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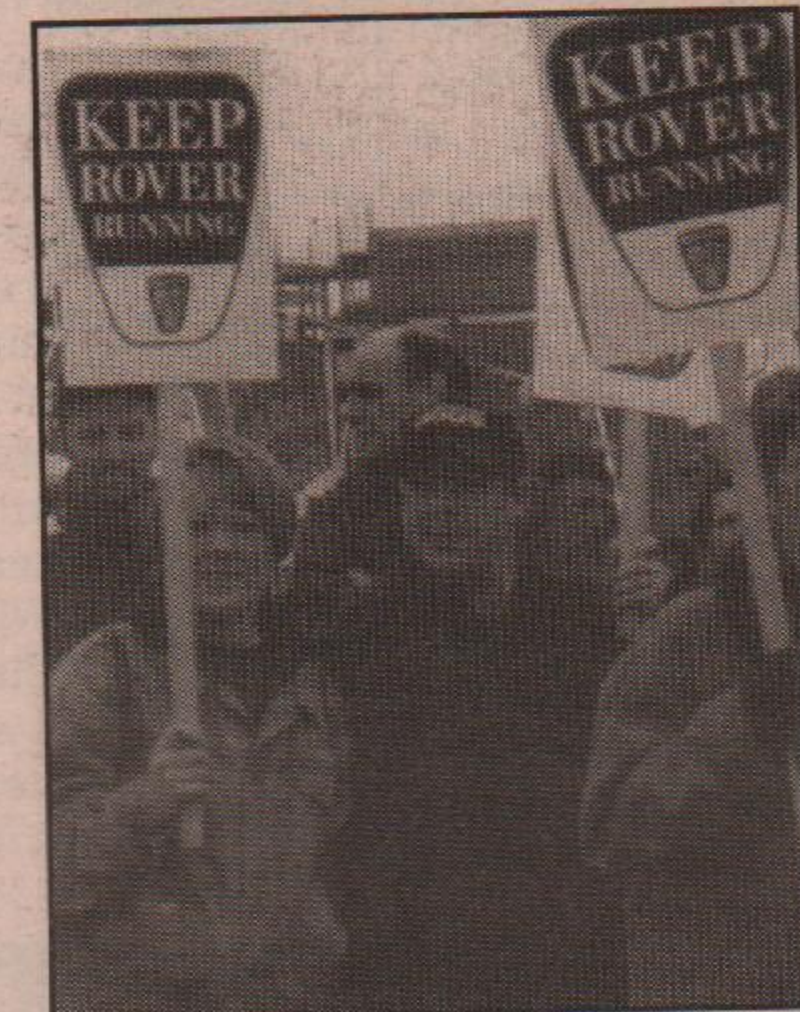
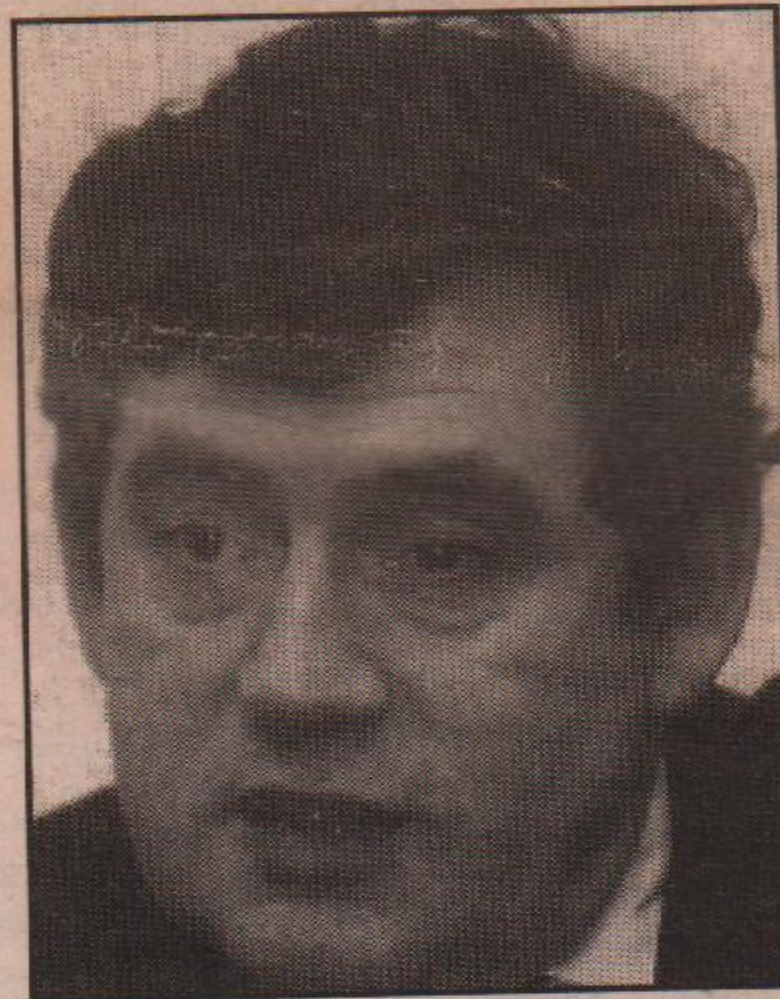
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TOTTENHAM BY-ELECTION

Support LSA against New Labour's pro-boss candidate

THE LONDON Socialist Alliance (LSA) is fighting its first ever parliamentary by-election this month in the contest to fill the Tottenham seat left vacant by the death of Bernie Grant MP.

The LSA has chosen Weyman Bennett as its candidate after he stood in the Enfield and Haringey constituency, which includes Tottenham, in the election for the Greater London Assembly (GLA). Weyman captured nearly 3,700 votes and would have won a larger share of the poll but for the presence on the

ballot of an "independent pro-Livingstone" candidate who took more than 10 per cent of the vote.

Weyman's record of anti-racist struggle stands in sharp contrast to that of 27-year-old Blairite barrister, David Lammy, who won the Labour Party selection contest against Bernie Grant's widow, Sharon Grant. Lammy enjoyed the blessing and active backing of the Millbank machine.

Weyman was instrumental in setting up the "Justice for Joy" campaign in

1993 after the brutal death of Jamaican-born Joy Gardner, killed by immigration officers who were attempting to deport her. Last year, he was central to the campaign to support the family of Roger Sylvester, a local black resident and Islington Unison member, who died in police custody. He has also supported local Kurdish activists denied the vote in this election.

Though a recent *Guardian* profile stressed Lammy's impoverished childhood in Tottenham, his appears to be a

very swift rags to riches story. He "escaped" from Tottenham to a private boarding school before becoming the first black man from Britain to attend Harvard Law School. His credentials are impeccably Blairite, causing veteran black Labour Party activist, Linda Bellos, to comment: "New Labour's leaders must think we are absolutely stupid if they imagine we are going to cheer just because they have leveled in a black candidate."

Workers Power calls for a vote for the

LSA in the 22 June by-election. This is an exceptional opportunity to combat the racist lies about asylum seekers and to build a large local contingent on the 24 June national demonstration. It is also a chance to bolster the campaign against privatisation of much of the local education authority in Haringey, and oppose New Labour's pro-boss policies as advocated by David Lammy.

More information: www.londonsocialistalliance.org.uk

■ Turn to page 7 for more on the LSA.

IN BRIEF

Workers in Australia are taking on multinational company Nike. The Textile Clothing and Footwear Union of Australia (TCFUA) has launched a campaign against the sportswear giant which has refused to sign up to an agreement protecting homeworkers. Instead of agreeing to guarantee the same rights for homeworkers as those based in factories, Nike is simply denying that they employ any such workers. In fact the union has evidence that work is regularly contracted out by Nike to homeworkers.

The TCFUA has run a poster campaign targeting Nike and is planning legal action this month. They have also launched a website and are asking workers around the world to visit the site and use the free fax and e-mail service to deluge Nike with messages of protest about their treatment of homebased workers.

Contact: <http://www.stopthesweatshops.com>

Ten hooded marchers carried a coffin through the streets of Buenos Aires, Argentina, on Wednesday: on their shirts it read "IMF", on the coffin it said: "education, wages, small businesses, health". They marched at the head of 20,000 trade union demonstrators, on a march called by both wings of the trade union confederation, the CGT. The protest was called against the \$938 million cuts demanded by the IMF-imposed austerity programme and implemented on Monday by President De La Rúa's Alliance government.

Union leaders have called for a 24 hour general strike on 9 June if the cuts are not withdrawn. The Argentine Workers Party for Socialism (PTS) is calling for a national congress of delegates from workers' organisations and for the escalation of general strike action to indefinite action.

Read more, in Spanish, on: <http://www.pts.org.ar>

There will be a demonstration demanding justice for two black men, Errol and Jason McGowan, in Telford on 1 July. Both men (uncle and nephew) were found hanged. Despite evidence that Errol had been the victim of a campaign of racist harassment and circumstantial evidence pointing to the possibility that both men were victims of racist murderers, the police decided they had committed suicide. This is another example of the police's refusal to take racist crimes seriously, notwithstanding the aftermath of the Lawrence inquiry. We urge readers to support the forthcoming demonstration demanding justice:

Assemble 11.30am, Saturday 1 July, Telford Town Park

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SECTION 28

Scrap Section 28

CLERICS AND capitalists joined together in Scotland – not in prayer, but in bigotry and hatred. Supported by the Scottish Catholic Church, Stagecoach boss and millionaire, Brian Souter, paid for a referendum in Scotland on the question of scrapping Section 28.

The purpose of the vote was not to find out what people actually thought but to put pressure on the Scottish parliament which, unlike Westminster, looks set to go ahead with repeal of Section 28.

The turnout was 34 per cent, 86 per cent voting to retain Section 28, with 13 per cent against. It cost Souter £1 million to conduct the poll; one million voted in support of his position. Exactly £1 per bigot – which Souter probably thinks is good value.

Others might think that the £1 million could have been better spent on improving his bus service or paying

his drivers a bit extra.

Those backing repeal in the Scottish parliament have correctly dismissed the results as unrepresentative. But Souter is not deterred. He has vowed to continue his crusade launching advertising campaigns attacking particular politicians.

Presumably Souter, one of New Labour's favoured businessmen, believes that having money gives him the right to "promote" homophobia. Certainly Souter's campaign will continue to undermine the myth that in a capitalist democracy everyone is equal.

Section 28 was introduced by the Tories, supposedly to stop local authorities spending money on promoting homosexuality. It is a particularly nasty piece of homophobic legislation and should be scrapped immediately. It has never actually been used in a prosecution, but then that was never its prime purpose.

Section 28 was designed to intimidate local authority workers and teachers.

Despite the fact that it does not apply directly to schools, most people believe its function is to stop teachers telling their pupils the terrible truth that it is alright to be homosexual.

New Labour made a commitment to scrap Section 28 but they have failed to press ahead with the repeal at Westminster. Pressure from Tory bigots in the House of Lords have led them to search for a compromise.

Labour ministers have been falling over themselves to reaffirm their faith in the heterosexual family and marriage. They want to assure us that schools will preach the message that there are "proper" (heterosexual) families and "pretend" (single parent, homosexual or any other) families. Proper is better than pretend and one based on a married couple is best of all.

A similar "compromise" was being proposed in Scotland, with an amendment "acceptable to Brian Souter" which guaranteed to put traditional marriage at the heart of any legislation replacing Section 28. But on the very day that the Souter result was announced, the committee of Scottish MPs preparing the legislation correctly rejected the amendment.

Section 28 has helped to create an atmosphere of fear in schools. Lesbian and gay teachers and pupils are affected by it daily. It has led to an increase in homophobic bullying and violence in schools and in society as a whole. Section 28 should be scrapped immediately.

All trade unionists, especially teachers and local government workers, should fight for the repeal of Section 28. Support the demonstration against Section 28 in Manchester on Saturday 15 July.

NUT

Build action against PRP

THE MOST recent communication NUT members will have received from their union is a pathetic, snivelling attempt to explain the failure of the leadership to carry out national conference policy and ballot for a one day strike against Performance Related Pay (PRP).

We are told by General Secretary Doug McAvoy that talks with the NAS/UWT are more important, that the majority at conference wasn't really that large and that anyway not all teachers would vote yes.

But perhaps the most ridiculous reason for denying the membership a vote is that now we don't have to think about a strike, we will all be free to concentrate on other things!

Like what Mr McAvoy? How to fill in our forms proving what good teachers we are to get our £2,000? Working out how to "copyright" all our work and effort with children to ensure that no one else gets to use it when applying for their £2,000? How to get out of teaching? Or just simply standing around with our arms up in the air shouting "we surrender" in David Blunkett's general direction?

The sell out could not have come at a worse time. The deadline for applications to cross the threshold and claim your £2,000 is 5 June. Once these applications have been processed, the end of July, and some have been given the extra cash, building an effective and united

fight against PRP will become increasingly difficult.

The introduction of performance management for all teachers in the next academic year will be made much easier for the government and PRP for all will be their next step. Union organisation and solidarity will have been decisively undermined.

For rank and file teachers, for union militants, the next step will be a crucial one. We know this is a battle that we cannot afford to lose. Many suspected that we would get no official action against PRP, now that has been confirmed.

Yet conference voted for strike action, many associations and individual schools have voted for strike action – and that action is needed now. We must build unofficial strike action at a rank and file level, across associations and divisions, across towns and cities. Such action must take place this term.

In the weeks following Easter conference some on the left in the Socialist Teachers Alliance argued that we should call off any other action against PRP in order to build for a yes vote in the ballot. Their position has now been shown to be not only dangerous,

in terms of defusing action, but totally mistaken since it would have tied us to a ballot that never was!

Thankfully many teachers, in Hackney and Tower Hamlets for example, saw through this flawed strategy and rejected it, maintaining their collective boycott of applications to cross the threshold and any training associated with them. Those already taking some form of action against PRP will be in the strongest position to launch unofficial strike action. They must take the lead in organising for unofficial action and spreading it to other areas.

PRISONS

Free Kuldip Bajwa

WE RECENTLY learnt that prisoners at the Highpoint prison staged an occupation of the television room in protest at the denial of association time. Prisoners are entitled to this time, but the prison claimed staff shortages meant that they could not have it.

After a discussion approximately 20 prisoners launched the occupation until their demands had been met, despite, at one point, being threatened by screws

tooled up in riot gear.

No doubt prisoners will face harassment as a result of their action, but reports suggest that this won't break their willingness to fight back against attacks on their rights inside.

The whole incident shows the importance of socialists supporting class war prisoners. Kuldip Bajwa, a supporter of Workers Power, remains behind bars for his role in defending the J18 demonstration last year. We ask all our

readers to support him by writing to him at:

Kuldip Bajwa
DN 7230
HMP/YOI Highpoint
Stradishall
Newmarket
Suffolk
CB8 9YG

You can also contribute to his welfare fund by sending cheques, payable to the Workers Power Welfare Fund, BCM Box 7750, London, WC1N 3XX

NATFHE

Turn the anger into action

THE RECENT conference of the college teachers' union NATFHE reflected the frustrations of rank and file activists. Branch leaderships cope with a daily war of attrition with their college bosses who are withholding pay increases, slashing jobs and demanding more and more paperwork, while attacking conditions.

But the NATFHE leadership – General Secretary Paul Mackney and the NEC majority – argues that the members won't fight, and is relying on Labour to deliver improvements. This is proving a vain hope.

Delegates were prepared to give a hearing to Lifelong Learning minister Malcolm Wicks, but they were less than impressed with what he had to say. While

Mackney welcomed the minister's references to resolving the issues of pay and casualisation, speakers from the floor pointed out that Wicks had failed to earmark money for pay increases or promise any end to the system of college by college bargaining over conditions.

Nor was there any real "new money" for the expansion in FE the government wants. This leaves many NATFHE branches still struggling to get any recommended pay increase and many others facing redundancies as colleges hit financial crises.

Not surprisingly, the further education section of Conference voted to recommend rejection of the current pay offer. It also elected left wing support-

ers of the "Rank and File" grouping as negotiators.

But to turn these positions into a real challenge to the leadership's policies, socialists will have to launch a fight back on pay and conditions on the ground and win the political arguments about the union's current strategy. This means tackling the whole question of Labour's policies for FE and HE.

While Labour ministers launch an ostensible challenge to privilege over access to elite institutions, they are presiding over an education system which systematically blocks learning opportunities for the working class, underfunding FE colleges and denying grants to HE students.

The next year will see new attacks as

the Learning and Skills Councils are introduced. These bodies are being presented as a way of overcoming wasteful competition in areas. In fact they will preside over a system where FE colleges will be pitted against private "providers" which will force down conditions and the standard of education and training.

Conference voted to support the NUJ initiative over asylum seekers and other activities such as the 24 June march. It also voted to back the call for mass demonstrations against the IMF in Prague and related initiatives. But as with the struggle over the future of higher education itself, it will be down to rank and file militants to turn these commitments into activity.

"Perfidious financial idiocy" is how the wild-eyed radicals of the British Medical Journal describe the Private Finance Initiative (PFI). But what is PFI? And what is so bad about it? *Alison Hudson* investigates

New Labour puts new life into PFI

IMAGINE YOURSELF back in the early 1990s. The NHS faced a horrible legacy of underfunding, leaving it with dozens of crumbling Victorian buildings. A tight-fisted Tory government was in office with no intention of finding public money for investment. In 1990 the Tories came up with the NHS and Community Care Act. This was the first step towards PFI as it made capital financing the responsibility of individual NHS Trusts and not the government.

Hospitals had to start acting more and more like private sector companies if they wanted to refurbish premises or build new ones, or even invest in new equipment. Legally, they had to make an annual surplus of income over expenditure. It does not take a degree in accounting to realise that for "non-profit" organisations this means cutting back on some areas to pay for others.

But this kind of exercise could not provide the vast sums needed. Given that the Tories were never going to raise revenue through taxing the rich to pay for investment, why were they so loathe to borrow the necessary cash as had been normal practice up to then?

One key reason was that Britain had signed up to the 1992 Maastricht Treaty with its convergence criteria which stipulated strict limits on public sector borrowing. So, as responsible capitalist managers of "UK plc", the Tories came up with a creative accounting wheeze that had the added bonus of bringing the private sector into the heart of the NHS.

PFI was introduced in the 1992 budget – with the justification that it would encourage private sector investment and bring in to the NHS (along with the civil service, road building and prisons) "management expertise". In the 1993 autumn statement PFI was promoted as an "additional source of funding for capital projects".

Under PFI the private sector pays for replacing or refurbishing public assets, such as a computer system or a new hospital, and then receives a long-term contract (usually 30 but up to 60 years in duration if the project is a new building) to operate the assets or run the associated services. Until recently it was taken as read that any jobs involved would transfer to the private company. The private company then recoups its costs several times over through a charge for the services which it now provides.

In summary, a PFI scheme puts off till tomorrow what you could pay for today in order to keep current public spending and borrowing down, and at the same time privatises services that capitalist businesses had previously not been able to get hold of in their quest for profit.

Initially, PFI was supposed to be one of many options for funding capital projects but very quickly it has become the only show in town. Since 1993-94 the civil service and the NHS have been required to give first refusal to the private sector before any public money can be approved. In 1994-95 planned public sector capital expenditure by the government was already being reduced by £4 billion.

In April 1996 the Public Private Part-



Strikers at UCLH protest against PFI

nership Programme (or 4Ps) introduced the PFI model into local government. Today the management bodies not only of hospitals and prisons but schools, housing, day centres and residential homes are taking the PFI route – essentially because local authorities and other public bodies have no choice.

Since the 1997 election the New Labour government has embraced PFI almost as enthusiastically as the Tories. This is despite the fact that it has been proved time and again, even by establishment bodies such as the Audit Commission, that PFI is a "costly process", that companies "can make excessive profits" and that PFI schemes cost far more than conventionally financed capital projects.

The Public Services Privatisation Research Unit in a report on the dangers of PFI refers to many examples of schemes dramatically escalating in cost, such as Norfolk and Norwich Hospital. This started as a £90 million project and rose to £193 million on a 60-year contract! This scheme, along with many other hospital schemes, also involved bed cuts, in Norfolk and Norwich's case from 1,600 to 1,000.

Ironically, some of the extra cost is due to the fact that the public sector can borrow funds cheaper than the private sector, because they are underwritten by the government. The bids are very complex, expensive and time-consuming to assemble (the costs are, of course, passed on to the public body). While there is minimal scope for real public scrutiny, and wide scope for potential corruption, public bodies have to spend considerable sums in researching potential projects – Guys and St. Thomas's Hospitals spent £557,000 deciding not to go for PFI.

But the main cause of the high cost of PFI schemes is the greed of private sector bosses who want to make profit at a rate of between 10 and 20 per cent, having been handed our services on a plate. The main criteria for the approval of a PFI scheme remains that it must be value for money and must transfer risk to the private sector.

The case of Pimlico School clearly demonstrates that instead of being "value for money" PFI means a huge financial

burden that may ultimately fall back on to the local authority. This in turn makes for a deteriorating service, both in terms of the individual school and the knock-on effect on the whole LEA.

Some £7 million was needed to refurbish the Pimlico building in the City of Westminster. The Department for Education and Employment (DfEE) offered only £2.5 million towards the refurbishment or the alternative of a £25 million revenue support grant for a new building, but only as part of a PFI scheme. This option was championed by the current Home Secretary, Jack Straw, one of the school's governors.

The PFI bid soon involved selling off one acre of the school grounds for high-density housing, reducing the school area to 8,000 square metres – a small fraction of the DfEE's recommended minimum of 60,000 square metres.

Part of the bidding process is to com-

Since the 1997 election the New Labour government has embraced PFI almost as enthusiastically as the Tories

pare the PFI scheme to a public sector alternative, but this process is always weighted in the private sector's favour. In Pimlico's case the public sector comparison meant taking account of local authority guidelines for housing density and the requirement for the public sector to include a social housing component of 25 per cent for the proposed one acre sell-off – the PFI consortium could ignore this and thus put a higher value on the so-called "surplus land". This extra £10 million swung the deal.

The Tory Westminster City Council, quite happy to see PFI as the only option, soon abandoned its planning policies and distorted the value for money test. In its desperation, the council was not in the slightest bit interested in whether it could actually afford to pay the annual fee to the consortium. Its own funding report stated:

"There will be additional cost to the city council if the charge for services under the PFI contract exceed those currently experienced. It is not yet possible to assess the level of these charges."

At present, after teaching salaries, Pimlico School has little more than £1 million to fund everything else – non-teaching salaries, equipment costs, etc. Increased charges, which the consortium is at liberty to introduce if it is not making enough profit, will have to be paid for by either cutting staff, attacking their terms and conditions or diverting funds from other schools in the authority.

Other local schools will also feel the effect of the Pimlico PFI as an 100 extra pupils are to be allocated to the school and a new school will inevitably mean more competition for places – this could have very damaging effects on neighbouring schools particularly if their numbers are already falling.

Pimlico demonstrates that the needs of the service are relegated to well below the needs of the PFI consortium to make as much profit as possible. It also shows that the idea that risk is transferred to the private sector is a joke. Last summer's Passport Office fiasco saw the public sector having to pick up the tab after Siemens' PFI-funded computer system caused a massive backlog and a massive public outcry – yet the fines for contractors who default on contracts are effectively so much loose change.

New Labour has made minor adjustments to PFI: they have ended the requirement to transfer staff (apart from workers employed to provide services related to an asset such as building maintenance) but if a local authority or NHS Trust wants to transfer staff they still could if they can prove the infamous value for money case.

Safeguards have been put in place to better protect the pensions of workers transferred. The main argument advanced by those in the labour movement who push for PFI is that assets can now return to the public sector at the end of the contract. But, of course, these often last for decades.

What New Labour have now accepted is the fundamental philosophy behind PFI that whatever the cost, whatever the waste of resources, privatisation is a good thing, that no matter what the attacks on workers' jobs, terms and conditions, private sector management of public services is the preferred option. In short, it is a triumph for Thatcherite ideology. It is the same ideology that has seen Labour, disgracefully, push through the privatisation of Air Traffic Control, putting public safety at considerable risk.

Whether or not staff are transferred out of the public sector, it is clear that in order to make maximum profit private bosses will have to attack workers' terms and conditions sooner or later, and union activists know this. Trade unionists and local communities have been staunchly fighting against PFI schemes up and down the country. Some campaigns have used imaginative methods such as local referendums (Wakefield and Pontefract Hospitals) to fight off the PFI threat, others have used community and joint union campaigns (Haringey schools).

Most significantly, the UCLH Unison branch took strike action in the face of opposition from not only their NHS Trust bosses, but from the High Court (which ruled that they could not strike to protect their terms and conditions with their future employer before transfer). Meanwhile, Unison bureaucrats were terrified that the strike was "too political" and an embarrassment to the Labour government they seek to prop up. Since then, Unison has mounted a witch-hunt of two of the strike leaders.

This comes from a union that has taken a paper position of calling on the government to scrap PFI for several years. Unison has also promised to campaign against PFI and for public services, but while it produces forests of useful pamphlets and briefing papers it refuses to co-ordinate the kind of campaign that is needed to see off PFI and the other forms of backdoor privatisation being peddled by New Labour.

Such a campaign must build resistance locally and nationally to any further private sector involvement in local government, state education and NHS or other public sector service provision through industrial action, protests and demonstrations. It must fight for the restoration to the public sector of all privatised services which are under the terms of CCT, PFI etc. These services should be placed under the democratic control of workers and service users.

Throughout the public sector we need to organise industrial action including indefinite strikes, official if possible, unofficial where necessary to stop every attempt at backdoor privatisation and spread those strikes to stop the government, and union bureaucrats, picking us off workplace by workplace.

COUNCIL HOUSING

Stop Prescott's sell-off

IN APRIL the government confirmed its plans to force local councils to sell off virtually all their housing stocks. A Green Paper introduced by Deputy Prime Minister John Prescott outlines the proposals in familiar New Labour terms – “modernisation and reform” to housing, to give people “quality and choice”.

This is hypocritical doublespeak. The real purpose of the reforms is to off-load the cost of renovating a long neglected housing stock onto working class tenants and to end any local democratic control over housing policy.

Prescott's department is using similar arguments to the ones put forward for the privatisation of London's underground. The Green Paper admits that at least £19 billion worth of repairs are outstanding just to bring the “worst council housing to modern standards”. This is a result of the Thatcher years when councils were starved of cash for housing repairs and the building of new houses virtually stopped.

Thatcher hated council housing. She wanted workers to become “homeowners”. With the burden of mortgages she thought they would be less militant.

New Labour shares her disdain for public sector housing and is unwilling to find the money to deal with its desperate problems. It wants to off-load the financing onto the tenants while setting up various quangos to take the blame for the rent rises.

The stock transfers will be “voluntary”, according to the government. But large sums of money will be directed only into the transfer schemes, while councils and the Housing Corporation will be starved of capital. You can stay with the council if you want but will have to live in a rundown slum – some “choice”!

The government's favoured scheme is to transfer the housing to some other “social” landlord, like a housing association. For this the tenants must agree in a ballot. They will also allow councils to create “arms-length” companies to run the housing estates while formally keeping the ownership. No ballot would be needed for this. Councils can also seek money through the Private Finance Initiative, with the agreement of central government.

The “arms-length” technique has already proved disastrous, with Housing Benefits being run in London and elsewhere by companies such as Capita, CSL and ITNet who are even more inefficient than the old council-run services.

The Green Paper makes much of the fact that different tenants pay differing rents for “comparable homes” – a reasonable point if the object was to reduce the higher rents. But of course it isn't. The “unjustifiable differences” in rent levels refer largely to the fact that, on average, housing association tenants pay 20 per cent more per week than council tenants.

cil tenants.

Within ten years most council tenants who transfer will be paying £20.00 a week more in rent, plus whatever “service charges” the new landlords deem suitable.

Even worse is a proposal to link rents to “property values”. Recent research, commissioned by the National Housing Federation and carried out by Cambridge University, showed that this approach would lead to rents of £70.00 a week for one-bedroom flats and £220 a week for four-bedroom houses! Local authority tenants now pay a national average of between £40 and £52 for such properties.

The supporters of these proposals – nicknamed the “big bang” by housing professionals – are the usual suspects. The Council of Mortgage Lenders quickly welcomed the proposals, seeing a new market as more council tenants are driven by rising rents into the banks' grubby hands. Chief Executives of large housing associations cannot wait to add new properties to their empires. New Labour-led councils, like Lambeth and Southwark, are rushing to prove their “modernising” credentials in getting shot of council tenants.

Councils are already moving full-steam ahead to meet the government targets for selling off 200,000 council houses a year for the next 10 years. Southwark Council plans to transfer all of its 53,000 homes to 10 new social landlords, Lambeth aims at 40,000 while Glasgow plans to sell off 95,000 homes. In all, 23 councils are bidding to transfer 270,000 council dwellings this year.

Opposition is growing even among Labour councillors as tenants realise what the proposals mean. Despite hundreds of thousands spent on glossy publicity and fat-cat consultants to persuade tenants to change landlords, tenants have organised to defeat many of these transfer attempts. Tower Hamlets' tenants voted a resounding “no” to transfer proposals. There are active campaigns to defend council housing in Southwark, Manchester, Cambridge, Camden and elsewhere.

A national campaign has been launched, backed by the construction



union UCATT, many tenants' associations, Unison activists and others. The Campaign to Defend Council Housing has brought out its own newspaper, arguing for a massive injection of funds to carry out a major programme of council house improvements. The campaign is an excellent start to preventing Labour from off-loading the housing crisis onto council tenants themselves.

But we must also rally tenants, housing and building workers to a socialist alternative to Prescott's plans.

Prescott and his Housing Minister, Nick Raynsford, boast about the £5 billion extra they will provide for housing over five years. This is a pitiful

amount, given the size of the problem. It is not only the massive backlog of repairs and renovation to council housing, but also the dilapidated state of much of the private sector housing stock that needs to be tackled. As the Green Paper points out nearly half Britain's housing stock is over 50 years old, a quarter dates from before the First World War.

In London and the south east especially there is a growing problem of homelessness. People cannot afford to buy, and councils have been prevented from carrying out any significant house-building programme for almost two decades. Meanwhile, the private sector builders sit on massive “land banks”, waiting for prices to rise and only interested in building for the higher end of the market.

Capitalism has never been interested in providing housing for the working class at affordable rents. It is only interested in a quick profit. This was why municipal housing, fought for by the workers and the socialist movement at the end of the last century, came about in the first place.

The Campaign to Defend Council Housing needs to be part of a struggle to tackle the root cause of Britain's housing problem.

Homelessness could be banished

overnight by requisitioning all second homes, especially in London and the south east, where the problem is acute. The fat cats and city businessmen, with their plush second flats all over central London, should be thrown out and the homes placed at the disposal of local councils for the homeless. Empty properties, many bought as investments, should be seized without compensation. These measures alone could solve the immediate homelessness crisis in London.

A massive programme of repairs and house building, as part of a programme of public works, should be launched, creating quality houses and flats for workers and their families. The tenants (actual and potential), building workers and elected representatives of the local working class, should control these programmes to ensure the projects are designed to meet workers' needs.

“Where will you get the money from?” This will be the cry from New Labour and its prudent Chancellor. The reply is simple. Through a steeply progressive income tax combined with a hefty wealth tax. This could raise billions, not just for housing but for health and education too. The Labour government won't do it because it is in the bosses' pocket. It would rather make the poorest sections of the community pay for a miserably inadequate housing policy through upping the rents.

Against the sham proposals of “participation” and “representation” for tenants put forward by New Labour and their social landlords, we should defend directly elected and accountable local councils, with control over housing, and fight for maximum tenant control over all housing decisions through elected tenants' committees and associations on the estates.

The private building companies and their “land banks” should be nationalised without compensation and placed under workers' control so that they can contribute their resources to such a housing programme. Land should be taken out of private ownership and returned to the people through nationalising it without compensation.

The crippling housing debts of the councils and housing associations, paid many times over in interest to banks and finance houses, should be cancelled immediately, with any bank in resulting financial difficulty being nationalised under workers' control.

As Friedrich Engels put it in 1872, talking about the housing crisis caused by the development of capitalism in Germany:

“In such a society the housing shortage is no accident; it is a necessary institution and can be abolished with all its effects on health etc., only if the whole social order from which it springs is fundamentally refashioned.”

This remains the case in Britain today.

NATIONAL CAMPAIGN TO OPPOSE COUNCIL HOUSE PRIVATISATION

Defend Council Housing

WEST MIDLANDS ORGANISING CONFERENCE

24 June, 12 noon - 4.00pm

United Services Club,

DAGENHAM

Strike to save jobs

“WE HAVE to fight because this is not just about workers' jobs now. It is about jobs in the future, and about whole communities.” These were the words of one long-time worker from Ford's Dagenham complex, addressing a meeting in East London last month.

Now, at long last, there are signs that national union officials are prepared to lead resistance to the impending closure of Dagenham's car assembly plant

with the immediate loss of some 2,000 jobs.

A 2 June meeting of 50 TGWU and other union officers agreed to ballot for strike action not only at Dagenham but across the whole of the Ford UK combine. Mass meetings at the Dagenham complex are due to discuss action before the end of July. In the meantime, however, another 1,500 jobs will already have disappeared as the result of an earlier

voluntary redundancy exercise.

Tony Woodley, the TGWU's top official in the car industry, once more told journalists that Ford had effectively torn up “a gentlemen's agreement” from 1997 about new investment at the Dagenham site. He added, “so we should stop behaving like gentlemen.”

Over the course of the next month stewards and activists at Dagenham need to encourage a huge “yes” vote for indef-

inite action and send out delegations to meet with workers at other Ford plants not only in Britain but across Europe. Militants need to argue now for a democratically elected, fully accountable strike committee that can wrest control of the dispute from full-time bureaucrats who have time and again sought to divert workers' anger into the defence of “British jobs” at the expense of workers elsewhere in Europe.

And any attempt at plant closure must be met by a full-on occupation by workers. If Ford bosses refuse to back down on their threat to jobs then we must pile the pressure on Labour to nationalise Ford under workers' control and without any compensation to bosses who have already realised billions in profits. No strike or occupation should be called off until every job is guaranteed.

Witch-hunt spurs left unity

DELEGATES GATHERING in Bournemouth later this month for the annual conference of Britain's biggest union will be facing what has become an all too familiar situation. Once again, left activists in Unison are under investigation and a major metropolitan branch (Sheffield) remains suspended.

In addition, the union bureaucracy has moved to expel a number of key militants from both local government and NHS branches in what is clearly a politically motivated witch-hunt. Meanwhile, a whole series of New Labour attacks on Unison members and the very notion of public sector service provision continue unchecked.

Still, some things have changed since the union's last national conference in Brighton a year ago. General Secretary Rodney Bickerstaffe announced that he was standing down early, so triggering an election for his replacement. His heir apparent, Dave Prentis, won but on the basis of a very low turnout.

At the same time the main candidate of the left, Roger Bannister, of the Campaign for a Fighting and Democratic Unison (CFDU) captured nearly a third of the ballot – a much bigger share than in autumn 1995. In May it emerged that Dave Prentis was suffering from cancer of the oesophagus, and might be forced to stand down before taking office.

May also saw a dramatic erosion in New Labour's working class support at the polls, not least because of continuing cuts in local services and the perpetual crisis in the NHS. Not everything has been going the way of the dominant faction of the union's bureaucracy, which aside from witch-hunting has combined mild rhetorical opposition to such New Labour policies as PFI and Best Value with a steadfast refusal to mobilise members to fight against them.

After confirming the expulsion in early April of UCLH branch officers, Candy Udwin and Dave Carr, who had led the fight against PFI at the central London NHS Trust, the bureaucracy moved against two other prominent SWP members working in the NHS. Yunus Bakhsh, secretary of the Newcastle City Health branch, and Karen Reissmann from South Manchester both faced disciplinary action for allegedly "intimidating" a member of the national executive at the NHS service group conference.

Initially, the indications were that Unison officials would block Bakhsh and Reissmann from attending the Bournemouth conference, but now it appears they have backed off and both will be allowed credentials.

Whether this climbdown signals a more general retreat from the aggressive witch-hunting that has become typical over the last three years remains to be seen, however. In fact, there is a good deal of evidence to the contrary,



Candy Udwin, victimised branch secretary

ranging from the expulsion of non-SWP activists in the Birmingham and Newham local government branches to Rodney Bickerstaffe's farewell speech to the annual forum of Unison's Affiliated Political Fund (APF), which included a good deal of overt "Trot-bashing".

The majority of those attending the APF forum will be doing their utmost to ensure that the national conference does not even discuss an extremely mild resolution from the Leicestershire Health Branch that does not suggest disaffiliation from the Labour Party but proposes the possibility of sponsoring non-Labour candidates. In addition, those branches expressing support for Udwin and Carr have come under threat of disciplinary sanctions if they donate any money to their defence campaign.

The first night of the Bournemouth conference will see another display of left unity in the form of a rally in defence of union democracy and against the ongoing witch-hunt. Speakers from the CFDU and SWP will be among those sharing the platform. The rally will, however, come after what has become the annual ritual of the debate on the right to organise and campaign within Unison.

After conference there is likely to be a meeting of left activists in London from various political tendencies and

none. At least the possibility is posed of a single left organisation in opposition to the current Unison leadership. In one sense, maximum unity on the left can only be a good thing. It could win the support of branch officers and shop stewards not aligned with either the CFDU or SWP.

But the main purpose of a united left should not be to construct a new electoral machine to challenge for positions on the national executive in the hope of eventually gaining control of the union machinery. A new "broad left" is not the way forward. A democratic united left campaign would need to focus on the base of the existing membership, stewards and lay activists, and on recruitment of new workers who currently do not identify with trade unionism but are profoundly sick of the reality of New Labour in office.

Such a left would turn to the rank and file membership, not as voting fodder come election time, but as the force capable of transforming the union into a body which is truly democratic and fighting. Concretely, this means building solidarity with every struggle currently taking place, while spelling out the connection between the current witch-hunt and the determination of the national leadership to make Unison safe for New Labour even as the government continues its assault on the public sector.

Workers Power supporters in Unison, around the bulletin *Well Red*, are committed to working with other groups and individuals in a united left. But our goal is not an enlarged left caucus. It is to create a movement at the base of the union, a real rank and file movement, aimed at turning Unison into a truly democratic, class struggle union.

workers POWER

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COMMENT

New Labour's phoney war

A young girl fails to get a place at Oxford University and the next thing you know the papers are running a "class war special" – not *Workers Power* or *Socialist Worker* but the *Independent on Sunday* and *Observer*!

Class was back in fashion as Gordon Brown, John Prescott and numerous other New Labour luminaries lambasted the stuffy, privileged Oxbridge elite.

In Britain you usually get two distinct approaches: either we are told class does not exist or that we are all obsessed with class. There is either studied denial or we are encouraged to think of it as a tourist attraction, a whimsical aspect of the British heritage that foreigners find entertaining.

But what lies behind Labour's recent rediscovery of class?

It is obvious that Oxford and Cambridge remain bastions of class privilege. They are training centres for future members of the ruling class. You only have to look at the statistics: seven per cent of children go to private schools, 93 per cent to state schools and yet nearly 50 per cent of those gaining an Oxbridge place are privately educated.

And that is after years of supposedly opening up the colleges to the great unwashed. Attempts to blame state schools for failing to educate their pupils to a high enough standard in order to get into the Oxbridge colleges were inevitable in this situation. But such arguments fall apart when the analysis shows that if those gaining the highest possible grades at state schools were to be reflected in the Oxbridge intake, the numbers of students from state schools would have to go up by more than 30 per cent. Of course, the numbers coming from private schools would have to decrease by 30 per cent. This would mean Oxford offering 83 per cent of their places to state educated students, instead of the 53 per cent actually being offered places this year.

The only explanation for such a disproportionate number of private school pupils at Oxbridge is class privilege.

Did Gordon Brown only just notice this? Did Oxford-educated Tony Blair not wonder why most of his university mates could afford crates of vintage claret while students elsewhere had to combine part-time jobs with study just in order to live?

Of course not. New Labour's phoney declarations of class war are the product of its realisation that its ardent defence of one class – the bosses – was alienating millions of members of the working class. The kick in the teeth New Labour received at the local elections has unsettled the leadership. Alarm bells must start to ring when, in inner city areas like Hackney, the London Socialist Alliance can come from nowhere to get seven per cent of the vote.

Within the party the battered remnants of left (and not so left – namely Peter Kilfoyle) have been arguing that New Labour risks losing its core voters by pandering to the middle classes in the shires. Perhaps Blair and Brown believe that some old Labour rhetoric about class, privilege and elites may sound good in the coming election campaign. But will they be prepared to actually do something about it?

In New Labour land class is an interesting concept. They can risk using the word because for most people it just applies to the toffs and the aristos, who are never going to vote for New Labour anyway. John Prescott can be wheeled out to attack those who got where they are just because their father happens to be a lord or a duke.

If your mother happens to be a barrister, things are slightly more complicated. You can talk about class but don't mention wealth; you can attack privilege, but don't mention equality. It is a subtle but important difference which allows New Labour to play to the left rhetorically, while actually delivering to the middle classes and defending the most important privileges enjoyed by the rich – their right to rule and exploit us.

Throwing a few balls at a coconut shy of Hooray Henrys might just distract attention from the fact that the New Labour government is presiding over a country where the gap between the rich and the poor is now wider than at any time since the end of the second world war.

And in Britain today, according to the Sutton Trust, you are 25 times more likely to go to university if you are educated in a private school than if you happen to be born into a deprived background.

The most obvious thing to do if you were serious about ensuring opportunity for all, if you want every child to have the chance to succeed, is to abolish two things: child poverty and private schools. Will this be in the next manifesto?

Less than a year ago Tony Blair claimed that the class war was over. Today New Labour stands accused by the Tories and the press – as a result of Brown's outburst against Oxbridge – of reviving it.

The truth is simple, this is all verbal clowning around by ignorant and privileged politicians and journalists. They can only get away with this because the class war – the real class war fought day in and day out in every workplace, at schools and colleges, on estates, in local campaigns over services, in the courts and prisons – has been a low intensity affair in Britain for the past few years.

The signs are that it won't stay that way for very long. The working class is regrouping and will fight when it comes under attack. And in this class war we won't simply attack the symbols of privilege as Brown did. We will attack the source of privilege – capitalism and the class divided society that New Labour defends.

CANDY AND DAVE DEFENCE CAMPAIGN

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The money game

This month television screens across the continent will be dominated by Euro 2000. As *Mark Harrison* explains this footballing feast involves much more than just watching men kick a ball around

England manager, Kevin Keegan, stands to earn quite a few bob from Euro 2000 – but only if his team are knocked out early!

He is under contract to appear on ITV's Euro 2000 coverage as soon as England are out of the competition. This little fact speaks volumes about the new ethos at the heart of modern football. Though a rich man, Keegan is but a small fish swimming in a sea of capitalist sharks.

Television rights, sponsorship, ownership and advertising are all sources of profit. The principal mass spectator sports have become big business in their own right: football clubs are floated on the stock exchange; television rights to coverage involve billions of pounds and huge returns for clubs and television companies; sponsorship rewards individual players and clubs, while the companies paying for it are guaranteed regular adverts to audiences numbering millions.

Players change clubs for millions and are paid grossly inflated salaries. Supporters' paraphernalia is now a multi-million pound, superstore-led operation.

In the early days the British ruling class used football, which originated at Eton, to try and instil team spirit and Christian discipline in the "respectable" working class. Its popularity as a mass spectator sport grew in the late nineteenth century, especially in the urban industrial areas of northern England and Scotland.

But with this growth in popularity came something the ruling class feared – the working class crowd, numbering tens of thousands. The working class crowd disrupted the idea of the "harmless" entertainment of the football match. The game had been dominated for years by the Old Etonians, the Old Corinthians and such like. Then the industrial city clubs came of age with Blackburn winning the FA cup in 1883. Ever since no gentlemen amateur team has ever won the competition, and the bourgeoisie took note of the danger the "northern" (i.e. working class) crowd posed. The football hooligan was invented when the Pall Mall Gazette reported on the Blackburn fans arrival for the final:

"A northern horde of uncouth garb and strange oaths – like a tribe of Sudanese Arabs let loose."

These fiercely partisan crowds were not what the bourgeoisie had intended. They were vociferous. They drank on the way to the match. They were unruly and they solidarised with each other. These were the very first "hooligans" – now feared today because they may deter investors.

Sensing the danger of football being taken over by the working class, the more far-sighted sections of the ruling class responded by re-organising the clubs as limited companies, run by unelected boards. That way the crowd could be used as a source of income – a captive paying audience.

The crowd could also be manipulated, not only financially, but in terms of uniting behind the team at the expense of their own class interests. West Ham United, for example, was set up by Arnold Hill after a strike at the local ironworks so as to promote class peace

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Nationwide, sponsors of the England Team, uses football to advertise its latest credit card.

among his workforce. And if this local chauvinism could be used to blind workers to their independent class interests then the same could be done on a national basis. National sporting teams could encourage jingoism and loyalty to the empire.

By the start of the last century the objective in promoting sport had become integration of the working class – more especially the skilled working class – into the capitalist order.

The great and the good of British imperialism realised that by identifying with sport, and in particular its great spectacles such as the FA cup, they could promote the nation and themselves. At the 1899 FA cup final Lord Rosebery, while presenting the cup, told the victorious Bury United captain:

"This is the second year running you have had a distinguished cabinet minister amongst you to preside over this sport. It is good for football, and it is not bad for the cabinet minister."

It was a short step from this to the attendance at the event by royalty in 1914, a few months before the first world war broke out. Not accidentally, football grounds were then handed over to the War Office and half a million men were recruited to the army via football organisations.

Patriotism was systematically built into the spectacle of the great sporting events. Royal attendance at the cup final forged a link between sport, royalty and the very idea of the nation. In came the national anthem and with it chauvinism. This trend not only kindles the sort of battles between rival national hooligans that both authorities and fans fear will erupt at Euro 2000. It also contributed to the blight of racism that still, despite the rise of black players in the last decade, plagues the game.

The deliberate identification of sporting prowess with the nation's morale encouraged this rapid growth of rabid nationalism and racism within sport. The ruling class may complain about the hooligan – but it fostered the ideology that fuels the hooligan's battles.

Meanwhile, the state built sport into general education as part of its programme for inculcating discipline and subservience into working class youth. The bosses exploited the transformation of clubs and associations into companies by increasing the scope of their commercial activities.

By the final quarter of the twentieth century business had really begun to emulate the example of North American companies and seized on the new opportunities for profit being opened up by football. Sponsorship money was pumped in. Mainly this was for advertising purposes, but the bosses noted a correlation between success on the pitch and morale (and therefore productivity) at work, a fact commented on by the *Financial Times* during Euro '96.

Today these aspects of sport have become predominant. Football is the clearest example of this process – an evolution that mirrors capitalism's own development. It has left behind its early local capitalist origins and entered its very own phase of monopoly capital.

Football was in serious decline in the 1980s. Working class fans were treated as second class citizens by the clubs and the state alike. The terrible tragedy of Hillsborough, where poor conditions at a ground, combined with police hatred of working class supporters, left 97 Liverpool fans dead, exposed this clearly.

To deal with the decline football's governing bodies faced two choices: treat working class fans like human beings or turn away from them in order to refashion football as a middle class "entertainment", a money-spinning leisure industry. In reality, for the Thatcherite breed of pirate capitalists who were buying into football clubs (Alan Sugar, Peter Johnson, the Hall brothers and so on) as well as the toffs at the top of the FA, there was no question about the route football should take. The FA's position post-Hillsborough was clear:

"The response of most [business] sectors has been to move upmarket, so as to follow the affluent middle class consumer. We strongly suggest that there is a message in this for football."

Reports were commissioned which talked about football in terms of "brand image" and "quality product". Fans were re-titled "consumers". The bosses at the top clubs saw an opening. Clubs were floated on the stock market. The post-Hillsborough "Taylor Report" on safety at grounds became a convenient pretext. Its wide-ranging proposals for reform – including giving working class fans a say in the running of the game – were totally ignored. Only its proposal for all-seater stadia was acted on.

This was viewed as a welcome opportunity to turn the grounds from centres where working class crowds gathered on terraces into entertainment complexes suitable for the new middle class target audience, complete with corporate hospitality boxes. Such boxes sell for £15,000 a season at Villa Park where Aston Villa's sponsors, Mueller Foods, entertain corporate clients. Better still, money for the transformation of the grounds came from outside the clubs, meaning minimal capital expenditure by the club owners.

But there was a further problem. While the Football League (the professional wing of the game) has never been democratic, it had one progressive element that the FA had insisted on when the League was established in the nineteenth century – that some of its income would be redistributed to benefit football in general. The big clubs had to give small clubs some of their takings.

The top dogs of the old First Division grew increasingly resentful of this, particularly given the newest source of big money – television, terrestrial and satellite.

The early 1990s, therefore, saw the biggest transformation of football since the League first emerged – the creation of the Premiership. This was the true dawn of monopoly capital for the "beautiful game".

This "epoch" sees football in Britain dominated by a tiny handful of super-rich clubs. It sees the transformation of the old competitions (like the FA Cup and the European Cup) into mere stepping stones towards big money games in a European super league. And it sees the withering of the game at a grass roots level, something that the executives who run today's clubs don't realise, is alienating the mass of supporters and choking off the supply of talent. How did this come about?

In 1990 the then head of ITV, Labour supporter Greg Dyke, (now running the BBC) invited a handful of League chairmen to dinner and suggested the setting up of a breakaway League which would have sole rights to television revenue.

Discussions and negotiations followed, and in 1992 the FA, itself now happy to undermine the old redistributive principle in return for retaining overall control over the breakaway league, sanctioned the Premiership. Twenty clubs were now at liberty to gorge themselves on television takings.

Enter, stage right, Rupert Murdoch. His Sky television company was losing money but he knew that football had the potential to bring in more viewers, and eventually through a pay-per-view scheme, millions in profit. Dyke at ITV offered the "premier clubs" £262 million for television rights.

Through his ally, Alan Sugar, Murdoch learnt of this bid and immediately phoned through a £305 million bid, leaving Dyke, the architect of the breakaway, floundering. And so, the "whole new ball game" was born. When the contract was re-negotiated in 1997 Murdoch – who by now was raking in £1.3 billion in virtually tax-free profit from his sports channel – wasted his competitors by offering the Premiership clubs £670 million in takings in exchange for exclusive television rights.

The road to mega-rich clubs was opened. A handful of them could now use their wealth to corner the market in transfers and, via guaranteed regular television coverage, garner mass passive support willing to purchase club merchandise to wear while they sit in front of the telly eating Pringles and drinking beer from whichever brewery is sponsoring the competition. A monopoly, in other words.

Meanwhile, community-based sport – the source of talent and grassroots club support – rots as local councils close sports centres, sell off playing fields and cut leisure budgets. No matter, though, you can pay to watch matches, fantasise about your two-bit team joining the European Super League and even save up for two months in order to afford to take yourself or your family to see the odd live game in the plush new stadia.

For the countless workers who enjoy football none of these developments will deter us from watching and enjoying Euro 2000. We will eagerly await 12 August (because its the start of the new season – football, not grouse shooting!). But for the class conscious among us the main worry will not be whether or not it kicks off between England and Germany fans, but whether or not we will be able to afford to stay regular supporters a few years down the road.

The future of the LSA

The future of the London Socialist Alliance is up for discussion at a conference this month. Here we outline Workers Power's views on where it should go now.

The London Socialist Alliance (LSA) achieved a credible series of results in the constituencies in the May London elections. The campaign – despite the poor list vote – was a resounding success. It provided an alternative to New Labour for the growing numbers of workers angry at Blair's failure to deliver and at his blatant pro-business agenda.

The LSA assembled a wide range of activists, from several organisations and from none, who were able to work together, constructively, to put the LSA on the map. The LSA's very existence was a challenge not only to New Labour but to Livingstone. Despite his break from Labour (a welcome step), both his campaign, and his record in office so far, demonstrate that he is not in the slightest bit interested in building an alternative to New Labour and will make concession after concession to the government whatever the impact of such concessions on the working class who voted for him.

All of this points to one conclusion: the LSA must stay in business. It must not be put on ice. It must not be confined to the electoral arena. It should be maintained, for the time being, as an alliance of organisations and activists committed to challenging New Labour through elections and through campaigning activity.

If we fail to do this we will be abandoning our own emphasis in the London election campaign on the difference between the LSA and the other parties: namely, the other parties only exist to get your votes at election times. You might as well not exist as far as they are concerned between elections. The LSA rightly said, whatever vote we get we will not be going away after the election. We will be at the forefront of cam-

paigns and activities that defend the interests of the workers and the oppressed.

We are not in favour, at this point, of the LSA simply announcing itself as a new party. While the election campaign showed the value of left unity it did not obliterate the differences that exist between the various organisations and individuals involved in the campaign. If we simply glued all of those organisations and individuals together into a new party it would be a premature unity that would most likely break apart at the first serious class struggle test. For that reason we are in favour of the LSA remaining an alliance.

However, alliances, as the very name implies, are temporary and exist only for as long as the allies share common goals. They are not organisations that can rally thousands of workers and oppressed to their ranks and organise them for a consistent struggle against the bosses and their governments. For this task the workers need a party, not a collection of different parties, groups and individuals which simply come together to strengthen their ability to compete in a general election.

In the longer term, Workers Power favours the transformation of the LSA and other socialist alliances into an all-British party. In the period ahead we are in favour of the alliances conducting a discussion – alongside their activities – about

what sort of party the working class needs.

Contrary to the assertion by the International Socialist Group, we are not in favour of the LSA becoming "a revolutionary party more or less immediately". But we are in favour of building a revolutionary party and we will argue, openly, honestly and fraternally with all those who disagree with us, as to why the working class needs a revolutionary party and why, if and when the LSA decides to transform itself into a party it should become a revolutionary party based on a revolutionary programme.

We do not pose this as an ultimatum (accept this or we will take our bat and ball home). But nor do we accept, in advance, as the International Socialist Group do, that the end product will be "a left centrist party". To decide, in advance, that we cannot build a revolutionary party in present circumstances is unduly fatalistic.

At the same time we are against the refounding of a Labour Representation Committee (Alliance for Workers Liberty) or a "mass workers' party" (the Socialist Party) – political character unspecified. These are roads back to old Labour, not steps beyond it. The Communist Party of Great Britain propose a reformed communist party. The programme of such a project remains vague. But the comrades' insistence that this can be done through a "rapprochement" of the

existing left in which competing factions come together within one party is, in our view, a recipe for future splits not a solid basis for lasting unity.

The Socialist Workers Party, the largest group in Britain, recognise the need for a revolutionary party but have, as yet, not put forward a view on whether or not the LSA can play a role in creating such a party. The danger here is that the LSA (and other alliances) simply gets reduced to being an electoral front – separate from party building in other spheres – and the opportunity to create a significantly larger revolutionary party in Britain is lost.

We approach the question differently. To summarise our view: we do not believe the LSA can simply be transformed into a revolutionary party now. But it could be a very important step towards the creation of such a party. For this to happen the LSA must seek to turn the considerable passive support it won in the elections into active support: a network of activists, firmly oriented to the struggles in the outside world. Only if the LSA draws in such forces can it become the vehicle for building a revolutionary alternative to Labour.

Without drawing in such forces it will remain – to coin a popular phrase – simply the sum of its parts. But by drawing in such forces we can create a meaningful arena within which the character, structure and programme of a new party can be discussed and, eventually, democratically decided upon.

Within that discussion we will advance revolutionary politics and seek to demonstrate their immediate relevance to the class struggle today. In any conference to decide the character of a new party we will advance a revolutionary programme as the basis for it.

The LSA should be maintained as an alliance committed to challenging New Labour through elections and through campaigning activity

On 11 June, 1.00pm to 6.00pm, at the University of London Union the LSA will hold a conference to which all LSA supporters are invited. Workers Power is submitting the following two resolutions for discussion at this conference.

STRUCTURE AND POLICY

The LSA should constitute borough-based individual membership organisations with an annual membership fee of £10 waged, £5 unwaged. At a borough level officers and a branch committee should be elected by members' meetings.

At a central level the LSA executive should consist of one delegate per sponsoring organisation (political or trade union) together with ten members elected by the conference (ten is a provisional figure). This executive should meet monthly outside of election periods and be responsible for any central propaganda produced.

The existing agreed manifesto should remain the policy of the LSA until a future conference decides to amend or replace it with a new programme. However, as borough organisations develop and as new situations arise new policy issues will be posed. Borough organisations can and should discuss these and put forward proposals to the steering committee.

Between now and the general election the steering committee should be charged with finally agreeing any new policies.

Standing in the general election will require a new programme, since it will be a national election in

which national and international issues will predominate. We are in favour of the LSA - and if other alliances stand, those alliances - convening a conference to discuss and decide the programme of the LSA/Socialist Alliance for any general election. If it looks likely that a spring 2001 election will take place we should aim to hold such a conference in early March of that year.

FUTURE ACTIVITY

The alliances should aim to draw in thousands of non-aligned workers and youth through a firm outward orientation to the class struggle between now and the general election. The executives and the branches should decide on a programme of class struggle activity depending on local circumstances. However, definite priorities in the next period should be:

- building the 24 June Asylum Seekers demo and campaigning activities related to the issue in the localities (pickets of benefit offices, supermarkets operating the voucher scheme) etc.
- building a lobby of the Home Office in July under the slogan "Asylum Seekers Welcome Here"
- building support for the planned week of anti-

capitalist protests in Prague (22-27 September) including organising transport to Prague

- building a demo in the autumn (called jointly with the rail unions and the Campaign against Tube Privatisation if possible) against the privatisation of the tube and against any backsliding by Livingstone on this issue
- standing candidates in all London parliamentary by-elections (including Tottenham) between now and the general election and in selected council by elections
- organising LSA union networks to build for solidarity with disputes, to build for action against the inertia of the trade union bureaucracy and to campaign for real union democracy (e.g. in Unison where a vicious witch-hunt is underway). We should schedule an LSA trade union delegate-based conference in the winter of 2000/2001 to plan and execute a campaign within all Labour affiliated unions to break the bureaucratic monopoly on political funds that stipulates money can only be donated to the Labour Party. The conference could also discuss other campaigning initiatives in the trade union movement
- preparing to stand candidates (in conjunction with other socialist alliances) in the forthcoming general election.

LETTERS

Dear Comrades,

From the last Workers Power: The Alliance for Workers Liberty "sees the LSA as a small step in the fight for a new mass reformist workers' party – a re-run of Old Labour."

What a stupid slander. We have never written or said anything of the sort.

"The AWL saw the LSA as a short term necessity to avoid isolation." No we didn't. We'd remind you that – unlike yourselves – we were involved in the last attempt at this sort of unity, in the run-up to the Euro elections in 1999. Nothing short term or recent about our involvement.

**Mark Osborn
AWL**

Dear Comrades,

In your last paper you claimed that the AWL's view of the future of the LSA was to create a new "Labour Representation Committee" and implied that this would be their vehicle for creating a new reformist "old Labour" style party.

Actually, this is only one of their options. They also still keep alive the schema that dominated their politics when they were trading under the "Socialist Organiser" label – reclaim the existing reformist Labour Party. In the December/January issue of Workers Liberty they wrote:

"The organised working class needs to reclaim the Labour Party, splitting away core working class support from Blair's neo-liberal party-with-

in-a-party, or to establish a new mass party based on the trade unions."

Reclaim the Labour Party? When was it ever actually in the hands of the working class? Under MacDonald, Atlee, Gaitskell, Wilson? A new mass party based on the unions? What about its political character – revolutionary, reformist?

Either way you are quite right to criticise them because both of these schemas point towards a reformist party as the immediate goal. Not surprising from the group that once proclaimed: "we are all Bennites now".

Yours in solidarity
**Mike Fisher
Derby**

HAVE YOUR SAY

We intend to make page seven a regular letters page.

**So send us your letters to
Workers Power,
BCM Box 7750,
London WC1N 3XX**

ZIMBABWE

Action needed to stop Mugabe

Zimbabwe's parliamentary elections planned for 24/25 June will be conducted in a climate of fear and intimidation. *Jeremy Dewar* explains why.

AS VIOLENCE has escalated in Zimbabwe, the racist British media has been concentrating on attacks on white farmers. But it is black members of the opposition movement, the Movement for Democratic Change (MDC), who have been bearing the brunt of attacks by gangs supporting Mugabe's Zanu-PF ruling party.

Zanu-PF supporters threatened candidates as they registered at the start of this month. Candidate Thadeus Rukini was beaten to death. In March, Mugabe was trailing in the opinion polls. Sixty three per cent of voters said they wanted a change of government. Zimbabwe's workers and peasants were disillusioned with a ruling party and leader which presided over 50 per cent unemployment and 60 per cent inflation. The MDC was gathering support on a wide scale.

Since then Mugabe has launched a counter attack using both carrot and stick. The stick is political violence and intimidation. MDC rallies are broken up. The MDC has virtually no access to the air waves.

The carrot is the promise of land redistribution. First Mugabe unleashed the "war veterans" to lead land occupations. When the white farmers caved in and promised not to support the opposition, the leadership tried to rein in the squatters. At the end of last month the ZANU-PF government finally decreed the land occupations legal, and promised



Squatters confront a white farmer

to resettle 100,000 landless peasants by the end of June.

This is too little, too late. The country's 4,400 white farmers own the most fertile 34 per cent of Zimbabwe's land while one million black peasant farmers subsist on the remainder. Yet for 20 years, Mugabe only managed to "resettle" a few of his closest friends and ministers. As one popular opposition t-shirt puts it: "Land to the people, not

the politicians".

Far from being the scourge of the capitalist farmers, Mugabe wants to do business with them. That is why he left the white landowners alone to build up their wealth for two decades and even now has allowed them to bank 20 per cent of their income, from the lucrative tobacco trade, in foreign currency accounts

Mugabe has only encouraged land

occupations now to save his political skin. After the elections he hopes to call off the occupations and strike a deal with the reactionary Commercial Farmers' Union (CFU).

Unfortunately, the MDC—which was formed by the trade union movement in September 1999 and quickly attracted over a million members from the workers and the rural poor—has bent over backwards to support the white farmers and the Western capitalists.

On the land question, the MDC supports the retention of the big plantations in the hands of the landowners, allowing only unutilised and marginal land to be redistributed. Even then, the black peasant farmers will have to mortgage their land to attract investment while the white capitalist farmers will enjoy rich compensation.

The MDC leadership want to mortgage Zimbabwe's future to the bankers in the IMF by rescheduling the debt. Over the past few months Zimbabwe has had to sell half its gold reserves and mortgage next year's gold deposits just to keep the country afloat. Doing the IMF's bidding will mean following approved policies such as privatisation, welfare and education cuts and a concentration on production for export.

The black workers and poor peasants must not allow Morgan Tsvangirai and the rest of the MDC leadership to throw away their futures and hand the capitalists a lifeline.

In the June elections they must give no support either to the thugs of the ZANU-PF nor to the bourgeois candidates of the MDC. Only those candidates chosen by the workers and the rural masses—in the main, socialists and trade unionists—deserve workers' support and votes. Those imposed from above, sadly the majority, will only sell the poor out.

At the same time, trade unionists need to organise to ensure that the elections are as fair as possible and that ZANU-PF is not able to postpone elections or launch a coup should they lose. In April, Tsvangirai promised to "bring violence to the doorsteps of the perpetrators", but then quickly backtracked. He shouldn't have: workers need to form their own militia to protect political meetings and demonstrations and the polling booths from intimidation.

The MDC national council in May also considered calling a general strike to protest against the violence. The working class needs a general strike, both as a warning against the coup-mongers, and to free up the most politically advanced activists to educate, agitate and organise the masses.

Finally, workers and socialists need to use the election period to challenge the MDC leadership and its class-colaborationist road. They should learn from the South African experience. There the trade unions supported a bourgeois-led ANC government and paid for it with privatisation, job cuts, speed-ups and a deteriorating social fabric.

Zimbabwe's workers have launched three impressive general strikes in recent years. They have fought vicious price hikes by taking to the streets and battling with the police. They have forced their leaders to build a new party of opposition. In short they have shown courage, tenacity and ingenuity in equal and enormous measures. They will need all of these in the weeks ahead.

- For workers' militia to defend political action!
- For a general strike to guarantee a free and fair election and stop Mugabe's reign of terror!
- Link up with the South African working class, not the white farmers and the IMF!
- Build a revolutionary socialist party, not a popular front!

THE ATTACKS on white farmers and their farms has sent Robin Cook scuttling to revive his "ethical foreign policy".

Foreign Secretary Cook and his junior minister Peter Hain have suspended the delivery of arms and spare parts to Zimbabwe, and have withheld £36 million (promised in September 1998) to compensate agribusiness magnates for land redistribution. They also used their influence to make sure that the World Bank and IMF cut off funding to the impoverished African nation last month.

There is nothing "ethical" whatsoever in Britain's response. Britain is defending the big white farmers whose ownership of the most fertile land in Zimbabwe is a legacy of Britain's colonial dictatorship over Southern Rhodesia, as Zimbabwe was then known.

Most of these capitalists hold both Zimbabwean and British passports as they see

themselves as settlers with another motherland. When President Robert Mugabe asked them last month to choose between the two, Cook warned him off saying it would be unwise to deport those who "form the backbone of the economy".

Which is precisely the point! Four and a half thousand parasites have been holding a nation of 12 million to ransom for over 20 years—and Cook is solely concerned with the human rights of the parasites.

If Cook, Hain and the British government were really concerned about human rights they would have stopped their support for the Mugabe regime long ago. They would have suspended the arms sales when they were asked to by the Zimbabwean opposition last year. But then no whites were being murdered, no capitalist property was being occupied—only tens of thousands of black soldiers were

being sent to fight a war in the Congo at the behest of Mugabe and his cronies.

If the British government and the international institutions cared about lives they would do something to stop the AIDS epidemic. AIDS—not political violence—is the cause of 90 per cent of deaths in Zimbabwe. Yet the IMF, with Britain's backing, has imposed cuts which means the country can only spend US\$200 per capita on healthcare while the multinational drugs companies massively overcharge for medicines.

If the British government really cared about human rights it would provide aid without strings—not to the capitalist farmers but to Zimbabwe's poor farmers and farm workers who are paying the price for the long years of colonial rule.

Human rights? Black people need not apply.

SOUTH AFRICA

BY LESLEY DAY

General strike shows anger

SOUTH AFRICA'S four million strong one day general strike in May, called by the leading trade union federation, COSATU, revealed the rising anger of South African workers.

More than double the number of COSATU's official membership participated in the strike which touched all areas and all trades. Mass demonstrations in all the main cities brought tens of thousands out onto the streets.

Instead of the promised gains from six years of African National Congress (ANC) governments under black majority rule, the working class has seen job losses totalling half a million. Black African workers have been hardest hit. Education, housing and land redistribution programmes have all been delayed. Big business is responding to a profit squeeze by downsizing, replacing

permanent jobs with temporary ones, and investing overseas. It is estimated that each wage earner is supporting 10 people.

COSATU is demanding protective measures such as compulsory negotiations over job losses, protection for workers in the case of company liquidations and the maintenance of some tariff barriers. Most of all, the COSATU leaders want renewed access to the government and consultations over economic policy. Instead they are being frozen out.

The jobs crisis is causing intense strains in the Alliance between the ANC, COSATU and the South African Communist Party (SACP). On 1 June, top COSATU leaders occupied the offices of the tripartite body NEDLAC, demanding meetings with senior ministers.

NEDLAC is supposed to provide a forum for discussions on the economy and industrial relations between business, the unions and the government.

In the wake of the general strike, COSATU leaders returned to the forum expecting a more attentive hearing but found that only junior officials had been sent along!

While Thabo Mbeki's government pursues its pro-business line, continuing privatisation and public sector cutbacks, and slashing company tax, other ANC leaders have been talking left. Just before the May general strike, ANC Secretary General Kgalema Motlanthe called for a "war against capitalism" and urged workers to join the strike. At the same time government ministers were issuing stern warnings about the damage the strike would do.

Although many commentators see Motlanthe's intervention as a piece of posturing in advance of local elections, it nevertheless reflects the developing dissatisfaction felt by rank and file workers and ANC supporters.

Another row concerns Mbeki's stated intention of expanding the black bourgeoisie. One discussion paper for the ANC's general council meeting in July calls for a rethink and a turn to "policies which aim at maximising the number of South African black communities and nationals who can share in the economy".

The jobs crisis is forcing the leadership of the SACP to be more openly critical of the government, but it still refuses to consider splitting the Alliance. At its May strategy conference, the SACP declared that building a "National Demo-

cratic State" was the best way to pursue redistributive policies and job creation.

For the SACP this means state intervention, the "disciplining" of private capital, restoration of tariff barriers and so forth. It has long abandoned calls for wholesale nationalisation. But even this moderate programme is too much for big business and the ANC ministers.

The SACP and COSATU leaders call for the maintenance of the Alliance on the grounds that this will keep ANC ministers under the control of the mass movement. In fact the reverse is the case. Workers should call on these organisations to break from the ANC and build an independent, revolutionary workers' party.

The scale of the general strike shows that the call for such a party can gain an ever wider hearing in the period ahead.

SIERRA LEONE

A brutal war for diamonds

IT COULD be the nineteenth century. A flotilla of gunboats assemble off the coast of Sierra Leone, Africa. British troops go ashore and take over the streets. Local people are interviewed by the British press. All of them say how wonderful it is to have their "former colonial masters" back again.

Liberal journalists praise Foreign Secretary Robin Cook for this entirely selfless and humanitarian intervention. The word "diamonds" is hardly mentioned. The Tories, on the other hand, sourly warn of "operation creep" and the danger of casualties for "our boys". Something strange is going on.

The pretext for the British intervention was the recent offensive of the Revolutionary United Front (RUF) led by Foday Sankoh. Under last year's Lomé peace agreement, the RUF promised to give up its nine-year war in return for four cabinet seats with its leader becoming vice-president and head of diamond exports. However, in early May, up to 500 UN officials were taken hostage by the RUF at the sites earmarked for weapons. UN forces were also attacked as they were about to occupy the diamond centre of Koidu.

The RUF launched an offensive against the capital, Freetown, twice attacking Masiaka, 60 kilometres from the capital, and threatening the international airport at Lungi. Both attacks were beaten back with difficulty. The second time this was only due to the use of Nigerian and British troops.

The SAS, then 600 paras and now 1,000 Royal Marine commandos were sent into Freetown to prop up the tottering regime. This is an example of the new "humanitarian" colonialism advocated by Bill Clinton and Tony Blair.

These apostles of the "Third Way" are totally committed to the economic depredations of the IMF. Its repeated savage austerity packages, imposed on African states over the last two decades, have led to the economic collapse and the descent into brutal civil wars of many of the weakest states. Presented in the racist Western media as all part of the "heart of darkness" in fact this horror is imposed from the "civilised" boardrooms of Wall Street, Paris and the City of London.

Faced with the collapse of states like

Sierra Leone, Blair and Clinton's answer is to mount "temporary" military interventions: first by local gendarme-regimes like Nigeria, under the cover of regional peace keeping forces like ECOMOG or the UN.

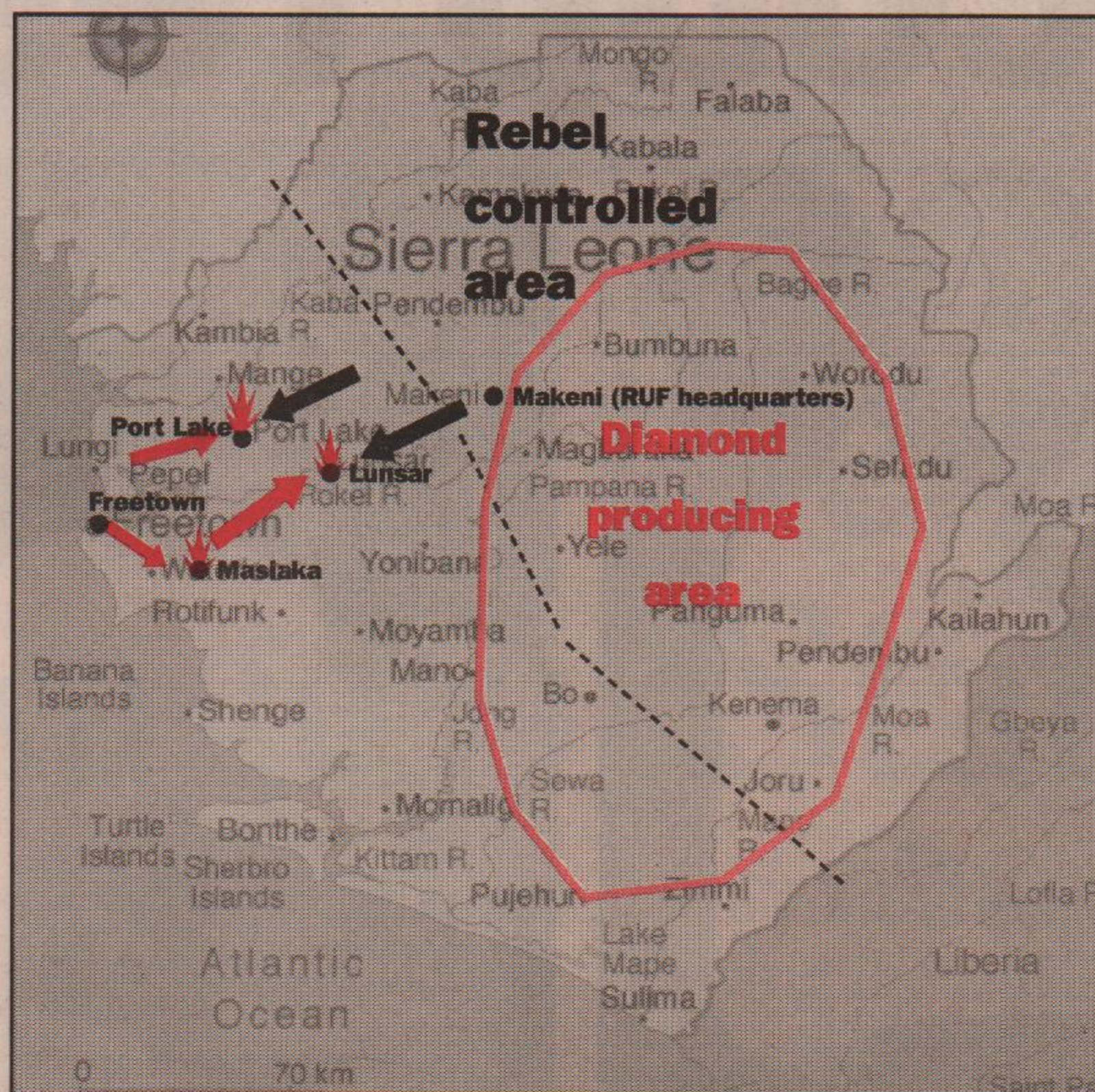
But since even states like Nigeria are staggering under the destabilising effects of the IMF their forces prove militarily inefficient and easily corrupted. Thus the imperialist powers are increasingly obliged to do their own dirty work, or at least stiffen their local agent's forces, first with private enterprise mercenary outfits and, when these too proved insufficient, to send in regular troops, ships, helicopter gunships and the rest.

Since their initial victories over the RUF, the motley array of government troops and irregular militias have taken the offensive, reaching the strategically important town of Lunsar. But they were expelled again in early June. Sankoh was captured by the British in mid-May and is rumoured to be incarcerated outside of the country.

The RUF however is no anti-imperialist national liberation force. It has earned itself a reputation for mass cruelty and terror. Though originating in student struggles in the early 1980s it was rapidly corrupted by the economic and political conflicts waged by the military-bonapartist regimes of the highly balkanised region. What is at stake is the control of the economic wealth of the region and who is to be middleman for the multinational corporations which exploit it.

The RUF's leading cadres, including Sankoh, were trained in Libya and backed by the governments of Burkina Faso and Liberia. Liberian guerrilla leader Charles Taylor (now President) originally sent them into Sierra Leone, in 1991, hoping that they would destabilise the country and prevent it from being used as a base by forces hostile to him. He was all too successful.

The RUF now controls about half of the country with up to 4,000 troops under arms. It reportedly killed 6,000 civilians when it captured Freetown in 1998. Most importantly it controls the bulk of the diamond producing areas. It has been able to sustain its war by diamond smuggling, using Liberia as the transit point. In 1998 the Sierra Leone



Map of Sierra Leone: Pro-government offensive in red and RUF attacks in black. Dotted line shows area presently occupied by RUF

government exported 8,500 carats of diamonds but the Belgium High Diamond Council – the world's largest market for rough diamonds – registered 777,000 carats from Sierra Leone.

However, in some parts of Sierra Leone, such as Kalihun in the east of the country, the RUF was seen as a defence force against a government forces which committed a series of atrocities against people from the Nimba ethnic group in the early 1990s. Charles Taylor remains its main backer. No peace deal is likely to be brokered without his support.

The forces ranged against the RUF hardly have any better record. The old army, the Armed Forces Revolutionary Council, have a bad record of carrying out atrocities when they were in power from 1992 to 1997. Its then leader, Captain Valentine Strasser, has received asylum in Britain, despite being wanted for human rights violations.

Under its new leader Johnny Koroma, the army, sided with the RUF in 1998 and deposed the recently elected

President Kabbah. Eventually, he was restored as President with the backing of Britain (via the mercenaries of Sandline International) and the West African peace-keeping force ECOMOG, led by Nigeria.

This time around, Koroma and his troops backed the restored Kabbah. There are also a number of ill-disciplined militias. The new Sierra Leone Army was created last year and has between 3,000 and 5,000 troops, trained and organised by the British army.

The United Nations forces, brought in to police the Lomé peace accords, were badly armed and blatantly ignored by the USA and the UK. Some troops have been killed, including a number of Zambians, and their weapons used by the RUF. It was the use of armoured personnel carriers taken from the UN that initially gave the RUF the edge in recent battles.

At a recent meeting of the West African heads of states, which discussed the crisis, a far-tougher mandate was demanded from the UN. This call was

backed by Kofi Annan who urged a policy of "peace-enforcement" by the UN. He also promised extra troops aiming to take the UN strength up to 11,000. In response Nigeria has committed itself to doubling its forces to 6,000.

Around the fringes of the war are the various mercenary outfits and their mining companies. The biggest mercenary groups Sandline International and Executive Outcomes use the Branch Heritage group, a diamond mining firm, as their mining wing. Branch Heritage has a number of mining concessions and is developing a regional business empire. These forces were in the past, and maybe in the future will be, vital to the survival of the Kabbah government.

This brutal war over diamonds has led to a death toll of somewhere between 20,000 to 50,000. Many more have been maimed and wounded. Yet the way out of this nightmare for the people of Sierra Leone is not to rely upon the UN, the British or the mercenaries. British occupation – with the TV cameras running – may seem to provide a respite from terror but it will do so only at the cost of subjecting Sierra Leone to a new colonialism. In fact it will sow the seeds of more conflict. Nor is relying upon the militias and the Sierra Leone army a way out. Immediately, the workers in the towns, the mines and the countryside need to create their own militias, based on and accountable to workers' and poor peasants councils. These alone can organise effective defence against the competing military outfits.

But to end the cycle of destructive war the workers need a political party that can fight for a workers' and peasants' government. Only such a regime, based on councils of elected and recallable delegates, will put an end to domestic corruption and the plunder of the country by the imperialist corporations.

Only such a government can nationalise the mines and all imperialist holdings under workers' control. It must dissolve the army and the militias and replace them with a popular defence militia, with democratically elected officers and commanders. Socialists in Britain must demand the immediate and unconditional withdrawal of all British troops and mercenaries.

BANGLADESH

BY LRCI SUPPORTERS IN BANGLADESH

Oppression and misery in the delta

ON 3 MAY, in Savar, Bangladesh, garment workers and their supporters staged a peaceful protest against a sudden wage cut. The management of Ring Shine called in police, who attacked the 1500 strong gathering.

One knitting operator, Rafiqul Islam, and one supporter, Mosharaf, were shot dead and 200 injured. The outraged demonstrators ransacked the factory in revenge. Six people were arrested, and a further 80 face charges of damage to property.

This incident is one example of the volatile situation within the fortress-like compound of Savar's Export Processing Zones (EPZ) which contains 33,700 workers.

Bangladesh began creating these EPZs in 1978 in order to attract foreign capital and earn export dollars. In 1993 the Bangladesh Export Processing Zone Authority (BEPZA) was set up and a blanket ban on trade union activity was imposed. This is obviously the most attractive feature for investors, on top of tax breaks and other incentives. In

1997, 15,000 Savar workers went on strike in defiance of the ban, demanding trade union rights and job security.

The EPZs, now employ 70,000 workers, mostly in the garment and shoe-making industries. While national labour laws do not apply in the EPZs, BEPZA has control over work conditions, wages and benefits. However, the guaranteed minimum monthly wages of \$US 70, 40 and 25 for skilled, unskilled and probationary workers respectively is a laughable fiction. So too is the entitlement of permanent workers to annual festival bonuses, medical coverage, and accommodation and transportation allowances.

This body has consistently refused to give out letters of employment and does not hire any workers on a permanent basis. In reality earnings come to about \$20 per month, less than half the official rates and workers do forced overtime on threat of dismissal. The withholding of pay for up to months at a time, a practice common throughout the private sector, is also the norm.

The situation in the garment industry at large is even worse. The country's top export earner employs 1.5 million workers under conditions of extreme super-exploitation. The majority are young women from rural areas who have migrated to the urban centres in search of work. Working in sweatshops which are more like prisons than factories, with no fixed hours, no regular breaks or days off, workers earn between \$7 and \$10 a month, for an average of 13 hours a day, 27 days per month. This comes to an hourly rate of two or three cents. The industry currently owes \$300,000 in back pay, a staggering amount considering the miserly wages.

Where unions are involved, they act more like extortionists, taking money from management to keep the workers in line while collecting dues from members with whom they have virtually no contact.

A week after the Savar incident the Bangladesh Garments Workers Unity Council (BGWUC), comprising eight such unions, secured an agreement. Under

this Ring Shine agreed to foot the medical expenses of all injured workers, drop the charges filed against the demonstrators, pay back wages and follow the BEPZA rules regarding minimum wages, festival bonuses and maternity benefit, as well as compensation of about \$4,000 to the families of the two men killed by police.

As part of the agreement the BGWUC, however revealed its true colours. It undertakes the responsibility to ensure the peaceful operation of the factory and to ensure that the workers will not create any further problems in future in the factory.

The EPZs are nothing more than a vehicle for the transfer of public money into private hands in the form of bargain-priced land and energy, tax breaks and subsidies. The government must be forced to open its books to inspection by democratically chosen representatives of the workers of these zones. Only thus will the full extent of their exploitation and the plunder of the country by the multinationals be exposed.

Unions key to Fiji's anti-coup resistance

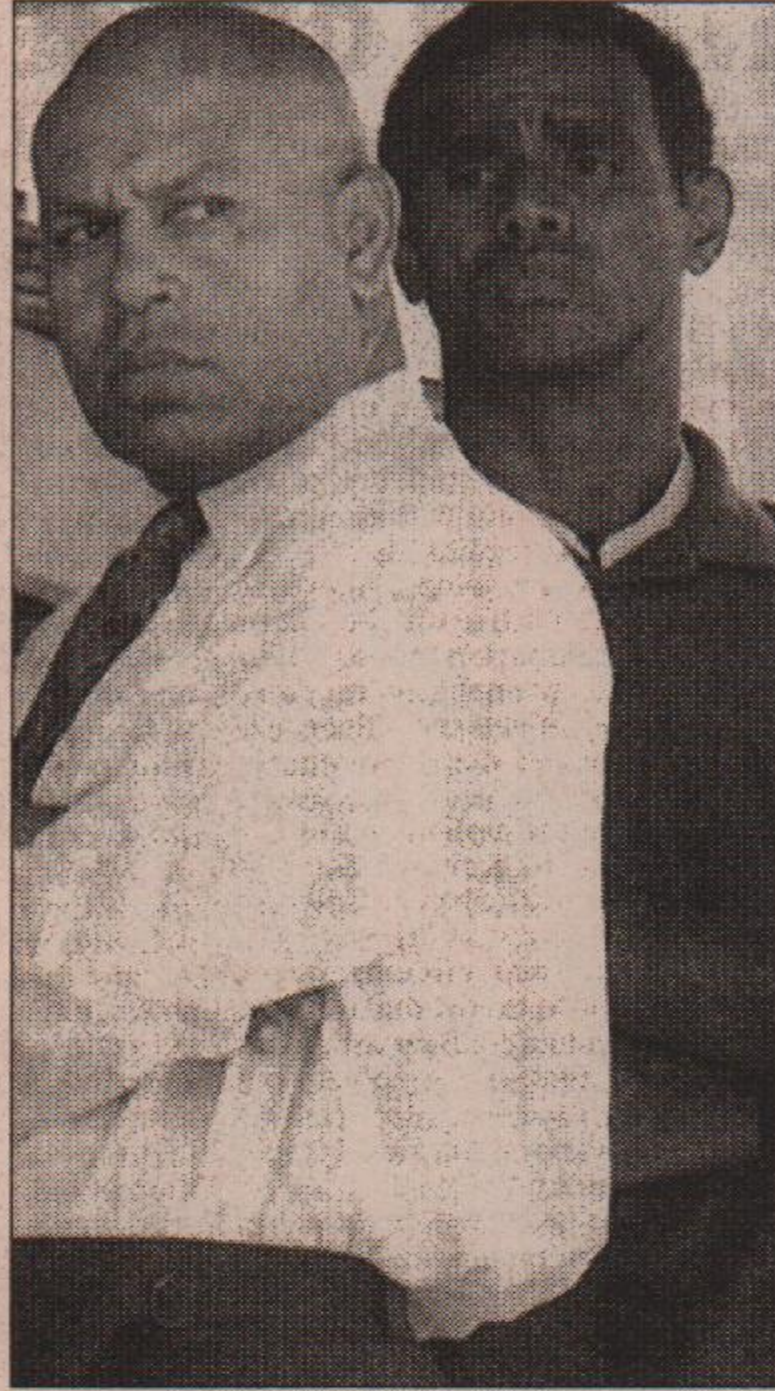
TRADE UNIONS in Fiji staged a one day strike and demonstration on 22 May against the coup attempt by Fijian nationalist George Speight. As Workers Power goes to press the Fiji TUC has called a one-day strike to unite ethnic Fijian and Indo-Fijian workers in opposition to the coup.

Meanwhile the international union federation ICFTU has issued an urgent appeal for solidarity with the Fiji trade unions. In Sydney, Australia, 600 migrant Fijian workers together with trade union and ALP activists blocked traffic in protest at the coup. Australian unions have begun a boycott of Fijian goods and services.

Coup plotters burst into the Fiji parliament on 19 May and continue to hold ministers at gunpoint. The Great Council of Chiefs (an ethnic Fijian group of community leaders led by former coup-leader Sitiveni Rambuka) called for a deal whereby key government posts will be reserved for ethnic Fijians only (as against the island's 44 per cent Asian population) and for the 1997 multi-ethnic constitution to be scrapped.

Initially the Fijian president Ratu Mara tried to play a mediating role but after clashes between pro-Speight gunmen and pro-presidency sections of the army, the army staged its own coup, aimed at defusing the situation while meeting the essential demands of the nationalists.

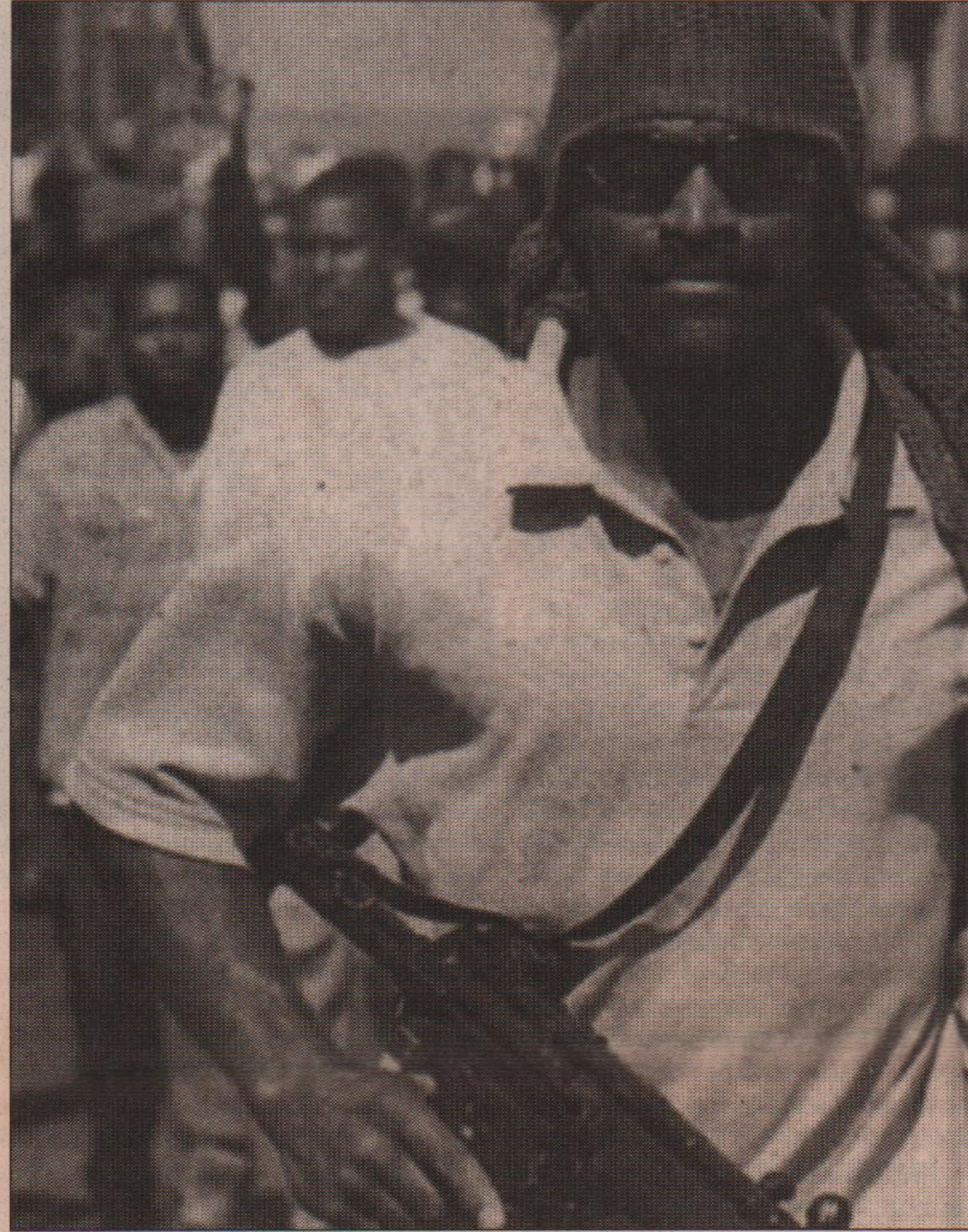
The world's press depicts this as an ethnic conflict but there are underlying class issues: Mahendra Chaudhry's Labour government - which now faces dismissal as Fiji's president Ratu Mara



Speight (above) launched nationalist coup (right)

tries to broker a deal to end the crisis - had embarked on a programme of social reform. This included price controls on 17 key commodities, (including electricity and gasoline) the reduction of VAT, the slashing of interest payments on housing loans and the introduction of subsidies for tertiary education.

The coup is reported by local media to be backed by ethnic Fijian landowners who have let land lie fallow while making fortunes out of importing food. Chaudhry bailed out a domestic rice pro-



ducing company last year and has a strategy of self-sufficiency in basic foodstuffs - which angered the landowners.

Despite the reform programme,

the Labour government will not take on either the global capitalists or their domestic counterparts - Fijian or Indo-Fijian.

Despite the price controls, Chaudhry's "Budget 2000" programme was hailed as pro-business because it promised labour market deregulation, financial deregulation and privatisations.

While Chaudhry faced both ways - to the poor and the capitalists - poverty increased. For all Chaudhry's calls for a multi-ethnic society, this gave ammunition that has allowed the right wing Fijian nationalists to whip up the urban and rural poor (largely ethnic Fijian) to see the Asian population as the enemy (as it did in the 1987 coup).

The Fiji TUC should launch a general strike to stop the new presidential coup. It should form armed workers' militias to defend all those under attack by the right wing nationalists and the army, regardless of their ethnic origin.

A workers' government, based on democratic, multi-ethnic councils of workers and poor farmers, is the answer to the problems of the Fijian masses. Such a government would nationalise the land and distribute landholdings to those who work on them, while replacing Chaudhry's piecemeal reforms with a workers' democratic plan of production.

Workers in the Pacific/SE Asian regions must rally to support their brothers and sisters in Fiji. But we should not support the threats of sanctions imposed by capitalist rulers like Clinton and Australia's John Howard: these can only be aimed at securing some form of mediated compromise that leaves Fiji even more dependent on its imperialist neighbours.

■ More from Asia/Pacific region at: www.workerspower.com

NEW ZEALAND

Labour backtracks on union rights

London mayor Ken Livingstone recently pointed to New Zealand as a workers' paradise. Sandra Grissom, in Auckland, reveals that the reality is very different

THE LABOUR-ALLIANCE coalition government rode into office last year with relative ease on a modest programme of reforms.

Helen Clark is now the most popular Labour prime minister ever, outstripping the legendary Michael Joseph Savage (prime minister during the depression of the 1930s). Her party has surged ahead in the polls and could govern alone if an election were held today. Support for the left-reformist Alliance Party has dropped dramatically since the election.

Labour's rising popularity is a result of keeping almost all of their election promises. The problem is that those promises amount to very little for New Zealand's workers and oppressed.

Taking a leaf from Tony Blair's book, Helen Clark released a "commitment card" before last year's election. Resembling a credit card, it carried Labour's seven key promises. These included:

■ **Focus on patients not profit and cut waiting times for surgery.**

One million New Zealand dollars (about £300,000) went towards cutting waiting lists. But the real problem

is not hospital waiting lists but primary healthcare. New Zealand has the unenviable position of the highest infectious disease rates in the developed world. Doctors' visits and prescriptions cost the proverbial arm and leg.

Currently, there are meningitis and whooping cough epidemics. New Zealand has the highest rate of tuberculosis of any English-speaking country (2.5 times that in Britain).

■ **Cut the cost to students of tertiary education, starting with a fairer loans scheme.**

Since their introduction in 1989 by the previous Labour government, fees have risen by 600 per cent. Collectively, students now owe almost a billion pounds in a country of four million people.

Labour policy in 1999 became simply an interest write-off scheme. From this academic year, students can apply to have their interest written off, but this is neither automatic nor retrospective.

■ **Reverse the 1999 cuts to superannuation [pension] rates.**

This has been done but, again, the gesture cost the government little. Nothing has been done about the fact that

pensions were already pitifully low. Many older New Zealanders live in dire poverty, and really need a big boost in basic payments.

■ **Restore income-related rents for state housing so that low-income tenants pay no more than 25 per cent of their income in rent. The government introduced the relevant legislation to Parliament on 25 May.**

On 1 December, the government will restore income-related rents to single people earning less than \$225 per week and families on less than \$347 per week (about £115). This excludes many people who struggle to pay market rents and means the government collects a further six months extra revenue in the meantime.

■ **No rise in income tax for the 95 per cent of taxpayers earning under \$60,000 a year. No increase in GST [akin to VAT] or company tax.**

This was the first promise Labour kept when they passed legislation increasing tax to 39 cents in the dollar for those earning more than \$60,000 (about £20,000). One thing will be obvious - wages in New Zealand are pitifully low. Ninety five per cent of people earn less than the equivalent of £20,000.

Exempting company tax from increases means Labour will not challenge big business in any way. Workers will still pay for the bulk of any reforms.

The Labour-Alliance coalition gov-

ernment also increased the adult minimum wage from \$7 per hour to \$7.55 (£2.30 to £2.50). This weekly increase of \$22 was considered hopeful by Labour supporters, but has since been gobbled up by interest rate and petrol increases.

This is a Labour government with very little to prove. New Zealanders were so relieved to get rid of Jenny Shipley's National Party-led coalition that these crumbs have satisfied the vast majority of workers. In this sense, the honeymoon has only just begun. The claims of massive popularity are all true but it has taken very little to placate New Zealand voters. Why?

The previous government had all but completed the privatisation of New Zealand society. Workers have been under siege for the past 20 years, suffering a major defeat in 1991 when the National government passed the Employment Contracts Act (ECA). The ECA has sent union density plummeting from 70 per cent to 16 per cent of the workforce in nine years. The country's unions have taken a battering in some ways worse than that suffered by their British counterparts, but with much less of a fight.

The Labour government's replacement for the ECA retains many of its worst aspects. Though there is no legal right to strike, the union bureaucrats are happy because the new Bill enshrines their position as the contract negotiators and workers' representatives. In addition, Labour minister Mar-

garet Wilson is in the process of watering down some aspects of the Bill after lobbying by the Employers' Federation.

The Labour-Alliance coalition has failed to deliver anything but the most minimal reforms. But workers have been ground down so much by the past two decades that this feels like a huge victory. Just like Blair in the early days of his government, Clark has been made to look good because the National (Tory) government before her was just so bad.

The current situation does provide a window of opportunity that socialists must exploit. Trade unionists need to seize on the liberalisation of the anti-union legislation to rebuild organisation. They must also boost support for a massive campaign to demand the full repeal of the ECA and its replacement with a positive set of workers' rights.

Beyond this we need to press home demands, backed by militant campaigns, for free education and health care, massive investment in primary health and housing, and a massive increase in pensions and other benefits. All this must be paid for by taxing the rich and squeezing the profits of the large corporations.

But as workers do regain lost ground they will come into sharp conflict with the Labour government. And when they do Clark, like Blair, will prove that the world over, reformism will defend the bosses' system at any cost. Will Livingstone still describe it as a workers' paradise then?

General strike in South Korea

Over 70,000 South Korean workers responded to the strike call by the militant union federation the KCTU on 31 May.

The strike was called over three main demands:

- reduce the working week from 44 to 40 hours, bringing in a five day week

- stop the sell off of the Daewoo motor company to a foreign buyer

- legal protection for

workers in casualised jobs.

The strike was strongest among metal workers and nurses. About 18 hospitals were affected together with large manufacturing plants like LG Chemical and Kumho Tyre. However KCTU members at the big four car manufacturers have so far failed to join the strike.

Likewise a number of smaller unions held back from

the strike action as the bosses moved to "salami" the strike into different sectional grievances. The pilots' union, for example, which has threatened an all out strike unless it was legalised, was granted a certificate of legality just hours before the general strike began. Subway workers in Seoul had already signed a no-strike deal in return for concessions.

The government also announced it would open negotiations on the working week as the strike was due to begin.

However, it is vital that the shipyard, heavy industry and auto workers who form the core of the KCTU's industrial strength are brought into the struggle now.

For regular updates see <http://www.workerspower.com>

UKRAINE

Workers pick up the pieces amid wreckage of Stalinism

Michael Proebsting talks to Sergei Filchashkin, one of the leaders of a youth trade union that is fighting to rebuild working class independence in the Ukraine, following the collapse of Stalinism

WE REPRINT below an interview with Ukrainian activist Sergei S. Filchashkin, conducted by Michael Proebsting and first published in the Austrian journal *Volksstimme*. Sergei S. Filchashkin is a 23 year old Law student in Kiev. He is a member of the Central Executive Committee of the Progressive Youth Trade Union. He is also a member of the sympathising section of the LRCI in the Ukraine. Proebsting is a member of the Austrian section of the League for a Revolutionary Communist International (LRCI).

Michael Proebsting (MP): When was the Progressive Youth Trade Union (PYTU) founded, and why?

Sergei Filchashkin (SF): The PYTU was founded in September 1998. It is a union organised by and for young people. Since then, it has been officially recognised by the Justice Ministry. In the 1990s, the so-called Youth Co-ordination Council still functioned as the official representative of youth. It originated in the Stalinist period but had been taken over by forces which were close to the right wing President, Kuchma. As a result, it was anything but a real representative of the interests of young people. At the same time, you have to bear in mind that the official trade unions are completely passive, fossilised old bureaucratic structures from which young people are, effectively, excluded.

MP: How big is PYTU today?

SF: For some time we have been organised in eight regions including

Kiev, the Crimea and the Donbas. Today we organise some 7,500 youth. The strongest group is in the Crimea where we have about 3,000, most of whom have been won just in the last few months. A significant proportion of our members are activists, between 500 and 700 in the Crimea. You have to take into account that the Crimea has a unique tradition and that the Communist Party is very strong there.

MP: You describe yourselves as a "youth trade union", could you give me a clearer picture of the social make up of the organisation?

SF: In Crimea, for example, the majority are apprentices with a further 10-15 per cent university students and about the same number of young workers and school students.

MP: What are the main demands of the PYTU?

SF: Raising living standards for young people is particularly important. Incomes here are miserable. Let me give you an example: a student here gets 17 Hrywna a month (approximately £2.40). A loaf of bread costs H2 and a monthly bus pass is H9. We have calculated that you need about H75 a month just to survive, and that's without power and heating. You don't have to be a mathematician to see that no student could live on that. So, most students have to work alongside their studies: many young women work as prostitutes. Wages are often not paid either: just at the moment, 40,000 miners are on strike for six months of unpaid wages. The most important

demands for us, therefore, are higher wages and grants, payment of back pay and the creation of more jobs.

MP: Do you have any other demands?

SF: Yes, obviously we defend basic democratic rights which are threatened by Kuchma's grab for greater powers. But we don't limit ourselves to immediate demands, we try to link them to ideas which go further. For example, the decline of the economy and the plundering of firms' assets by the oligarchs is a central problem in Ukraine. The PYTU, therefore, stands

Most young people simply don't know what they could do against the attacks from the government or the employers

for self-administration, the control of the workplaces by the workers. Another very important idea for our union is the fact that, today, there is no party that really represents the interests of the workers and the youth. We are in favour of the building of a new workers' party.

MP: Is the PYTU a non-party organisation then, or is it close to any particular party?

SF: The PYTU is certainly non-party in the sense that it is not subordinate to any party. But naturally there are several political forces active within it. For example, I myself am active in Workers' Power - the Young Revolutionary Marxists. Seven of the 23 members of

the Central Executive Committee are in the Komsomol, the youth organisation of the Communist Party, another one is active in the group Workers' Resistance. However, the majority of our leadership belong to no political party. That has led to arguments because the Komsomol representatives originally proposed that PYTU should simply join the Communist Party of Ukraine, which was heavily defeated.

MP: What are your most important activities?

SF: One of the central problems that we have, which, perhaps, you don't

of your union?

SF: Members in our branches meet at least once a month. Town leaderships hold at least two meetings a month and the Central Executive, in other words the leadership of the whole of Ukraine, meets at least once in three months. Our union has absolutely no full timers - not because we fear the old problem of bureaucracy but simply because we have no money.

MP: So finances are your biggest problem?

SF: Yes, certainly! I've already told you how low the wages are and how high the cost of living. Obviously, that doesn't leave much for the union. Just the fares for going to leadership meetings are practically impossible. A train to Crimea costs about 70H.

We just don't have enough money to publish a paper or a discussion journal. As a result, all of our work depends on donations. I know that even in the West, the Left and trade unionists have to struggle with financial problems but here, in Ukraine, the situation is really dramatic.

The government is continually restricting the rights of young people. But the growth of our union in such a short time shows there is widespread anger amongst the youth and a readiness to get active.

■ You can help to support the work of the LRCI in the Ukraine and across Eastern Europe by sending donations to Workers Power, BCM 7750, London WC1N 3XX. Please make cheques payable

Miners strike shows need for a political alternative

Miners across Ukraine took strike action in May. We received this report from Workers Power (Ukraine)

IN EASTERN Ukraine 12 mines were on strike in the Donetsk region. In addition three mines in the Lugansk region and one mine in the Lviv region (western Ukraine) took strike action.

Some of the most militant action has been in Lugansk, where miners from the Komissarovskaya pit picketed the Lugansk regional government and organised a tent camp in the square opposite the administration building. Sixty two miners took part in this continuous picket. The Lugansk strike was organised by the official trade union (PRUP).

Unfortunately the independent trade union (NPG) has refused to support the demand for an industry wide strike. This is explained by the fact that the pro-bourgeois leadership of the NPG is actively taking sides in an ongoing fight between

two large "clans" within the Ukrainian bourgeoisie.

The NPG is preparing its own strike, aimed at securing the dismissal of the deputy prime minister, Yuliya Timoshenko. Timoshenko is the minister responsible for fuel and energy, but she is also a leader of a major clan - the one previously headed by former Prime Minister Pavlo Lazarenko. Pavlo Lazarenko fled to the USA, when faced with charges of having embezzled millions of dollars. He is now facing money laundering charges in the US and Switzerland.

A rival bourgeois clan is headed by Grigoriy Surkis and Viktor Medvedchuk. The political expression of this clan is the Social-Democratic Party of Ukraine (United) SDPU (U). The leader of the NPG has made a political pact with SDPU (U) against

Yuliya Timoshenko and her clan. These lash ups by the union leaderships with different bosses are the source of massive corruption and disorientation in the Ukrainian trade union movement.

In this situation comrades in Robitnycha Vlad/MRM (Workers Power/Young Revolutionary Marxists) have been arguing amongst the striking miners that it is vital for the Ukrainian workers to develop their own independent class political standpoint. Otherwise, they will continue to be used by one set of bosses merely as a tool against another.

Unfortunately, at present, the miners remain under the powerful influence of pro-bourgeois union leaderships. At the same time the Communist Party of the Ukraine and other reformist parties have little serious influence amongst the

striking miners.

The government of Ukrainian premier Yushchenko is attempting to defuse the situation. They are promising to pay all the wage arrears owed to miners. But any concessions are likely to be temporary and these promises will soon prove to be empty ones - as on so many other occasions.

The main political tasks now are to combat workers' illusions in the reformist parties and to fight for a trade unionism independent of all the oligarchs and bureaucrats, which mobilising for a mass, indefinite general strike, right across Ukraine and all of its industries, to force the payment of all back wages, pensions, student grants etc. at the expense of the oligarchs, the ex-bureaucrats and the new bourgeoisie.

From anti-capitali

Last November, protesters blocked the meeting of the World Trade Organisation in Seattle. But *Colin Lloyd* asks, what is the global anti-capitalist movement, and how can it go from protest to working class power?

LAST NOVEMBER, a series of demonstrations took place in Seattle, USA, against the World Trade Organisation (WTO). The Seattle protest not only disrupted the WTO meeting: it shook global capitalism to its foundations. It set going a multinational popular resistance movement to capitalism that every socialist, trade unionist, single issue campaigner has to be part of.

What shocked the world's ruling class about Seattle? First, the coming together of radical youth protesters and "non-governmental" lobbying organisations (NGOs) with organised labour. Second, the rapid evolution of protest ideology away from single issue ecology campaigns towards a total hostility to the capitalist system. Third, the internationally co-ordinated character of the protest.

It shocked them all the more because they have spent the entire decade since the fall of Stalinism in 1989 sounding the death knell of anti-capitalism. We've had the "End of history" theory; we've had post-modernism – which insisted concepts like exploitation, oppression and imperialism were dead; we've had the emergence of the "third way" in the social democratic parties – based on the theory, as Tony Blair says, that Labour parties should never have been formed separate from the liberal mainstream.

But despite all that, in the words of US radical Michael Moore:

"Mark it down, this last great date of the 20th century – November 30 1999 – The Battle of Seattle, the day people got tired of having to work a second job while fighting off the collection agents and decided it was time the pie was shared with the people who baked it."

Seattle mobilised youth dressed as endangered sea turtles, Korean sweatshop workers, French farmers, a whole host of environmental groups – and unions from the industrial core of the US working class. But what are the WTO, the World Bank (WB) and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and why have international protests started to focus on them?

The WB/IMF and WTO are part of the world financial architecture set up on the orders of US imperialism after World War Two. They really came into their own as economic tools of imperialism when the long boom of the 1950s and 1960s ended, and capitalists turned to an economic policy described as "neo-liberalism".

In Britain, and rest of developed world, neo-liberalism means attacking all the protective institutions and reforms fought for by the working class since 1945. Privatisation, the "marketisation" of state services, reduction of taxes on the rich and increasing them on the poor, slashing public spending and welfare rights, mass unemployment as production moved to third world destinations – this is the programme of neo-liberalism, and it is all carried out alongside a relentless downward pressure on workers' wages.

In the developing world it means all this plus crippling debt. Debt means that, in Uganda, the main hospital building is a concrete and glass edifice as modern as a city general in Britain. But there is no power, no water, no medicine, few doctors and only basic nursing care. Patients light fires on the concrete floors and drink from dripping pipes.

The loans that paid for the ambitious development schemes of the 1970s now cripple the whole system. This obscenity is put into even sharper focus when we consider that Uganda is seen as the "most successful" country in Africa at managing and alleviating debt.

The effects of the capitalist financial architecture are most acute in the less developed countries. Marxists call them semi-colonies because direct political rule from the G7 countries has been replaced by indirect rule.

The key institutions of indirect rule are the WB, IMF and the WTO.

The World Bank issues long-term loans to indebted countries and ties them to "anti-pover-

APPEAL TO ALL ORGANISATIONS

To all trade-unions, socialist, communist, anarchist, anti-capitalist and youth organisations, initiatives and campaigns,

From 26 to 28 September 2000 a combined conference of International Monetary Fund and the World Bank is taking place in Prague- capital of the Czech Republic. These unelected and unaccountable organisations are responsible for crippling debt, harsh austerity measures, social cuts, privatisation and hunger for the people of Africa, Asia, Latin America, Eastern Europe and the former USSR.

In Seattle, USA, on 30 November 1999, tens of thousands of protesters - trade-unionists and youth - showed their opposition to these policies of the international financial institutions on the occasion of World Trade Organisation Conference.

This conference was brought to an early end due to the common peaceful action of trade unions and anti-capitalist

campaigners.

We the undersigned from the Czech Republic support non-violent protests against IMF/World Bank and call on organisations and individuals internationally to join a mass demonstration of workers and youth on 23 September 2000 in Prague and to participate in accompanying events.

We appeal to organisations from across Europe to support our protest!

- **Cancel the debt of Third World and Eastern European countries!**
- **Establish a democratically controlled international development bank which would provide needed investment to education, health service, infrastructure and housing!**
- **Stop the dependence on multinational monopolies!**
- **Tax the MNCs and movement of speculative capital!**

ty" programmes that are basically an order to rip up social protection to boost conditions for capital investment.

The IMF issues short term loans tied to "conditionality": this means the loans will only take place if governments adopt policies ordered by the IMF itself.

The WTO is concerned with trade agreements: for neo-liberalism pulling down barriers to trade used to mean ending import controls and quotas. Now it is intent on removing "invisible" barriers to trade: for example in Britain the National Health Service is seen as a "barrier" to free trade by private health companies.

One example of how the IMF works was in the economic crisis in South East Asia. In the face of the 1997 economic crash it demanded cuts in public spending, denationalisation, removal of import controls and the transfer of corporations to US or European buyers at knock down prices.

This in turn led to layoffs and massive casualisation. Last month's general strike in South Korea (see p10) was aimed directly at stopping the attacks launched by the IMF. No wonder South Korean workers protested under the banners "IMF= I'M Fired".

The IMF/WB/WTO are part of a process known as globalisation that neo-liberalism unleashed to remedy its economic crisis. There is a debate on the left about the true extent of globalisation. Some argue that we are up against a whole new kind of capitalism – that has left behind its "national" identities forever. Others say little has changed since Lenin and Bukharin formulated the theory of imperialist monopoly capitalism in the early 1900s.

That debate has been dealt with elsewhere – and the reality lies between these two extremes. However, an understanding of the extreme globalisation theory is needed to understand the Seattle movement. Its proponents say:

- a) capitalism has left behind its national boundaries
- b) all politics aimed at the nation state are useless – not only things that Marxists oppose (import controls, immigration controls) but all demands on Parliament, for example the demand to nationalise Rover or Dagenham.

Hence the focus of protest turns against international institutions like the IMF and on multinational corporations like Monsanto. Go straight to the capitalist organ-grinder – not the monkey in Parliament – is the theory.

That is what the Seattle-coalition did. And it sparked the idea that there could be a new, multi-

national popular resistance to capitalism. But to move that from wish to reality we have to subject the ideas and projects of the three main strands involved in Seattle to some critical scrutiny.

What is a Non-Governmental Organisation? Basically these are campaign and lobby groups that have grown up as charities have become politicised and drawn into the economic and political running of capitalism.

- There are NGOs very close to national governments. Some of these take part in the lobbying around IMF/WB conferences but it is worth noting that the US state has a policy of creating and fostering links with "friendly" lobby groups in order to counter the danger of subversion.

- There are NGOs that are independent but backed by wealthy individual donors and mass subscriptions: Friends of the Earth is probably the most prominent of the mainstream environmentalist charities and Greenpeace the more radical mainstream. They work through a mixture of direct action and lobbying but their general aim is to reform capitalism to develop the economy at a pace suited to protecting the environment.

- Then there is a third tier of NGOs that was most visible in the Seattle context: NGOs formed by other NGOs, and occasionally unions, to campaign against and monitor the activities of individual companies or institutions. Corporate Watch, Bank Watch, Fifty Years is Enough and the Bretton Woods Project (BWP) are examples.

The BWP was formed in 1995 by 30 UK NGOs to monitor the IMF/WB and its key document and proposals for reform of the WB are published jointly with Public Services International. Public Services International is a trade union federation with 20 million members including Unison, the FBU, the GMB the TGWU etc.

Leaving aside the overtly pro-imperialist NGOs, most want to reform capitalism. While they operate on a national level, in the context of Seattle they represent the emergence of a new kind of international liberal reformism. What they want most of all a seat at the table when the WB/IMF sits down – to represent the interests of the earth, the peasantry, the poor and the working class.

Their emergence reflects the total failure of traditional reformist parties to do anything for

ism to revolution

NS OF WORKERS AND YOUTH

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- Trade Union Association of Bohemia, Moravia, Silesia
- Socialist Workers Organisation/LRCI
- Communist Youth Union
- Revo (revolutionary youth)
- Movement for Just Society
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- Vera Zezulkova, journalist of Communist Party of Bohemia and Moravia (KSCM)
- Milan Honusek, Member of Central Executive Committee of KSCM
- Hassan Sarfo, head of international relations department of KSCM
- Jiri Hudecek, chairman of Party of Democratic Socialism
- Miroslav Prokes, United Czechoslovakia

Add the name of your organisation to the list of supporters of the demonstration on 23 September 2000 in Prague.

All those trade unions, socialist and progressive organisations in Britain who wish to participate in this demonstration and the events of the following week in Prague should contact/affiliate to:

The Prague September 2000 Mobilising Committee
c/o BCM Box 7750
London
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Financial and organisational support urgently needed. Please make cheques payable to:
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these groups – a privatisation of reformist campaigning. They are generally staffed by the '68 generation in all its political forms: ex Trotskyists, anarchists who have hung up their bal-clavas, greens, anti-racists. But they are paid for by the middle class and the liberal capitalists.

As well as the NGOs, there are the trade unions. As socialists steeped in the day to day workplace struggles we think we know the unions inside out. But they are changing at the top. Basically, the union bureaucracy in the 1990s has, by and large, given up trying to protect jobs and conditions through militant action and is looking for a new form of social compromise and partnership. Instead of trying to resist globalisation the bureaucrats accept it but become more professional and determined in their lobbying for reforms at the international level.

A whole cadre of second-tier union bureaucrats has used the internet to form horizontal ties with unions internationally to co-ordinate lobbying and occasionally protest action. The "old" internationalism of the union bureaucracy involved a back-slapping solidarity address at conference each year and then maybe a drink-sodden "delegation" to Bulgaria. The new unionism can involve daily contact with international counterparts and inevitably the bureaucrats involved look to the intellectuals and campaigners within the NGOs for ideas and use their actions as a lever in negotiations.

Let us remember that the "old" reformism was called into being a century ago by the move of unions from the purely economic sphere into the political sphere of national politics: that's how the Labour party was formed. So again today we can see the re-creation of reformism at an international level.

The third element in the new alliance is young people. If we paint a general picture of class consciousness in the 1990s we could say youth were bombarded with a soft anti-communism that said: social problems are over, socialism is dead, feminism and even gay rights have succeeded, the only war left to fight is the one to save the planet. Individual lifestyle or passive protest were the way forward.

Above all the academics rammed down the throats of students the new capitalist ideology: postmodernism: "All protest leads to oppression; all class struggle is futile; the Gulf War didn't happen; imperialism is a dead concept".

But the youth have managed to overcome all this. Much to the annoyance of all kinds of conservative trade union time servers – and quite a few self-styled Marxist revolutionaries – the

youth worked out, all by themselves, that it's not just Monsanto or Microsoft that is the problem but the capitalist system.

That's why we see, in the USA for example, the emergence of movements on campuses to support workers in sweatshops. United Students Against Sweatshops (USAS) is a campaign that has forced colleges not to take sponsorship from sportswear companies using low-paid and child labour – for example, Nike. They've done the job of adding firms like, Gap, Nike and Starbucks to the list of "what shops is it acceptable to trash", which was formerly a list of one: McDonalds.

Despite the desire to focus on the big problem – capitalism – much of the youth's activity remains focused on single issues (like sweatshops). It uses a combination of radical Non-Violent Direct Action (NVDA) and political lobbying for reforms. It sees the workers often as passive victims of oppression, and sees politics as something to do with the bourgeois parties in Congress.

So, for example, a USAS workshop script for activists encourages students to "imagine what it's like to be in a sweatshop".

Some people have compared the present generation of "fluffy" anti-globalisation activists to the Russian narodniks of the 1880s. But many have not even got that far: the narodniks dropped out of their universities and their middle class lifestyle and went "to the people".

Many within the mainstream of the anti-globalisation movement see the workers, shanty-dwellers and peasants of the third world in the same way as they see whales and rainforests: helpless victims to be protected, their plight to be "imagined".

The crucial step will come however when the youth positively turn to the workers – not as charitable donors or saviours through individual acts of protest but as allies in the class struggle.

Basically, the youth in this alliance are the "wild card": the NGOs and unions leaders have a strategy and an agenda that flows from their position within capitalism. The youth are not constrained by a self-imposed limit.

The choice is posed for the youth around and within the NGO-led protests: turn to the working class. Not because its struggles are more glamorous than the individual direct action stunts of the NGOs – for months and years on end they are not. But the working class is the only force in society that can make anti-capitalism a reality. It is the only class that has an interest in overthrowing the system rather than reforming it from within.

When we look at the Seattle movement, and its international character, one danger is to abstract from the different national terrains of struggle. There are probably a majority of youth in the European protest movement whose ideas mirror those of the USAS leaders. However, Europe has a far stronger existing tradition of union, socialist, communist, Trotskyist and anarchist youth organisations.

This is both a strength and a weakness. Its obvious strength is that it allows the radical anti-capitalist youth to take a lead in posing the question – to the workers, or to individualised reform-oriented protest? Thus youth in Europe were able to stage large militant stand-offs with the state – such as the J18 protest in London in 1999 – and have participated in massive anti-fascist mobilisations (up to 300,000 turned out earlier this year to protest at the Haider coalition government in Austria).

The weakness is that many of the existing leaderships of the pro-worker youth movements are conservative and hostile to the anti-capitalist movement or – in the case of the Anarchist FSA – determined to split it so as to exclude all NGOs, all unions, all socialist and communist parties and quite a few rival anarchist groups as well.

This survey of the forces involved in Seattle is critical because we have to avoid two things: the first is writing off the movement because it doesn't look like the British miners' strike of 1984/85 or the student riots and workers' mass strikes of France in May 1968. The second is to see the emerging consciousness as spontaneously revolutionary anti-capitalism. To say as the Socialist Workers Party (SWP) does, "we agree with them 90 per cent, disagree 10 per cent and only raise the differences where they are posed by the struggle", is to gloss over the problems with the new movement.

Both approaches are doomed. If we are to take the NGO activists, the youth and the trade union rank and file beyond their existing ideas and strategies we must intervene within the movement with our own, unified strategy.

And history is with us: at Seattle events themselves pushed the militants and even the leaders beyond the boundaries they'd stayed behind before.

The NGOs and union bureaucrats were denied their "place at the table": so they had to link up with the most radical groups – the youth, the social ecologists, the anarchists – to launch direct action. The massive police repression, where rubber bullets, stun grenades and CS gas were fired point blank into crowds not of anarchists but of peaceful protesters, did what it always does: it changed their understanding of the role of the capitalist state. And because it was televised live across the world the impact of the thousands of demonstrators changed the minds of millions of others watching.

Events themselves pushed the youth into an alliance with the unions. Sitting in groups of hundreds, the beleaguered youth had just one question according to one eyewitness account: where is the union demo?

The AFL/CIO leaders had mobilised between 20 and 50,000 union members to protest at China's entry into the WTO and the cheap Chinese steel that would hit US industries. Many of the youth rejected that kind of protectionism out of hand. But once on the streets they realised that turtle costumes and gas masks can only resist the robocops for so long: 50,000 steelworkers and teamsters is a different matter.

The workers too got pushed further than their leaders expected by the Seattle events. The leaders of the AFL/CIO went out of their way to keep the union march separate from the anti-globalisation protest – both physically and politically. They tried to lead it in the other direction. They eventually accepted a private meeting with Clinton, and their formal agenda was dominated by protectionism.

But the rank and file had other ideas. They broke through the police lines – and it was no accident that the breakthrough was led by the steelworkers and teamsters. These are unions

where there has been a limited anti-bureaucratic fight. Instead of seeing the youth as the shock troops, like the NGOs see them, the workers saw them as allies. In fact the bitterest fighting took place on 1 December when the workers waded straight into a line of riot cops on the Seattle waterfront.

After Seattle it was clear that the protest movement was not just reformist NGOs, naïve, single-issue middle class youth, and passive workers under the control of the bureaucracy.

It was an alliance of youth and workers to change the world with an internationalist vision and a clear view of the state as the protector of the capitalists: suddenly both were part of a movement that gets results. There have been – before and since – strikes that started to win in the USA. But here was a politicised workers' movement that made a difference.

The tasks of revolutionary socialists in this movement could not be clearer. We have to pose the question: towards middle class reformism or working class socialism. We have to intervene to correct the movement's current political weaknesses that let it be used as a stage army by reformism and liberalism: the same Friends of the Earth that mobilises youth into radical direct action puts money and lobbying expertise behind Democrat politicians like Bill Bradley in the USA.

We have to focus the movement onto a real anti-capitalist programme – the politics of revolutionary Marxism.

Within the youth movement we say: there is only one force that can overthrow capitalism. The choice is between NGO lobbying and workers' revolution. Turn to the workers, become socialist revolutionaries.

To the workers we say: stop demonstrating for one capitalist vulture to beat another capitalist vulture, as at Rover. Stop lying back and thinking of England every time Tony Blair launches a new attack on your rights and conditions. Open the doors of the workers' movement to the youth.

To the best activists within the NGOs we have to say: charity and campaigning are not enough. Turn over the massive resources of the lobby organisations to the needy and dispossessed.

The youth movement must turn to the workers. The workers' movement must become anti-capitalist. The revolutionary socialist groups must immerse themselves in this struggle or become an irrelevance – but they must fight for revolutionary politics, not just become cheerleaders.

With a radical youth movement and a workers' movement awakening from years of defeat, history has given us the opportunity to rerun the late 1960s. But this time we must do it with a revolutionary organisation in the lead, instead of a collection of workerist sectarians and middle class poseurs. What is more, the Stalinist obstacle that was there in 1968 is a decrepit toothless shadow of its former self even if many of its ideas (the cross class alliance, quasi-nationalist economic policies and even the guerrilla strategy) are alive and well within the Seattle movement.

Where next after Seattle? There was April 16 in Washington – which showed the IMF/WB getting clever in trying to co-opt the NGOs and demobilise the unions. There were the Mayday protests. And next there is Prague.

Maybe Prague will top Seattle – or maybe it will be repressed out of existence by the desperate Czech capitalists. But however big our protests get, the capitalists will carry on adopting the divide and rule approach, opening up parallel dialogues through shadow conferences and consultation exercises.

Mass strikes – co-ordinated across the globe – and a mass revolutionary movement of workers and youth: that is the way to greet the capitalist get-togethers that carve-up our futures behind closed doors. When the lights go out, the luxury food stops arriving, and the internet connection dies: that's when they'll realise we don't just want to share the pie: we want to take over the bakery.

Faction fight erupts i

Dave Stockton looks at the issues behind the faction fight, which has been publicised on the internet, between the British Socialist Workers Party and its sister group in the USA, the International Socialist Organisation.

AT A membership meeting in London on 13 May, members of the British Socialist Workers Party (SWP) assembled to discuss the results of the London Socialist Alliance election work. But for most of the meeting they were treated to a long attack upon the International Socialist Organisation (ISO) by Alex Callinicos – leading member of SWP central committee and international organiser for the International Socialist Tendency (IST). The ISO is the SWP's long time fraternal organisation in the United States, with around 800 members.

This was the first time that most of the SWP's the membership had heard of this dispute. They were handed a 53 page Bulletin, whose contents proved that "serious differences" had been developing between the two organisations for around a year. They dated from the period of Nato's war against Serbia and erupted at the IST's meeting held around the SWP's Marxism event in July 1999.

Then SWP Central Committee criticised the ISO for erecting sectarian obstacles to building a broader and larger anti-war movement in the US and of failing to focus sufficiently on the "main enemy at home". Why? Simply because the ISO continued to advocate the right of the Kosovars to self-determination – as well as mobilising against the Nato war – after the war had started.

The SWP believes that it was impossible to build a broad mass movement if revolutionaries "confused" the masses by supporting both the Kosovars against Milosevic's attempted genocide and supporting Serbia against Nato's bombing. In Alex Callinicos' view this would be a concession to Nato's "humanitarian" pretext for the war.

The Greek section of the IST (Sosialistiko Ergatiko Koma – SEK) strongly supports the SWP position. In a resolution for an IST meeting due to be held on 8 May they stated that during the war, "the key issue was opposition to Nato and the war; disagreements over secondary issues such as the United Nations and Serbian nationalism were diversions from building a dynamic and united anti-war movement."

The League for a Revolutionary Communist International (LRCI) pointed out at the time of the war that in most countries the enormous and fully justified working class sympathy for the hundreds of thousands of Kosovars driven from their homes and homeland was not a "secondary issue". In many cases a dynamic and large anti-war movement was created around support for the Kosovars and opposition to Nato's brutal bombardment of Serbia.

Indeed in Britain the failure of the Stalinist and SWP dominated Committee Against War in the Balkans to take up the question of the defence of the Kosovars played a major role in preventing the building of a mass anti-war movement. The confusion among normally "anti-war" and "anti-imperialist" activists in the labour and student movement was precisely because this was not a "normal" situation (the oppressed, exploited people on one side and imperialism on the other).

Many such activists were confused because they could see, prior to the Nato war, that the Serbian regime's attempted ethnic cleaning mass of the Kosovar Albanians was unjustified. Therefore to ignore or cover up this issue played right into the hands of Blair and Clinton and the "Nato socialists". It did nothing to help rally activists to the anti-war movement, a fact demonstrated by the relatively small size of the demonstrations as compared, for example, to those during the Gulf War of the early 1990s.

Serbia was oppressed, only insofar as imperialism attacked it directly. But winning support for Serbia against this attack could not be achieved at the expense of abandoning a principled, revolutionary defence of the rights, and lives, of the Kosovars.

A non-Nato interventionist solution to this problem had to be argued for. This could be nothing other than the support of the Kosovars' right to independence and support for their armed resistance to ethnic cleansing. The fact that the anti-war movement in Britain and the USA failed



KLA barricades. Support for the Kosovars right to independence was not incompatible with building a mass anti-war movement

to even approach a mass character was in no small measure due to fact that it turned a blind eye to, or actively minimised, the ethnic cleansing and the pogroms of Serb chauvinists in Kosova and uncritically marched alongside those Serb nationalists who supported these abominations.

Not that the ISO actually supported those Kosovars actually resisting the ethnic cleansing. In this sense their support for self-determination was entirely platonic. They seem to have been scared off such a position by the SWP's argument that the KLA was in league with imperialism.

To this there is one answer. What about the SWP's enthusiastic support for the Afghan Mujahidin in the 1980s? Not only were they arch reactionary Islamists, based on the tribal-feudal landowners, funded by Saudi millionaire princes: they were supplied with stinger missiles and trained by the CIA, on a scale that makes the US support for KLA look grudging in the extreme.

It is not true that support for the Kosovars' struggle somehow prevented opposition to "our own" imperialism. Indeed the LRCI (unlike the SWP) openly and publicly supported Serbian resistance to the Nato bombing of their own country (both the popular mobilisations and the "Yugoslav" Army's attempts to down Nato aircraft). We openly declared that we were for the defeat of Nato's offensive and for the unconditional withdrawal of all its forces from the Balkans. Such a position was not at all confusing. It met a warm response in many of the trade union and student organisations where we put resolutions and rallied more people to an anti-war position.

The SWP's position meant that many of the anti-war meetings and demos in Britain were dominated by Serb chauvinists and British Stalinists. These people openly and repeatedly supported the forcible retention of Kosova, denied that the Kosovars were suffering ethnic cleansing, etc. They did so without any serious criticism of these reactionary and ridiculous (because anyone with a television set could see what the Serbs were doing to the ethnic Albanian Kosovan population) arguments by the SWP. The SWP even refused to "make the question of the refugees a central question" (SWP Letter to ISO July 1999).

This shows how desperate the IST majority were to maintain their block with the Stalinists and Serb chauvinist riff-raff.

There was, as we said at the time, a self-defeating character about this for the SWP. The *Morning Star* Stalinists in Britain are a declining and desperate bunch. Few British workers would trust them. Their claims that "Kosova is Serbia's", that the Kosovars were actually pogroming themselves, or were leaving "in order to provoke a Nato attack", should have been denounced for the foul chauvinism and racism and that they were. Comrades who cannot

denounce Nato's crimes and Milosevic's together clearly cannot walk and chew gum at the same time.

In Greece there was a mass movement, but one dominated not only by Serb chauvinism but by Greek anti-Albanian chauvinism, masquerading as "anti-imperialism". The defence of the Kosovars was far from being a "secondary" issue as Sosialistiko Ergatiko Koma says. In Greece, even more than elsewhere, defence of the national rights of the oppressed Kosovars was a litmus test of internationalism. It was a principled necessity. It was a test the IST failed.

Nevertheless the ISO did, in Alex Callinicos words, "make strong criticisms" of the SWP's politics in the war, namely its failure to defend the Kosovars right to self-determination, its weakness in fighting Serb chauvinism and its failure to take up the free entry of the Kosovar refugees. On this the ISO clearly maintained a more principled position than the SWP.

This brought down upon its head the wrath of the SWP CC and Alex Callinicos. Why? Because the position of the US section was obviously far from a minority one. In an SWP Central Committee letter dated 2 July 1999 we read:

"Quite early in the war it became clear that a number of European [IST] groups had responded in a confused and abstentionist way. They were influenced by the general tendency of the far left, in Europe at any rate, to adopt a 'curse on both your houses' position towards Nato and Serbia, and even to support the KLA. Even the German group [Linksruck] was deeply confused and partially paralysed for the opening weeks of the war."

At an international meeting, and under pressure from Callinicos and Tony Cliff this "confusion" was crushed – except in the case of the recalcitrant US leadership.

Despite an agreement at the end of the international meeting in July 1999 "to disengage and reduce tensions" the next cause of conflict seems to be what the ISO claims were attempts – by means of one or more of the famous Tony Cliff phone calls – to persuade some ISO leaders of the need to oust the most troublesome members of the ISO leadership (the Steering Committee), notably Ahmed Shawki, from that leadership body. A letter of protest was sent to SWP on 19 November by the ISO leadership, calling on the SWP Central Committee to clarify if Cliff had spoken for them and to "desist from such interventions".

The response of SWP leadership – in a letter dated 13 January 2000 – was to launch a full frontal political attack on the ISO leadership over its attitude to the Seattle demonstration of 30 November. It criticised the ISO for its poor turnout (around 20 members) in Seattle at the

n SWP international

huge anti-WTO protests. This, it claimed, meant that the ISO was hesitant about involvement in, and too critical of, the developing mass anti-capitalist movement.

For the SWP the Seattle movement represented "the emergence of a new anti-capitalist consciousness at the very core of the system", a mood already witnessed in Britain by "the closure of the City of London by a 'Festival against Capitalism' on 18 June last year."

The LRCI and its British section Workers Power are not likely to downplay the importance of this. But for the SWP to place such heavy criticism on the ISO is remarkable given the near total absence of the SWP from the J18 mobilisation and their limited mobilisation for the N30 events in London which coincided with Seattle. We therefore read with some surprise the boast, quoted from the SWP's Party Notes, that, "the SWP was alone on the Left in relating to this anti-capitalist mood."

Given that Workers Power and the youth organisation fraternally linked to it, Revolution, were the only visible, organised far left presence at J18, and that one of our comrades is now in prison as a result of his actions in defending that demo against police attack, the SWP's claim is entirely hollow.

It reveals that the SWP's conversion to the centrality of these movements post-dates Seattle. It may be legitimate to say that a group in the US should have been more aware of what Seattle would mean, but a principled criticism by the SWP Central Committee should at least have contained a self-criticism of their own failure to recognise the new mood in their own country. But for the SWP to cite even one serious failure on its part on one mobilisation is clearly dangerous – the leadership must always be right. In fact the ISO has made a grudging self-criticism, admitting that "our turnout... was small by our own standards", that they were not happy about it but that for an organisation based in Chicago and the Midwest, mobilising any more was impossible.

Tony Cliff and Callinicos decided this wasn't good enough and decided an all-out polemic was required. In a letter dated 20 February they stated, "it was a tragedy that the ISO leadership failed to take the Seattle demonstration seriously", that it mobilised "only a tiny number of comrades" and that "the ISO leadership had failed the test of Seattle" on top of the fact that in 1999 it had "failed the test of the Balkan War". This was a declaration of factional war on the ISO.

The ISO, naturally enough, observed in its reply that this was ratcheting up the conflict from, "demanding the removal of two members of our leadership to demanding the removal of the entire leadership."

The assault on the ISO was further broadened to the charge that the ISO was stagnating, refusing to open its doors wide to the masses of anti-capitalist youth etc. Their "stagnation" was compared unfavourably with Linksruck, the German section of the IST which had (despite its early bout of "deep confusion" and "partial paralysis") in fact passed the test of the Balkan War. Linksruck has grown rapidly (from about 400 to 800) because it is not "sectarian" about mass movements, does not demand that members be cadres (sell papers attend branch meetings) and – barring that brief confusion – takes its cue from London without too much argument.

This is a boomerang argument – had Cliff and Callinicos but realised it. If success with recruitment is the proof positive of correct perspectives and political line then what should be said of the SWP? In the early 1990s the SWP more than tripled in size, at one point claiming nearly 10,000 members. In the late 1990s the SWP have not merely stagnated, but declined to around 4,000 members. Nor can they plead objective circumstances since this is "the 1930s in slow motion"; capitalism is/was

linked to an international programme.

This failure to understand what a programme is has brutal consequences in the here and now.

It leads to a constant feature of the SWP leadership's method. Every time there is a need to change perspective, when something else becomes the "Main Thing" (today it is the spirit of Seattle), all previous perspectives and other issues get shoved unceremoniously into the background – indeed become obstacles. Those who continue to defend them are hopeless conservatives and have to be shoved aside (or out), usually by organisational manoeuvres and the restructuring of branches and leadership bodies rather than by a democratic internal debate and decision making.

These political somersaults used to be known as "bending the stick". But they have little in common with Leninist democratic centralism. It is a bureaucratic centralist way of operating. And it is a profoundly wasteful method – losing masses of members, demoralising and losing independent minded and critical cadres, encouraging subservience and a culture in which the "best" members are the unquestioning hacks.

The ISO leadership itself shows a similar national centredness. While recognising that "the

practice it means that one organisation – in this case the SWP and its leadership – is above criticism from any other sections.

In the ongoing fight a "third faction" has emerged, made up of ISO members who are critical of the ISO leadership as well as the SWP intervention. They identify the origins in the rift between the ISO and the SWP in Ahmed Shawkhi's request a year ago for information on the money raised in the US and other sections for IST groups that have subsequently "disappeared" (the South African and unspecified Eastern European sections). Evidently no satisfactory explanation was forthcoming from Alex Callinicos.

This opposition set up a public e-group through which anyone could read the documents and participate in the discussion. Due to pressure from the ISO leadership on the server this was closed down. Relunched, it was subjected to the same "repression". Interesting as its material was, it seems to us unwise in the extreme to make such a discussion public. Any uncommitted but loyal members of the ISO must have found this alienating. In any case, an organisation has the right to an internal life. This allows for, and encourages, the free expression of differences without harming the external work of the organisation.

Of course if an organisation does not allow for democratic internal debate, via regular national and international internal bulletins (and today internal discussions sites via the web) it encourages disloyalty. A leadership which suppresses internal debate is itself behaving like a permanent and privileged faction against its own members. It will – sooner or later – reap the whirlwind it has sown.

The most important issue this third faction has raised is precisely the question of democratic centralism which is entirely absent in the IST and is at the root of much of the repeated bureaucratic abuses of the national sections in the 1990s, and before, that have led to purges and splits. The website contained a characterisation of the dispute and proposed measures to deal with it which seems to us elementary and correct:

"Why don't the ISO/SWP leaderships call for a delegate meeting of all sections of the IST to discuss and resolve the differences? Why not organise such a conference to allow both the ISO and SWP leaderships and the dissident factions in each organisation to make their cases in meetings with the leadership and members of the different sections? While we agree that the Tendency is not an international, democratic centralism (both sides of it) is a principle that should be observed."

The LRCI does not view these disputes with malicious factional pleasure on the grounds that anything that is bad for the IST must be good for the working class in general and for us in particular. We agree with the SWP leadership that the recent upsurge of anti-capitalist mobilisations are to be welcomed, participated in and promoted. That is why we have worked to build a mobilisation for the IMF-World Bank jamboree in Prague in September. We are very pleased that the SWP and the IST sections support this mobilisation.

But we believe that bigger possibilities exist as result of this new internationalism. Globalisation and the struggle against it poses the need for greatly increased co-operation and indeed joint actions between all workers' organisations as well as those of youth, women, the racially oppressed etc. We believe that what this poses is the question of concrete steps towards the founding of a new revolutionary International.

We believe all international tendencies considering themselves to be revolutionary should be playing a vanguard role in this. To do so requires a co-ordinated, centralised expression of their strategy and tactics and a democratic decision making process. If the IST adopts such a procedure then its present internal conflicts need not be negative or destructive in their outcome. If it fails to, then the danger is further splits and fragmentation will follow and the method of "internationalism" revealed by the current dispute – bureaucratic centralism and the domination of one national group over all others – will become entrenched.

What bureaucratic centralism means can be seen in the present dispute. In practice it means that one organisation – in this case the SWP and its leadership – is above criticism from any other sections.

"on the edge of the abyss"; and society had moved to the left with a "new mood" of opposition to capitalism growing all the time.

This decline does not seem a very sound empirical proof of the SWP's superior method.

Callinicos claims it is a sign of hopeless propaganda circle mentality if an organisation updates its membership lists regularly (i.e. discounts as members those who have not been seen or heard of for months, if ever). The polemic reveals that the SWP's Party Notes (31 January 2000) has to urge the branches to ensure that "every member gets *Socialist Worker* every week"

This conflict throws the spotlight on one crucial fact. The IST is an international tendency which has neither a common programme nor a democratically elected international leadership. It is, essentially, a grouping of co-thinkers of the British SWP. Its 462 word "Where We Stand", which makes do for a programme, defines it as: "An international grouping of socialist organisations founded on the principles of socialism from below. We stand for the direct and democratic control of society by the working class and are taking the first steps towards the building of international revolutionary socialist parties able to provide political direction within the working-class movement."

The principles of "socialism from below" include Cliff's theory of state capitalism, support for trade unions, the need to abolish capitalism and anti-racism. No wonder that such a limited set of principles cannot hold the IST together. For two decades the SWP and the IST mocked the very idea of having a programme. As Tony Cliff repeated ad nauseam, "who needs a picture of a machine gun: what you need is the bloody gun". Had he never heard of the use of a blue print when it comes to designing and manufacturing guns?

Then over the last few years not only the SWP but its German and Australian sections adopted national "action programmes". In a sense this was a step forward from Cliff's view that no general strategic document was necessary. But the limitations of these programmes were that they deliberately excluded the goal of the struggle for workers' power and consequently they could not show how the struggle for immediate and partial demands (in other words reforms) leads on to the struggle for power. They were not

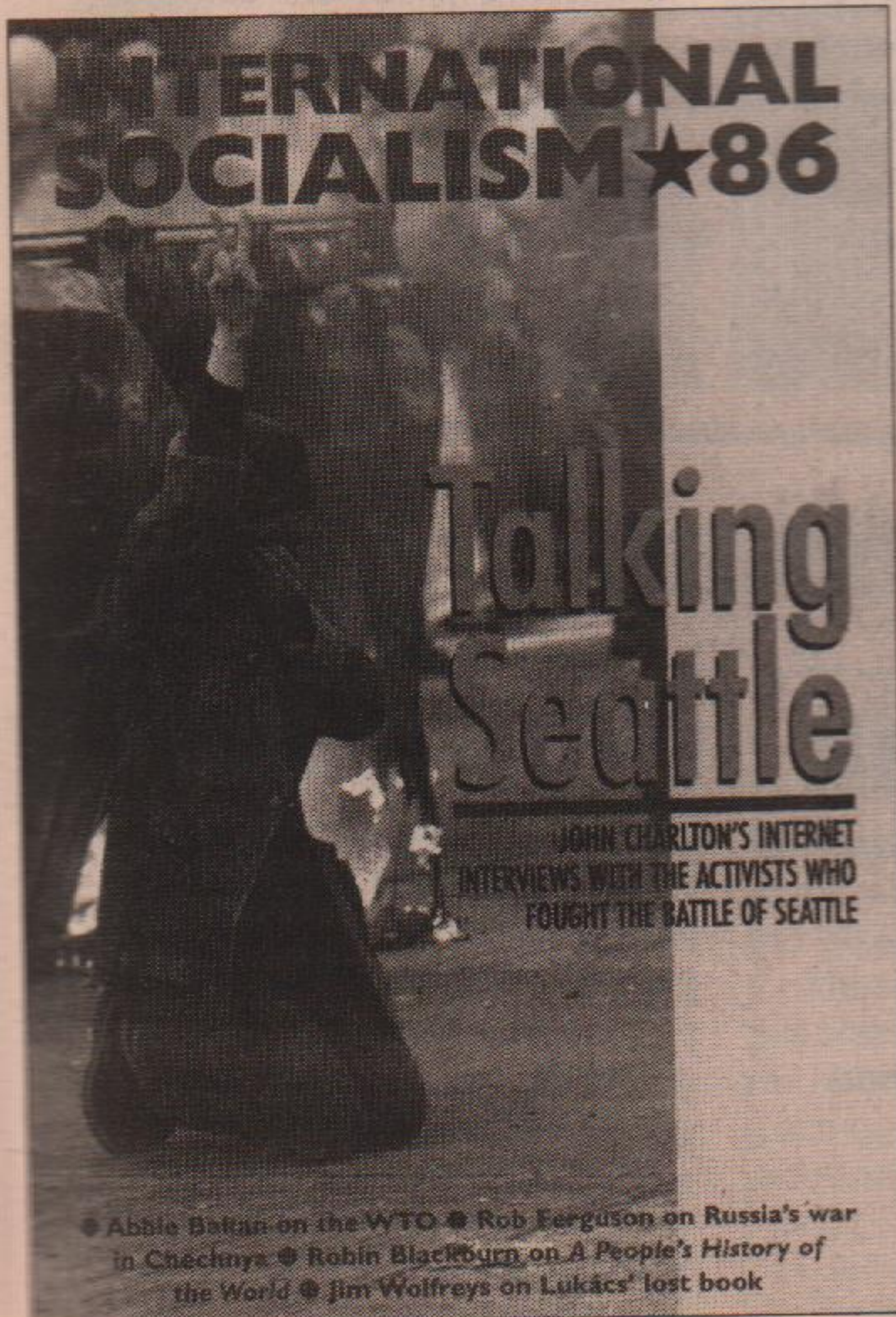
SWP is the leading organisation of the tendency" it goes on to ask, "why should we reflexively accept the British Central Committee's views.?" It indignantly asserts – "Our organisation has its own elected leadership which sets the ISO's priorities – which are best decided in the US not in London."

This of course misses the point. Some of the priorities of an organisation are international – ones they hold in common with their comrades around the world. Some "national" political events have a worldwide significance. So even if Seattle was – as the ISO says – only one of several important campaigns (such as the Mumia and the anti-death penalty movement) its impact across continents, its linkage to similar anti-capitalist mobilisations, its role in what many commentators are calling the "new internationalism" all mean that the IST as a tendency has the right, indeed the duty to make this a priority for all its sections.

This does not at all mean that all a sections' perspectives should be decided in London, but rather that national perspectives – decided at their own conferences – should be set within the framework of international perspectives. These should be decided when and wherever the delegates of the IST can best assemble.

This is nothing other than the dreaded international "democratic centralism" which the ISO, like the SWP, thinks is out of the question. They demand – today at least – strict adherence to federalist principles. But life should have taught them that if you don't have democratic centralism in an international tendency then either you will get bureaucratic centralism or your tendency will just fade away as national divergences and peculiarities get more and more pronounced with time.

What bureaucratic centralism means can be seen in the present dispute. Sudden denunciations, e-mail shots to all the members over the heads of the national leaderships, phone calls and whispering campaigns, sending SWP members to the US to join in the fight. In short, it means an undeclared factional struggle – dishonestly concealed behind declarations of respect for the complete autonomy of the fraternal organisations. In



The SWP criticised the ISO for failing the test of Seattle

WHERE WE STAND

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

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

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

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

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

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

Unite to stop this racist tide

Labour's current slogan seems to be: "refugees not welcome here". New Labour, new racism.

Instead of extending a helping hand to those fleeing war, torture, persecution and famine, the Labour government has engaged in an obscene war of words and deeds with the Tories to prove that they can be tougher on refugees.

Over the last six months, Straw and his fellow ministers have:

- attacked refugees from the Roma communities of eastern Europe on the grounds that they are not "genuine"
- attacked refugee mothers for exploiting their babies and engaging in threatening begging
- cut benefits and introduced the voucher system whereby refugees have to exchange vouchers for goods with no change given on vouchers
- enforced a dispersal policy which buses refugees around Britain
- failed to deliver funds to local authorities to enable them to care for refugees
- placed asylum seekers in sub-standard accommodation which councils had condemned
- introduced fines for truck drivers found with stowaways.

Both the language and the actions of Straw and his despicable sidekick, Barbara Roche, have fuelled a rise in racism and chauvinism. By demonising asylum seekers, by cracking down on their rights, by talk of "bogus" asylum seekers, and "floods" of refugees, the government has fuelled an atmosphere where the refugees are seen as the problem. The oppression - political and economic - from which they flee in fear is conveniently ignored.

Labour may protest that it does not use the extreme language of the tabloids - though it comes damn close - but there is no question that the government's actions have encouraged mounting prejudice. As the journalist Nick Cohen puts it:

"The asylum-seeker panic is the racism of the respectable populist elitist, the dirty passion of the politically correct."

The targets of this discrimination may often not be black but this is still racism, and it feeds all forms of racism. This is seen both in a rise in racist attacks and in the disturbing increase in votes for the BNP and NF on 4 May.

Indeed, as Nick Griffin, leader of the fascist British National Party told the Guardian:

"The asylum seeker issue has been great for us. We have had a phenomenal growth in membership. It's been

DEFEND ASYLUM SEEKERS

STOP

RACIST SCAPEGOATING

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quite fun to watch the government ministers and the Tories play the race card in far cruder terms than we would ever use, but pretend not to. This issue legitimises us."

The Tories are, of course, only too willing to trump Labour when it comes to playing the race card. Hague and Widcombe still manage to accuse the gov-

ernment of being soft on refugees and call for all the asylum seekers to be locked up.

Still, the Tories always were a little behind the times. Surely, Widcombe at the very least, should know that each year 10,000 people are detained under immigration laws and at any one time 1,000 refugees are being held in deten-

SCRAP ALL IMMIGRATION CONTROLS

It is vital that socialists take up the argument and fight against all immigration controls. Immigration controls are inherently racist. They encourage the false assumption that there is "not enough to go round", that there is a fixed number of jobs or amount of wealth to be shared around workers and that immigrants inevitably take resources from other workers.

This is simply not true and masks the reality of an immensely wealthy Britain with an obscene level of inequality where a mere one per cent of the population controls 20 per cent of all assets, valued at nearly £400 billion.

The real enemies are the capitalists who control that wealth, exploit all workers of whatever nationality or colour and cream off the profits. The bosses' capital is free to roam the globe. We demand the same right for people.

FEEDBACK ■ Contact us on 020 7793 1468

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

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