Assembly and to the office of president.

Also reminiscent of previous military governments is Nigeria's continuing involvement in Sierra Leone's civil war. "The high death toll among Nigerian soldiers in Sierra Leone has been compared to America's misadventure in Vietnam", says the Nigerian magazine Tempo. Other commentators say it has been "the greatest humiliation since the civil war for the Nigerian Armed Forces".

More than 700 Nigerian soldiers were killed in the January fighting in Sierra Leone. Burials have been taking place in swamps, without units present, to avoid lowering the morale of the troops. Within Nigeria, the war has been opposed by pro-democracy activists: Chief Gani Fawehimi, leader of the Joint Action Committee of Nigeria, has called on the government to withdraw the troops by the end of February or face "mass action".

Meanwhile, Britain has applauded the Nigerian troops. Experienced in defending their autocratic rule against democracy movements, and in using the

weapons sold by British multinationals against their own people, the Nigerian military has now been asked to bring "democracy" to another country by Foreign Secretary Robin Cook.

The British media portrays the Sierra Leone civil war as a journey to the heart of darkness. The implication is that if Africans cannot govern themselves, then the west must utilise the "orderly" African nations – whether democratic or not – as a praetorian guard against chaos on the continent.

In fact, while the insurgent Revolutionary United Front (RUF) does represent forces just as reactionary as the Sierra Leone government, the fault for the chaos lies not with the African peoples but with the west, which has systematically ripped off the continent, destroying the very foundations of civil society.

The rebel RUF entered the capital of Freetown early in January. They called for the release from prison of their leader, Foday Sankoh, and for the RUF to be included in any government. The rebels were able to surprise the troops of the West African peacekeeping force, Ecomog, composed mainly of Nigerian troops and soldiers from Ghana, Guinea and Mali, and storm the presidential palace.

The RUF on this occasion was joined by significant sections of the Sierra

Leonean army (the AFRC) who supplied details of Ecomog troop positions and even infiltrated the ranks of the Nigerian army. At first, the rebels and the AFRC had a number of successes, pushing back the Ecomog forces and carrying out a series of ambushes that demoralised the Nigerian army. Since the RUF's early successes, however, Ecomog has been reinforced and now has 15,000 troops in Sierra Leone. They have pushed the rebels out of Freetown and from Lungi International airport.

The civil war in Sierra Leone started as an offshoot of neighbouring Liberia's civil war. In the early 1990s, Charles Taylor, who led a guerrilla army in Liberia, sent the RUF (who then numbered a few hundred) into Sierra Leone to tie down Ecomog troops. When Taylor was elected president in Liberia he forced the RUF to agree a settlement in Sierra Leone.

Elections were held and Ahmed Tejan Kabbah was elected president. Overthrown by the military in May 1997, Kabbah was restored to power in March 1998 by Ecomog and loyal troops called Kamijors. He was also able to rely on the UK-based mercenary outfit, Sandline International, and the British ambassador to Sierra Leone.

The RUF and its allies in the Sierra Leonean army have again been backed by Charles Taylor's regime in Liberia.

Taylor has been criticised by both Ghana and Nigeria for backing the RUF while supposedly supporting the aims of Ecomog. Furthermore, Nigerian sources claim that Sandline International has been hedging its bets by supplying the rebels and allowing them to use its own private airstrip.

And, while Robin Cook has been paying tribute to the dead Nigerian soldiers on BBC Radio Four, the British government has been supplying trucks, RAF transport planes and offers of troop transports to airlift more soldiers into Sierra Leone from Mali and Ghana. Britain has spent £30 million on Sierra Leone since Kabbah returned to power.

At stake for Labour is Robin Cook's "ethical" foreign policy. Cook wants to be seen to be doing something to bring democracy back to Sierra Leone. Peace in that country would also help stabilise West Africa and stop any bids for regional leadership by Liberia and its backers, Burkina Faso and Libya.

For the Nigerian military the reputation of its army is at stake. What interested the late Nigerian dictator, Sani Abacha, and still interests the Nigerian army, Liberia, Sandline International and several multinational corporations about Sierra Leone is its diamond and gold mines. It is one of the world's richest areas for gold and diamonds. So who-

ever backs the government, whatever government, can become very, very rich.

For the masses there is only terror and torture, starvation and disease.

Currently, there are 30,000 people seeking safety in Freetown's football stadium. Hospitals ran out of medicine by mid-January. People who fled Freetown have returned to find their houses destroyed and their families, friends and relatives killed, maimed or tortured.

There is nothing progressive in the RUF's war. The masses of Sierra Leone should put no faith in either the government or the RUF and its military allies. The Nigerian workers need to demand that Ecomog forces get out of Sierra Leone. The idea of the brutally anti-democratic Nigerian military imposing democracy on a country while oppressing its own people is obscene.

It's time that the generals in West Africa were kicked out and their multinational backers slung out of the continent. Until the working class, urban poor and impoverished peasants in central Africa organise independently of the military opposition movements – whatever left-wing and anti-imperialist rhetoric they come out with – every rising runs the risk of unleashing social breakdown or of installing a new dictator, accountable to no-one and inevitably destined to become fat on imperialist bribes.

A return to the progr

The Socialist Workers Party claim that their new Action Programme is based upon Trotsky's 1938 *Transitional Programme*, as well as his earlier *Action Programme for France*. But, argues Jenny Scott, the real model for the new programme is the centrist confusion of post-war Trotskyism.

IN RECENT MONTHS the Socialist Workers Party's (SWP) turn to programme has provoked debate both within the organisation and inside many trade union branches. *Workers Power* supporters have sought to amend the "Action Programme" proposed by the SWP to transform it from one limited to reforms into a revolutionary action programme.

Revolutionary demands can be made relevant to the immediate struggles of workers if they have a transitional content – demands starting from the needs of the day but also providing a bridge from an immediate struggle to the fight for revolution and a socialist society.

A system of transitional demands exists in Marx's Communist Manifesto. The Communist International talked of the need for such a system of demands but a rounded programme was not codified until 1938. That year, the founding conference of the Fourth International adopted *The death agony of capitalism and the tasks of the Fourth International* – popularly known as the *Transitional Programme*. Written by Trotsky, this systematised and generalised the transitional method

After decades of ignoring and even disparaging the *Transitional Programme*, suddenly SWP leaders have started to praise it and its predecessors. John Rees claimed Trotsky as the inspirer of the SWP's Action Programme:

"The political origin of the Action Programme lies in Trotsky's formulation of an action programme for France in 1934 and his generalisation of this approach in the *Transitional Programme* in 1938." (*Socialist Review*, January 1999)

In an earlier article, Alex Callinicos located its origins in the Communist International's 1921 *Theses on Tactics*, which called for "a programme that bridged the old minimum and maximum programmes" ("World capitalism at the abyss", *International Socialism* No. 81)

This is a sharp break with the "orthodoxy" of the party's founder, Tony Cliff. His split from the Fourth International in the late 1940s was over the class character of the USSR. He later went on to reject virtually the whole of Trotsky's political legacy, including the *Transitional Programme*.

At his crudest, Cliff attacked the very idea of a programme. This was summed up in his oft repeated remark that when somebody was trying to kill you, you didn't need a picture of a gun (a programme), but a real gun (the spontaneous class struggle plus the party).

Cliff's objection to the *Transitional Programme*, and transitional demands generally, is that the programme's economic demands, like the call for a sliding scale of wages, only "fitted a situation of general crisis, of capitalism in deep slump" while other demands, like the call for workers' defence guards, "did not fit a non-revolutionary situation" (these quotes are from the two pages Cliff devotes to the *Transitional Programme* in his 400 page book on Trotsky, 1927-40!).

There is a get-out-clause, which allows for the raising of such demands in "appropriate circumstances". Nevertheless, the actual rejection of the transitional method by Cliff was revealed by his real practice whenever the SWP analysed a revolutionary situation or a deep crisis.

As recently as last autumn Cliff's article (*International Socialism* No. 80) on the lessons of Indonesia repeats what was, in reality, his alternative to a programme – a call to "build the party" as the organisational mechanism for generalising the spontaneous struggle, not as a leadership offering a programmatic way forward. Not a single transitional demand features – despite a revolutionary situation. Cliff's "programme" was to call for a militant fight for minimum demands and combine that with an abstract call for socialism: in other words, a minimum/maximum programme.

Some SWP leaders, taking their cue from Cliff's aversion to the *Transitional Programme*, sought to theorise the party's rejection of it. Duncan Hallas, in his 1979 book, *Trotsky's Marxism*,

criticised Trotsky's definition of transitional demands as a bridge between today's consciousness and struggles and the socialist revolution as "exacting specifications" and argued: "If at a given time 'today's consciousness of wide layers' is decidedly non-revolutionary, then it will not be transformed by slogans. Changes in actual conditions are needed."

The idea that the programme as a totality will at first be understood by a militant minority, a vanguard; that these militants will utilise the demands to generate struggles and build forms of organisation which will raise the consciousness of those who participate in them; that in this way the "decidedly non-revolutionary consciousness" will change: all of this is lost on Hallas: "The emphasis [Trotsky] gave to this matter was, however, excessive and encouraged the belief that 'demands' have some value independently of revolutionary organisation in the working class."

To counterpose "revolutionary organisation" to "demands" is senseless. Without an overall strategy (the goal and the intermediate objectives, demands, tactics and forms of organisation for the working class to achieve it) how can you tell whether an organisation is revolutionary or not? There have been plenty which claimed to be but whose strategy led to disaster and defeat – the German Communist Party in 1933 and the POUM in Spain in 1937.

Nor is it correct to counterpose militant action to a programme. Workers around the world, from Indonesia to Romania, are not slow in taking action in crisis situations. This has been the case throughout the twentieth century but wherever workers have tied their action to the wrong programme – installing a class collaborationist or a bourgeois nationalist government for example – their magnificent struggles have ended in defeat.

It is obviously false to fetishise a programme, denigrating either the spontaneous struggles of the workers or the need for a revolutionary party. But it is equally false to believe that action, or party organisation in and of themselves, are sufficient to transform consciousness. A party armed with a programme – one able to apply this programme creatively within the spontaneous class struggle and turn the workers' spontaneous militancy into a conscious struggle against capitalism – was what Lenin and Trotsky strove to build.

The orthodox SWP view of programme was blind to this. It was rooted in its failure to break with the centrism that corroded the ranks of Trotskyism during the years 1948 to 1953.

The SWP can claim that their analysis of the impending world economic crisis and the ensuing political turmoil validates their recent adoption of an Action Programme that they regard as transitional. After all, they have said that such a programme fits periods of "deep slump".

For revolutionaries who recognise the SWP's importance on the British left the key question is: does the current turn to programme mark a break from this centrist tradition? On current evidence it does not. It reflects one facet of degenerate Trotskyism's legacy – cherry picking the *Transitional Programme* for relevant demands but robbing them of their revolutionary content.

This is clear from both Callinicos' and Rees' contributions. Callinicos, mindful of SWP orthodoxy, avoids the *Transitional Programme*, preferring the *Theses on Tactics* of the Communist International as his reference point. Rees opts for a direct comparison between the SWP's Action Programme and Trotsky's key texts. But both Rees and Callinicos are wrong.

Callinicos quotes the *Theses on Tactics*, which were a precursor of the *Transitional Programme*, at some length, including the following:

"In place of the minimum programme of the reformists and centrists, the Communist International puts the struggle for the concrete needs of the proletariat, for a system of demands which in their totality disintegrate the power of

the bourgeoisie, organise the proletariat, represent stages in the struggle for the proletarian dictatorship, and each of which expresses in itself needs of the broadest masses, even if the masses are not consciously in favour of the proletarian dictatorship."

This could not be clearer – it refers to a system of demands, as representing stages in the struggle for the proletarian dictatorship (i.e. the creation of a workers' state) and of organising the masses for struggle. To do this the demands must have a capacity to break up the economic and political power of the bourgeoisie – from the factory and the local community to the state power.

Thus there is the need to transform the call for nationalisation – which in the hands of the reformists means compensation to the owners, capitalist management, cheap inputs for the private capitalists – into a step towards the expropriation of the whole capitalist class and the preparation of workers to manage the entire economy. That is why our programme calls for no compensation and for workers' control, because without these we simply socialise the losses of the former owners and replace private with state capitalism.

In a political struggle, such as against the anti-union laws, we have to fight for forms of action and organisation adequate to a conflict with the state when it enforces these laws. Thus workers' defence guards are needed to protect picket lines and threatened union property, strike committees elected at mass meetings are necessary to break the stranglehold of the union bureaucracy.

The SWP claim these demands are too advanced, and don't fit. Yet it is clear that such demands can be immediate ones – ask the Liverpool dockers, who struggled for more than two years and were up against the police, if they needed defence guards and you will only get one answer: too right! Ask the militants at the Longbridge car plant if demands for control over work-speed, conditions and the supervisory regime are relevant in the face of the BMW productivity offensive and you will get the same answer.

These demands are transitional because they challenge either the monopoly of power of the bosses state or the sacred rights of private property. They are revolutionary because they lay the basis for the sort of economic regime that workers need – expropriation of the bosses and control of production – and the sort of state they need, one directly run and defended by the workers' own democratic organisations.

Winning workers to fight for one or more of these demands, combined with the specific immediate objectives from which the struggle erupted, is crucial. But the demands taken together as a strategy are essential in mobilising, generalising and advancing the struggle towards a revolutionary outcome to the crisis. Thus the Action Programme, if it is to be truly transitional and revolutionary must not shy away from the inevitable conclusion – it is necessary for the working class to take state power into its own hands.

However, Callinicos consciously guts the SWP's Action Programme of such a revolutionary transitional content – in contradiction to his earlier quote from the Communist International. He argues instead:

"None of these measures [the demands of the SWP programme] explicitly challenge the capitalist system. Many are advocated by reformists and Keynesians. But, though they do not directly attack private property the logic of workers struggling for and implementing them would undermine it [capitalism]". (ISJ 81)

If the logic of the struggle does this, irrespective of whether or not the demands are revolutionary, then it doesn't really matter how minimal the demands of a programme are: capitalism

The logic is clear. Reforms are impossible under a crisis-wracked capitalism, therefore the fight for reforms becomes anti-capitalist

they challenge either the monopoly of power of the bosses state or the sacred rights of private property. They are revolutionary because they lay the basis for the sort of economic regime that workers

programme of reformism

would be overthrown.

This is not revolutionary Marxism. It is centrism. It is a programmatic method that flatly contradicts the one advocated by Trotsky or the Communist International.

And this is why the SWP can now sign a joint reformist programme with people like Militant Labour and Socialist Outlook who have peddled the confusion for decades as the basis for the United Socialists' election campaign in London for June's European elections. It is a programme of limited reforms offered as an alternative to the Euroland bosses' drive towards a united capitalist Europe.

John Rees situates his "rediscovery" of the *Transitional Programme* in the context of the impending world crisis. He criticises socialists who repeated the programme in a "timeless fashion" in the 1960s and 1970s arguing that "context is the important factor here".

But if context is decisive then surely the *Transitional Programme* was relevant in: May 1968 in France – 10 million on strike, a physical battle for the streets of Paris; Derry 1969 – a defensive rising by the entire nationalist population of the city against loyalist pogroms; or the 1972-74 strike wave in Britain – with a near general strike against anti-union laws, and the battle of Saltley gates during the 1984-5 miners' strike. Do the SWP expect struggles qualitatively bigger than these today – ones which justify transitional demands now but not then?

Rees sells the programme to the SWP membership as something that will make them popular with reformist workers because it is, essentially, a list of reforms, "the 'common sense' response of every militant and activist in the movement". It is rooted in, rather than a tran-

scendence of, the existing reformist consciousness of thousands of workers.

At the same time, however, he claims that the SWP's Action Programme is "a starting point both to agitation and action, and towards revolutionary politics as a whole". To prove this Rees reduces transitional demands to one definition: "it is rooted in the existing consciousness of the working class but it is incompatible with capitalism". Thus, the "right to work" in conditions of capitalist crisis, is a transitional demand because capitalism cannot grant it.

The logic is clear. Reforms are impossible under a crisis-racked capitalism, therefore the fight for reforms becomes anti-capitalist – after all, the "right to work" is not qualitatively different from the "full employment" slogan of John Smith's Labour Party.

Instead of being a bridge between today's struggles and the socialist revolution – the goal of the system of demands in the Transitional Programme – the SWP's Action Programme becomes "a bridge between socialists and the hundreds of thousands of workers who know there must be an answer to the crisis but do not know what it is".

If you set off with the view that you will limit yourself strictly to demands that can, theoretically, be met under capitalism but which the bosses cannot afford today (which is exactly what the SWP's list of demands are), then at a certain point, when measures are needed which openly contradict capitalism, you will stop. Or at least you will have prepared neither yourselves nor your mass support for going further.

This is dangerous because when the bosses are really frightened of losing their power and their property, in a revolutionary situation, then

they will grant reforms they "cannot afford" – even gigantic ones. Why? To demobilise the movement, knowing that they can claw them back once this is achieved.

In the final analysis a programme which consists only of reforms and dares not mention the struggle for power or a workers' government will train not revolutionary cadres but reformist ones.

In contrast to this the *Transitional Programme* necessitates a method of organising the day to day struggle in a manner which prepares the transition to the open struggle for power and the victory of the socialist revolution. If the SWP want to return to Trotsky, they should consider both his and the entire revolutionary tradition's view of transitional demands. For Engels, as early as 1847, particular demands that attacked private property were possible, provided they were tied to the revolutionary goal:

"They are possible as preparatory steps, temporary transitional stages towards the abolition of private property, but not in any other way." (M&E Collected Works, Vol. 6, p295)

That is, they were not calls for reforms separate from the struggle for revolution. Likewise, Lenin, on the eve of the Russian Revolution, formulated a clear revolutionary transitional approach in his pamphlet, *The Impending Catastrophe and How to Combat it*. After calling for demands the SWP completely ignore – such as the abolition of business secrecy – Lenin insists the question is not one of individual reforms:

"In point of fact the whole question boils down to who controls whom, i.e. which class is in control and which is being controlled... We must resolutely and irrevocably, not fearing to break with the old, not fearing to boldly build the new, pass to control over the landowners and capi-

talists by the workers and peasants."

Of course, Britain isn't gripped by a revolutionary crisis. But Lenin's essential point – fighting for the new as part of the transition – holds good.

And while Trotsky did say that transitional demands were incompatible with capitalism, he was also explicit that the fight for the system of transitional demands was a means of mobilising workers for revolutionary struggle. This was neither a trick, nor simply a call for a militant fight for reforms.

The open struggle for such demands by millions would make the question of power the order of the day. The transition he calls for goes from fighting job closures to fighting for workers' control, and from that to the fight for a workers' government, based on workers' councils and a workers' militia, which will transform the entire economic order:

"Only a general revolutionary upsurge of the proletariat can place the complete expropriation of the bourgeoisie on the order of the day. The task of transitional demands is to prepare the proletariat to solve this problem."

This is what the Transitional Programme and the Action Programme for France both did. There is no comparison between them and the SWP's list of eight reforms: **both of these programmes contained open demands for working class power.** The SWP's doesn't even hint at it.

However, the fact that the SWP itself is making such comparison offers the hope that they are at least serious about rooting their programme in the revolutionary tradition. Through discussions and practical collaboration in the class struggle, we will continue to seek to persuade them to go much, much further than they have so far.

Cliff's false theory of Trotskyism

John Mckee reviews *Trotskyism after Trotsky: the origins of the International Socialists*, by Tony Cliff

THIS SHORT book is designed to show how Tony Cliff creatively developed the programme of Trotskyism after 1945.

Cliff argues that Trotsky's perspectives were falsified in four areas: he underestimated the strength of Stalinism; thought capitalism was in "a terminal crisis"; believed, because of his theory of permanent revolution, that the working class in the semi-colonial world would lead the struggle for national liberation; and thought Stalinism and reformism would be swept aside as the masses rallied to the revolutionary Fourth International.

Cliff argues that Trotsky believed that Stalinism would either collapse during a long war with Germany, overthrown by a "bourgeois Bonapartist counter revolution" or be rescued by a victorious proletarian revolution in the west. Neither happened and Stalinism emerged from the war greatly strengthened. This led Cliff, in the late 1940s, to develop the theory of state capitalism: a new form of capitalism had emerged in Russia in the late 1920s.

As we have shown elsewhere (See "State Capitalism: Call that socialism?" in *The Politics of the SWP: a Trotskyist Critique*, Workers Power) Cliff could only develop his new analysis of Russia by scrambling Marxist political economy:

"It was during the first Five Year Plan that the mode of production in the USSR turned capitalist. Now for the first time the bureaucracy sought to create a proletariat and accumulate capital rapidly."

To prove that the USSR became capitalist Cliff had to show that the accumulation being carried out between 1929-32 was the accumulation of commodities, items to be bought and sold on the market. But, the tractors, machine tools and so on, were not exchanged on the market but transferred according to a plan, albeit a bureaucratic one.

To get round this flaw in his analysis, Cliff had to argue that although there was no competition within the Soviet Union nor competition with the capitalist bloc, military competition played the role of commodity exchange. Tanks, guns, nuclear warheads, produced primarily as use-values, had to be seen as "acting as" exchange values. Once again Marxist categories were torn up to suit Cliff's theory.

This revision of Marxist theory led directly to another one – the Permanent Arms Economy (PAE). In the late 1950s the Socialist Review Group, forerunner of the SWP, recognised that capitalism had entered a new period of growth.

Cliff argued, and he repeats it in this book, that the major reason for the stability of the world economy during this period was the impact of arms expenditure: "The gigantic military expenditures after the war affected the tendency to crisis. Now the armaments economy had a very great influence on the level of popular purchasing power, the level of real capital accumulation, and the amount of goods seeking a market."

Such a view is based on an erroneous "underconsumptionist" view of the causes of crisis. Cliff's 1950s articles were almost entirely informed by the view that capitalist crisis was caused by a lack of demand and purchasing power and that massive arms expenditure stimulated the economy in a Keynesian fashion.

The PAE involved more than a misunderstanding of Marxist crisis theory. Michael Kidron, who is not mentioned in the book, was central to developing this theory and explicitly drew out its consequences with regards to Lenin's theory of imperialism:

"[Lenin's theory] must be rejected on at least on four counts: finance capital is not nearly as important for and within the system as it was; the export of capital is no longer of great importance to the system; political control, in

the direct sense meant by Lenin, is rapidly becoming dated; and finally, resulting from these, we don't have imperialism but we still have capitalism... If anything it is the permanent war and arms economy that are 'the highest stage of capitalism.'" (*ISJ* 20 Spring 1965)

This rejection of Lenin's theory of imperialism was linked to Cliff's attack on Trotsky's theory of permanent revolution.

Trotsky argued that in the epoch of imperialism the bourgeoisie would always play a counter-revolutionary role in the semi-colonial nations. Only the developing working class, leading the poor peasantry, would be able to complete the fight for democracy, national independence and agrarian revolution and only through proletarian revolution and the establishment of a workers' state, as in Russia in 1917.

In an article in 1963, entitled "Deflected Permanent Revolution", Cliff declared that on examining permanent revolution in the light of events, such as China and Cuba, "we shall be compelled to reject large parts of it."

The key weakness that Cliff sees in Trotsky's theory is that the working class in these countries turned out not to be the agents of revolutionary change. For Cliff the (state capitalist) revolutions led by the Chinese Communist Party and the Cuban revolutionaries around Castro showed that it was the petit bourgeoisie and the intelligentsia in the "third world" who had become the agents of radical change: "Once the constantly revolutionary nature of the working class, the central pillar of Trotsky's theory becomes suspect, the whole structure falls to pieces."

The programmatic implications for revolutions in the "third world" were stark. In countries like India, Algeria, Ghana and Indonesia the middle class would lead the struggles in the direction of state capitalist development and only in the "long run" would the working class develop

in "cohesion and social weight".

For a whole period, as far as the IS was concerned, socialist revolution was off the agenda in the semi-colonial world. The task was to build parties where revolution was possible, in the industrialised nations.

In this latest book Cliff is more circumspect, but still wrong: "Now Stalinism, the great bulwark preventing the advance of revolutionary Marxism, of Trotskyism, has gone. Capitalism in the advanced countries is no longer expanding and so in the words of the 1938 *Transitional Programme* "there can be no discussion of systematic social reforms and the raising of the masses' living standards' fits reality again. The classic theory of permanent revolution, as argued by Leon Trotsky, is back on the agenda, as shown by the Indonesian revolution of 1998."

Trotsky's theory was never posited as an "automatic process" where, because of the size and weight of the working class and the crisis of capitalism, workers would automatically lead the struggle to settle accounts with the imperialists and their own ruling class. The tiny proletariat in Russia only played that role because Lenin and Trotsky politically armed it with a programme and a party that fought all varieties of reformism and nationalism. Only by arming the Indonesian workers with such a programme, and by building a party to fight for it, will it be possible to defeat all brands of nationalism, social democratic reformism and Stalinism and thereby make the revolution permanent.

Cliff starts his book declaring "Our criticism of orthodox Trotskyism was conceived as a return to classical Marxism". The evidence proves the opposite. Cliff distorted Marx's analysis of capitalism, junked Lenin's theory of imperialism, and declared Trotsky's theory of permanent revolution inoperable for nearly forty years. This is not a proud record.

Taking sides in t

The class struggle is, as well as strikes and protests, a battle of ideas. And a battle is currently raging between post-modernist "radicals" and scientific defenders of the status quo. *Jack Tully* makes sense of the science wars that have gripped the USA, and argues that socialists must be at the forefront of a critical defence of science.

FOR THE last five years, colleges in the USA have been gripped by what the press has dubbed the "science wars". Social scientists, feminists and left-wingers have slugged it out with scientists over the value of the different approaches to the study of culture, and in particular towards science.

The debate raises fundamental questions that only Marxism can fully answer. It began in 1994, with the publication of an irritable, cynical and overly-polemical book, *Higher Superstition: The academic left and its quarrels with science*. The aim of the authors, Paul Gross (a biologist) and Norman Levitt (a mathematician), was simple: to ridicule left-wing academics for their post-modernist and anti-materialist "science studies" and for the political positions that explicitly motivate these studies: feminism, ecology and what passes for "Marxism" in American universities.

"Science studies" is a growing part of the college curriculum in the USA. Generally concentrated in sociology or cultural studies departments, it tries to analyse science as a social phenomenon. It tries to overcome the limitations of the more traditional "history and philosophy of science" approaches.

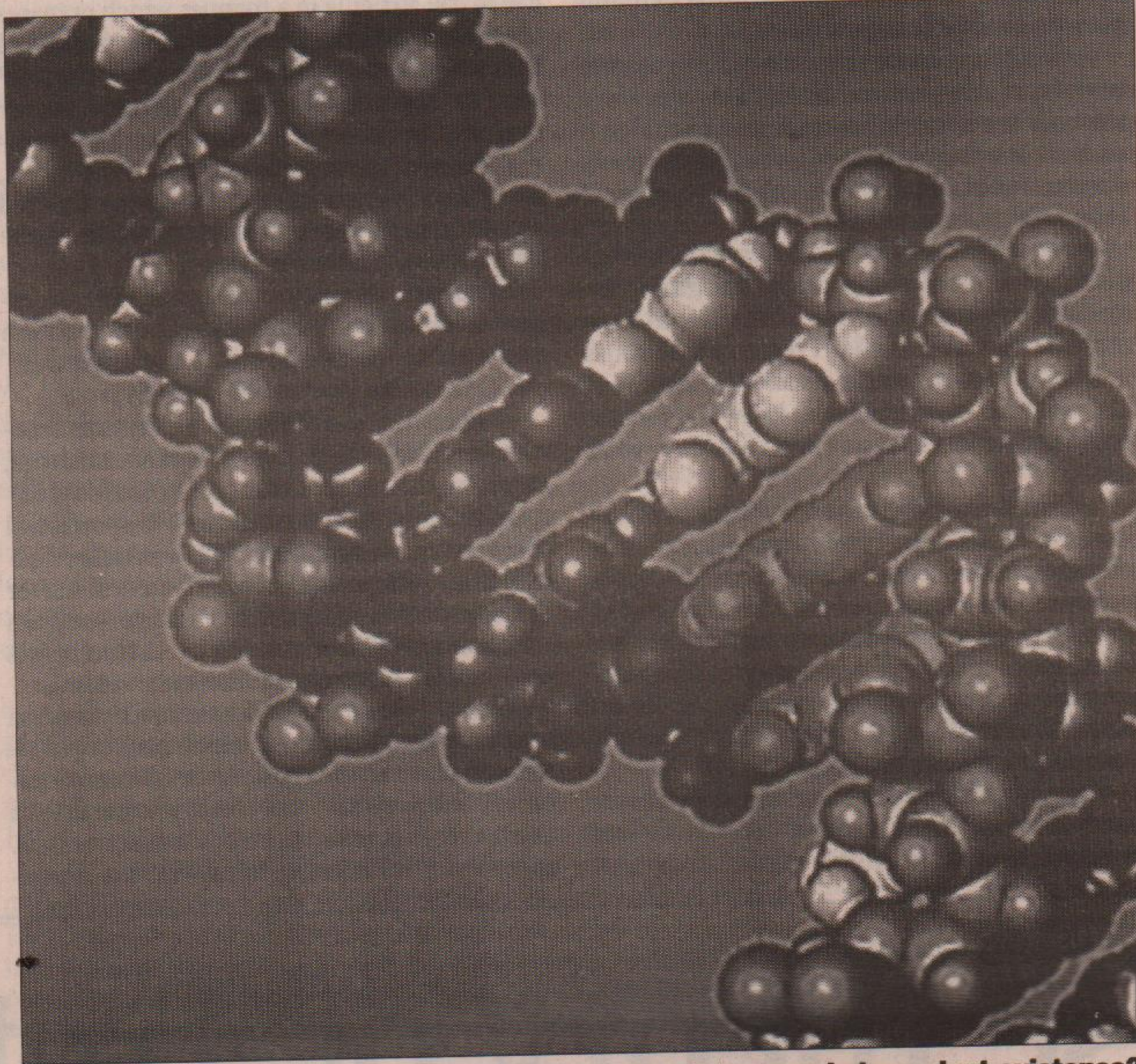
Despite the fact that Gross is a self-proclaimed member of the Democratic Socialists of America¹, the book is heavily marked by its criticisms of left politics, and contains several reactionary rants against positive discrimination in the US education system. However, the fundamental problem identified by Gross and Levitt is that of post-modernism and its vision of science. They catalogue some appalling scholarship (and even worse academic gobbledegook) and show that, in studying science, post-modernism is as useless as in other domains.²

Post-modernism, largely based on a set of French thinkers – sociologists (Foucault), philosophers (such as Lyotard and Derrida) and psychoanalysts (such as Lacan and Deleuze) – argues that all knowledge is culturally determined and is thus relative. Curiously enough, many post-modern critics of science regularly appeal to some of the weirder results of physics – in particular the bizarre findings of quantum physics and the alleged unpredictability associated with chaos theory – in order to buttress their claim that there is no absolute knowledge. The only exception they make to this blanket dismissal of all certainty is the certainty that the eighteenth century revolution in politics, science and culture – the Enlightenment – was a bad idea.

For post-modernism, with its dense mixture of badly-translated French, rampant idealism and deliberately obscure terminology, science is fundamentally a social construct. As post-modernist Bruno Latour has put it: "Reality is the consequence rather than the cause of the social construction of facts." This idealistic position can give rise to the craziest mumbo-jumbo: for example, the strange argument that Newton's *Principia Mathematica* can be considered as a "rape manual" or the fantasy that African tribes discovered quantum physics centuries ago. All this formed the main target of Gross and Levitt's scorn and fury.

Gross and Levitt were all the more concerned because, for many US students, their only contact with science is through the growing number of post-modernist science studies courses. Many apparently sane US citizens believe that space aliens regularly kidnap humans; that there is a statue of Elvis on Mars; that evolution is a myth and that the universe was created in seven days. "Science studies" says their truth is no less valid than ours.

As intended, Gross and Levitt's book provoked



Is this DNA double helix a social construct or does it have an independent existence?

a huge row amongst US intellectuals. In May 1995, one year after publication, the New York Academy of Sciences organised a conference on the theme "The Flight from Science and Reason", which also resulted in the publication of a massive report, edited by Gross and Levitt.

THE MATTER would probably have remained at the level of a mutually profitable academic gray-train, were it not for a celebrated hoax perpetrated by Alan Sokal, a physicist and left-wing activist. The Sokal hoax launched the science wars onto the front pages of newspapers the world over.

Sokal was dismayed by the fact that many science studies scholars were producing intellectually shoddy work in the name of left policies that he agreed with – in particular by citing scientific results that had little to do with the question at hand, and which they clearly did not understand.

Sokal submitted a spoof academic paper to the post-modern journal *Social Text* that denounced science as being merely a social construct. He peppered the article with scientific rubbish that any A-level physics student would have spotted and wrote it in an obscure and pompous style, devoid of content. Here is an example: "Just as liberal feminists are frequently content with a minimal agenda of legal and social equality for women and are 'pro-choice', so liberal (and even some socialist) mathematicians are often content to work within the hegemonic Zermelo-Fraenkel framework (which, reflecting its nineteenth-century origins, already incorporates the axiom of equality) supplemented only by the axiom of choice. But this framework is grossly insufficient for a liberatory mathematics, as was proven long ago by Cohen in 1966".

If you don't understand that paragraph, don't worry: there's nothing there to understand. Quite simply, it is gibberish. *Social Text* was preparing a special issue (entitled "Science Wars"), rebutting Gross and Levitt's arguments and

defending post-modernism. The editors, only too pleased to have a prestigious scientist on board, assumed he knew what he was talking about, and published the article. A few weeks later Sokal revealed all, and the formaldehyde hit the fan.

Since then, an increasingly petulant debate has raged in the pages of the major scientific journals, and more books have been published. Sokal has ridiculed French thinkers for their ignorant abuse of mathematics and physics in support of their arguments, while the French post-modernists have fought back with a collection of piqued essays attacking his ignorant abuse of their philosophy.

Finally, in an unpleasant chauvinist twist, Bruno Latour wrote an article in the leading French daily *Le Monde*, linking the dispute to the Anglo-Saxon domination of science and the rejection of French discoveries – in particular the ludicrous claim that water molecules can be imprinted with information that can be disseminated via the Internet.

Despite all this, the questions raised by the science wars are of fundamental importance, for two reasons. First, Marxists have a vital contribution to make to debates over the relation between the structure of society and human consciousness (including scientific knowledge). The nature of this relationship is fundamental to Marxism's understanding not only of the world in general, but of the class struggle in particular – and it guides our struggle to change the world.

Second, revolutionaries would be sympathetic to some of the political questions that motivate the post-modernist side in the science wars. However, we would insist that those political stances should not blind us to the results of science: post-modernism's rejection of materialism and its adoption of a profoundly sceptical approach ultimately undermines any attempt to change the world.

To provide some answers to the questions raised by the science wars, we first need to understand science as a branch of knowledge. Many scientists believe they are engaged in a value-free search to understand the natural world – and that the terms of scientific debate, and the way in which

scientific knowledge progresses, can be understood from a strictly "internalist" stance, i.e. from within science itself. According to this view, science constitutes an inexorable march towards the truth, with only the facts determining the outcome of scientific debates.

This is clearly one-sided. As Sokal put it in a recent article:

"Which research problems count as important, how research funds are distributed, who gets prestige and power, what role scientific expertise plays in public-policy debates, in what form scientific knowledge becomes embodied in technology, and for whose benefit – all these issues are strongly affected by political, economic, and, to some extent, ideological considerations, as well as by the internal logic of scientific inquiry."

Furthermore, scientists themselves – overwhelmingly white, middle-class and male – are subject to a process of selection and training that is yet another expression of the racial, gender and class oppression that dominates in capitalism (and which dominated in the Stalinist states, too). It would be unusual if this selection had no effect on the way science is practised.

Determining exactly how these ideological factors interact in the choice of scientific problems is clearly a legitimate subject for study by social scientists, and should produce fascinating findings about how knowledge is organised under capitalism.

But despite the reality of these social factors, the vision of science as a progressively true account of the universe is correct. This is what makes science unique. Its findings are checked, corrected and enriched on the basis of experience. The same cannot be said of, for example, literary criticism. Do today's post-modern critics understand Shakespeare's sonnets better than, say, nineteenth century "romantic" critics? They may think so, but they cannot prove it to the satisfaction of almost everyone else.

On the other hand, today's understanding of genetics is demonstrably superior to that of the 1960s. Such is the pace of scientific discovery that the gap between a discovery being awarded the Nobel Prize and being taught at undergraduate level has been reduced to around 10 years.

Unlike literary criticism (or cultural studies, or philosophy or any other branch of knowledge), science works. Its fruits surround us, they have changed the lives of everyone on the planet. That is not bad for something that is allegedly just a "social construct".

The post-modern view of science is a caricature of Marxism. The post-modernists in general reject the fact that subjective human actions can alter circumstances. Translated into the debate on science, this becomes a crude one-way model of society "dictating" ideas to science.

At one level it is true that science is socially determined. The state-directed planning during the Second World War played a fundamental role in forcing decisive advances in computing, radar and, of course, nuclear weaponry. This also shows that the choice of scientific subjects can be determined by society rather than springing spontaneously from scientists' heads.

But the post-modern explanation of social determination, precisely because it rejects class society as a key idea, and rejects objective truth in general, is much cruder than this. For example, Einstein's theory of relativity and subsequent discoveries in twentieth century physics have been "explained" by sociologist Harvie Ferguson in terms of the psychological consequences of changes in property relations:

"The inner collapse of the bourgeois ego signalled an end to fixity and systematic structure of the bourgeois cosmos. One privileged point of

he science wars

observation was replaced by a complex interaction of viewpoints. The new relativistic viewpoint was not itself a product of scientific 'advances' but was part, rather, of a general cultural and social transformation which expressed itself in a variety of 'modern' movements. It was no longer conceivable that nature could be reconstructed as a logical whole. The incompleteness, indeterminacy, and arbitrariness of the subject now reappeared in the natural world. Nature, that is, like personal existence, makes itself known only in fragmented images."

Leaving aside the fact that Ferguson has got hold of the wrong end of the stick (modern science precisely enables us to understand nature as a "logical whole" rather than as a series of "fragmented images"), the key point here is that he in no way proves his thesis: he simply states it.

A Marxist might also suspect that there is some relation between various forms of cultural development that could be understood in terms of deep changes in the economic base of society. For example, it is probable the development of the scientific method was linked in a dialectical chain of cause and effect to the rise of industrial capitalism. But that would have to be demonstrated. Alternative hypotheses – including strictly internalist explanations (could science have evolved without capitalism, or vice versa?) – would have to be taken seriously and tested. In other words, the study of science, like the study of all phenomena, requires a materialist, scientific approach.

THE POST-MODERNISTS' caricature of science, and their calls for a "post-modern" or "feminist" science, echo the intellectual absurdities of Stalinism in its heyday. In one of the most tragic episodes of twentieth century science, Stalin's cronies decreed that there was "bourgeois science" and "proletarian science".

In the late 1940s a series of purges took place among Soviet scientists in which the "bourgeois science of genetics" was effectively eradicated in the USSR, at the behest of T. D. Lyssenko, Stalin's fraudulent scientific yes-man. The reality of genetics – "bourgeois" or not – was denied in the name of a terrifying bureaucratic vision of culture in general and science in particular. The consequences for Soviet science – and indeed for Soviet agriculture – which could have enormously profited from the application of genetics to crops and animals, were catastrophic and are still being felt.

Despite the warning provided by Lyssenko, pure post-modernism adopts a stance that is barely different from his. This is the heart of post-modernism's understanding of epistemology (how we know what we know) in general and of science in particular.

According to Shapin and Schaffer, two of the more literate (and moderate) practitioners of post-modern science studies:

"As we come to recognise the conventional and artificial status of our forms of knowing, we put ourselves in a position to realise that it is ourselves and not reality that is responsible for what we know."

In other words, our knowledge of the universe does not stem from reality itself, but from the social context within which that reality is interpreted.

Or as Stanley Aronowitz, one of the leading post-modern critics of science, has put it: "The point is that neither logic nor mathematics escapes the contamination of the social." This is rubbish, Stanley: $2 + 2 = 4$, whether you are a worker or a boss.

As well as mirroring some of Stalinism's worst excesses, this position also reflects another tendency in the history of the workers' movement: "Empirio-criticism". In 1909, in one of the more obscure episodes in the history of the Bolshevik Party, Lenin launched a lengthy polemic in defence of materialism and against a tendency within the Party led by Bogdanov that followed the philosophy of the physicist Ernest Mach, who denied the existence of objective reality.

Lenin took issue with Bogdanov's attempt to

The materialist conception of science, including of Marxism, which is currently our best approximation to social reality, and like all sciences, continually evolves and changes to meet the challenge of changing reality and better methods of investigation

blend Marxism and "Machism":

"The basis of 'objectivity', wrote Bogdanov, must lie in the sphere of collective experience...In general the physical world is this: socially agreed-upon, socially harmonised, in a word, socially organised experience."

In other words, a social construct. Sounds familiar? Gross and Levitt, who snigger at Lenin's scientific ignorance, would no doubt be surprised to find that, on this question at least, they are on the same side of the philosophical barricades.

Lenin's long offensive against Bogdanov, and his detailed defence of materialism, puzzled many Bolsheviks. Pokrovsky, a historian of the Bolshevik party, writes:

"When Lenin began to quarrel with Bogdanov on the issue of empirio-monism, we threw up our hands and decided Lenin had gone slightly out of his mind. The moment was critical. The revolution was subsiding. We were confronted by the need for a radical change in our tactics; yet, at that time Ilyich immersed himself in the Bibliothèque Nationale [in Paris], sitting there for whole days, and wrote a philosophical book as a result. The scoffing was endless."

And, yet, Lenin was right to take the argument to Bogdanov and to attack his rejection of materialism and, more specifically, of dialectical materialism. At the heart of the matter was the fundamental question of the nature of human knowledge, of science, and thus of Marxism itself.

As Engels put it in his monumental work, *Anti-Duhring*, human understanding "can never be created and derived by thought out of itself, but only from the external world...The principles [of knowledge] are not the starting point of the investigation, but its final result; they are not applied to nature and human history, but abstracted from them; it is not nature and the realm of humanity which conform to these principles, but the principles are only valid in so far as they are in conformity with nature and history. That is the materialistic conception of matter."

It is also the materialist conception of science, including of Marxism, which is currently our best approximation to social reality, and which, like all sciences, continually evolves and changes to meet the challenge of changing reality and better methods of investigation.

This relationship with the objective world is consciously placed at the heart of Marxism and, implicitly, in the natural sciences. It is a dialectical approach, which seeks to understand matter as it changes, as it moves (including humanity itself, which is part of matter), and to develop and change theory in response to new discoveries. Post-modernism, on the other hand, offers nothing more than recycled idealism, a philosophical dead-end that, in fact, pre-dates modernism. Far from being the new vanguard of human thought, the post-modernists are intellectual throwbacks with nothing new to say, but who make a great deal of noise saying it. And they are not even on the right side of the social struggle.

On one of the key intellectual debates in the USA – the struggle against the teaching of "creationist science" in US schools – post-modernism lines up with the religious reactionaries. If Darwinian evolution is merely another "story", another social construct like the myth of creation, how can you possibly argue against giving the religious bigots equal time?

APART FROM the resurgence of obsolete idealist arguments, the science wars have revealed the striking inadequacy of the left. Post-modernism, with both its philosophical scepticism and its spurious claims to radicalism, dominates social sciences and the arts, both in US and British colleges. The revolutionary Marxist voice has been virtually silenced.

But things need not be this way. In France, for example, post-modernists do not pose as "left": the influence of an unbroken working class movement means that young left intellectuals are rarely attracted by it. Any doubts as to the reality of the class struggle have been dispelled by some of

the biggest strike waves to rock the continent for decades. Animal rights have not replaced struggles in the workplace: Marxists are not intellectual lepers. For different variants of the same reason – the absence of crushing working class defeat – post-modernism has likewise failed to sweep southern Europe or the third world.

The ideological impact of defeat provides us with an explanation for why post-modernism has become so dominant in the USA and Britain – and it goes far beyond Gross and Levitt's crude sociological explanation that the ex-student radicals of the 1960s and 1970s have simply grown up and got jobs in universities.

The resistible rise of post-modernism on campuses in both the USA and Britain, and the explicit links that are often drawn between this idealistic stance and avowedly "radical" positions – even if these are often reactionary, such as New Age flim-flam, conservative ecogism or animal rights – have closely paralleled a series of blows against the working class, the collapse of Stalinism and the inexorable rightward evolution of the reformist left. Post-modernism and its associated "radical" ideologies are the fruits of major defeats.

But if post-modernism has filled the gap left by various reformist versions of socialism, part of the responsibility for this lies with the revolutionary Marxists and their own weakness.

The sea-change in the world situation that took place from the middle of the 1980s with the collapse of Stalinism should have produced a revitalised Marxism that would use the class struggle to provide a real and lasting answer to the real problems of racial and sexual oppression and the threat of ecological disaster.

Outside of very small circles of revolutionary militants this did not occur. But the class struggle is not dead, and it will only take a minor resurgence in workers' resistance to reveal post-modernism as a hollow, pretentious sham.

The turn to recession in the USA and Britain will undoubtedly reinforce inward-looking and pessimistic ideologies amongst the less adventurous. But the first clashes between bosses and workers will awaken the most determined and intellectually curious and will push them to rediscover and redevelop the analytical and programmatic tools of Marxism.

A precondition for this revitalisation of Marxism is that we are ready to meet the political, programmatic and intellectual challenge, and that we have ceded nothing to post-modern scepticism. The new generation of workers needs a clear answer to the question: how to change the world and drive out poverty and exploitation. Linking Stalinism and fascism with socialist revolution, post-modernism argues that all such "grand narratives" lead to worse oppression than if we stick to liberal capitalism. It is, effectively, the reflection in the world of ideas of a capitalist system that no longer believes in itself, but cannot stomach the socialist alternative.

Marxists take sides in the current science wars: with science, against post-modernism, but armed with a materialist critique of the ideologies and social structures that bend science to the will of the bourgeoisie. The humans of the future will live in eco-friendly, hi-technology homes of their choosing – not tepees and mud. That is why they have to clean-up science and put it to the service of humanity, and reject post-modernism.

FURTHER READING

- P. R. Gross & N. Levitt, *Higher superstition: the academic left and its quarrels with science*. Baltimore, 1998 (second revised edition)
- P. R. Gross, N. Levitt & M. W. Lewis (eds.), *The flight from science and reason*, New York, 1995.
- N. Koertge (ed.), *A house built on sand: exposing post-modern myths about science*. Oxford, 1998.

FOOTNOTES

- ¹ A group that traces its development to Max Shachtman
- ² See Colin Lloyd, *Marxism vs Postmodernism Trotskyist International 21*

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

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

THE TRADE UNIONS must be transformed by a rank and file movement to oust the reformist bureaucrats, to democratise the unions and win them to a revolutionary action programme based on a system of transitional demands which serve as a bridge between today's struggles and the socialist revolution. Central to this is the fight for workers' control of production. We are for the building of fighting organisations of the working class—factory committees, industrial unions, councils of action, and workers' defence organisations.

OCTOBER 1917: The Russian revolution established a workers' state. But Stalin destroyed workers' democracy and set about the reactionary and utopian project of building "socialism in one country". In the USSR, and the other degenerate workers' states that were established from above, capitalism was destroyed but the bureaucracy excluded the working class from power, blocking the road to democratic planning and socialism. The parasitic bureaucratic caste has led these states to crisis and destruction. We are for the smashing of bureaucratic tyranny through proletarian political revolution and the establishment of workers' democracy. We oppose the restoration of capitalism and recognise that only workers' revolution can defend the post-capitalist property relations. In times of war we unconditionally defend workers' states against imperialism. Stalinism has consistently betrayed the working class. The Stalinist Communist Parties' strategy of alliances with the bourgeoisie (popular fronts) and their stages theory of revolution have inflicted terrible defeats on the working class world-wide. These parties are reformist.

SOCIAL OPPRESSION is an integral feature of capitalism systematically oppressing people on the basis of race, age, sex, or sexual orientation. We are for the liberation of women and for the building of a working class women's movement, not an "all class" autonomous movement. We are for the liberation of all of the oppressed. We fight racism and fascism. We oppose all immigration controls. We fight for labour movement support for black self-defence against racist and state attacks. We are for no platform for fascists and for driving them out of the unions.

IMPERIALISM is a world system which oppresses nations and prevents economic development in the vast majority of third world countries. We support the struggles of oppressed nationalities or countries against imperialism. We unconditionally support the Irish Republicans fighting to drive British troops out of Ireland. But against the politics of the bourgeois and petit-bourgeois nationalists, we fight for permanent revolution—working class leadership of the anti-imperialist struggle under the banner of socialism and internationalism. In conflicts between imperialist countries and semi-colonial countries, we are for the defeat of the imperialist army and the victory of the country oppressed and exploited by imperialism. We are for the immediate and unconditional withdrawal of British troops from Ireland. We fight imperialist war not with pacifist pleas but with militant class struggle methods including the forcible disarmament of "our own" bosses.

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

After another death in police custody...

Fight back against the racist police

ON WEDNESDAY evening 13 January, 30-year-old Roger Sylvester headed home from his job as a careworker in Islington. He never returned.

Two hours later, Roger was taken naked into custody by eight police officers, and detained under the provisions of the Mental Health Act. An hour afterwards, at St Ann's Hospital, Roger began to experience severe breathing difficulties. He was transferred—first to the North Middlesex and then to the Whittington Hospital—where he was placed on a respirator. Five days later he was pronounced dead.

The inquest into Roger's death has been adjourned after an inconclusive post mortem. In all probability an inquest before a jury will not be heard until next year. Meanwhile, his family and friends are at a loss to explain how an apparently fit and active young man could die in such a fashion.

So far, there is no evidence that the police used CS spray or a long-handled baton to "restrain" him. The coroner's court heard only that he had marks around his wrists "consistent with resistance to the application of handcuffs". There were also signs of injuries to his head, arms, body and legs, described as "mainly superficial" and most probably resulting from falling on concrete and grass while naked.

Roger Sylvester was black. His parents came to Britain from Grenada in the 1960s. Roger did have a history of mental health problems, but had held down his job with Islington council without difficulties for more than two years. He was a member of the local Union branch.

His death may have been a genuine

accident. But his family and the local black community in Tottenham where he lived are, rightly, deeply suspicious. Hundreds gathered on the Sunday after his death for a peaceful protest outside the Tottenham police station where the eight officers are based.

Many suspect that an investigation by the Police Complaints Authority (PCA) will be yet another whitewash. After the Lawrence inquiry, the Metropolitan Police are worried about the spotlight falling on them yet again over charges of racism and brutality. As a result, the eight officers have all been assigned to desk duties, but the truth about Roger Sylvester's death may take a very long time to come to light.

More than 40 people have died in police custody since 1992—the majority of them black males. There are relatives like Janet Alder in Burnley, Lancashire still fighting to find out the truth about her brother Christopher, who died in unexplained circumstances in a police cell in Hull last April. Unusually in such a case, five cops have been suspended from usual duties and a file has gone to the Crown Prosecution Service.

Though inquest juries have recorded verdicts of unlawful killing in the cases of the black African asylum seekers Shije Lapite and Ibrahima Sey, and the Irish-born traveller Richard O'Brien, no officer has ever faced any criminal charges. Most of them never even faced internal disciplinary action.

In these and other cases, such as those of Brian Douglas and Wayne Douglas, there is compelling evidence that the

police involved were guilty of murder, and yet almost every one of them is still on the streets as an officer of the Met.

Roger Sylvester's home was only a couple of miles from where another 30-year-old black man, the musician Michael Menson, suffered horrific and ultimately fatal burns in January 1997. For months the police maintained that Michael had committed suicide by setting himself alight. It took enormous efforts by his family and their supporters to get the Met to concede that he was the victim of a racist murder.

The officers responsible for the failure of the Stephen Lawrence investigation are doubtlessly grateful for Home Secretary Jack Straw's decision to take no measures against them. What else can we expect from a government that gives a Charter Mark award to privately run Doncaster jail, which has the highest suicide rate in the country, and is on the verge of announcing the most draconian legislation ever against asylum seekers?

In support of the Lawrences and other black families fighting for justice and in memory of those who have died at the hands of a racist police force, socialists and anti-racists must take the fight into the labour movement demanding:

- Prosecute all police officers in the Lawrence case—retired or not—and sack Paul Condon!
- Ban CS spray, disarm the police and disband their special units
- Support for black community self-defence and
- Stop Labour's racist asylum bill—abolish all immigration controls.

LAWRENCE REPORT

The long-awaited report of the public inquiry, chaired by Sir William Macpherson, into the May 1993 murder of Stephen Lawrence is due to be published this month.

Sections of the media have sought to deflect attention onto the Lawrences and their lawyers. Reports have suggested that the inquiry will conclude that they are somehow to blame for the fact that the five white men, almost certainly responsible for Stephen's death, will never face trial—because they brought an unsuccessful private prosecution against the racist thugs three years after the murder.

If this is indeed the content of the Macpherson report, it will only provide the most transparent cover for the Met. As Neville Lawrence put it: "What they are trying to do is defend the indefensible." The bulk of the inquiry's findings, if they bear any relationship to the evidence taken over the course of 1998, will be damning of the Met. They will expose a record of incompetence, corruption and institutionalised racism in the capital's police force.

Detective Superintendent Albert Patrick, the officer placed in charge of the Lawrence case by Paul Condon in 1997, has been removed because he has been implicated in a probe of corruption in his former workplace, the East London "Flying Squad".

Finally, nearly six years after Stephen's death, one of the cops involved in the original investigation of the murder will face an internal disciplinary hearing in March. But even this token gesture has only come about after public outcry at the news that Sergeant Ben Bullock would be allowed to retire without facing any disciplinary action, joining his four Met colleagues who left the force and will never have to answer charges laid in a report by the Police Complaints Authority.

The Macpherson inquiry was never going to deliver justice for Stephen and his parents, but it has laid bare a pervasive pattern of corruption and racism in the Met. It has confirmed the truth of the slogan of socialists and anti-racist campaigners: "British police—racist police."

STOP STRAW'S RACIST LAW!

DEMONSTRATE: Refugees are welcome here! Defend asylum and immigration rights

Assemble: Embankment, London, 12 noon, Saturday 27 February

FEEDBACK

Contact us on 0181 981 0602

Workers Power is the British Section of the League for a Revolutionary Communist International

Mail to: Workers Power, BCM Box 7750, London WC1N 3XX

Tel: 0181 981 0602
Fax: 0181 981 0475
Email: lrci@easynet.co.uk

Print: Newsfax International
Production: Workers Power (labour donated)

ISSN 0263-1121

FUND DRIVE

Last month our fund total was £3,142.10 and we have bought two new computers. But we need more equipment to produce this paper efficiently. We need to raise another £3,000 by the summer. This month it looks as if the recession has come early, because we haven't received a penny. So please send in any donations (cheques payable to Workers Power and sent to the address left).

SUBSCRIBE

Please send Workers Power direct to my door each month. I enclose:

- £9.00 UK
- £12.00 Europe
- £18.00 Rest of the world

Name: _____

Address: _____

Postcode: _____

JOIN US!

- I would like to join the Workers Power group
- Please send more details about Workers Power

Name: _____

Address: _____

Postcode: _____

Tel no: _____