Workers Press

WEEKLY PAPER OF THE WORKERS REVOLUTIONARY PARTY

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Workers Aid launches second convoy

GHRISTIN AS APPEALEOR BOSNA WORKERS Aid for Bosnia has launched an appeal for a Christmas convoy.

This is the first step taken by the campaign's steering committee which met in Manchester on 20 November. With the enthusiastic support of the 31 members at the meeting, this action launches the drive to open the northern route to Tuzla.

The TUC has responded to discussions with Edo Asceric, director of the Tuzla Logistic Centre in Zagreb, by supporting the demand for this route to be opened, along with the opening of Tuzla and Sarajevo airports for the delivery of aid.

The campaign's appeal leaflet says:

THREE million Bosnians are facing starvation, as Christmas approaches.

Over 60 children are dying every day from lack of food and medical attention.

Help

We appeal to everybody in the labour movement to do everything to help Workers Aid for Bosnia send an aid convoy this

We ask all those who stand against fascist barbarity and for the right of Bosnia to exist as a nation to back this convoy.

It plans to leave Britain on 15 December and arrive in Zagreb, the Croatian capital, on 18 December. It will consist mainly of young people who have already taken part in the first Workers Aid for Bosnia convoy.

This second convoy will be part of the campaign to open the road from the Croatian border town of Orasje to Tuzla, in Bosnia.

This 75km highway, although a designated UNapproved 'blue route', is being blocked by that organisation because it wants to starve the Bosnian people into submission and force them to accept the Vance-Owen plan, which will mean the break-up of Bosnia.

Workers Aid for Bosnia is planning a larger convoy for February as part of its demand that this route be opened.

Every penny you raise, every item of aid you give, will let the workers of Tuzla know that their courageous fight is not in vain.

■ They are fighting to survive in temperatures now 10 degrees centigrade below zero.

Lack

- Because of a lack of diesel oil for the pumping stations, electricity is available for only one-and-a-half hours a day.
- Doctors are operating in hospitals with no running water or anaesthetics.
- Under constant attack from Serbian fascist bands, the Tuzla region remains the outstanding bastion against 'ethnic

This workers' region is on the front line of the fight against fascism in Europe. Its miners

and steelworkers are the backbone of this fight.

When the European Community's mediator Lord Owen said that it would be counterproductive to open the aid routes he was speaking on behalf of the great powers and the **United Nations**

The people of Bosnia are digging in for a long, hard winter. They must not stand alone!

They will not stand alone! Their fight is our fight!

Please give everything you possibly can to the Workers Aid for Bosnia Christmas Appeal.

Send your donations and offers of help to: Workers Aid for Bosnia, PO Box 9, Eccles SO, Salford M30 7FX. Or you can phone the Christmas convoy hotline on 071-582 5462.

How you can help

■ Ask your trade union branch or community organisation to make a donation to the Christmas appeal.

■ Take one of our collecting sheets among your friends and workmates. ■ Ring and let us know if you have any goods — food and medical

supplies are the things needed most urgently. ■ If you would like to join a local Workers Aid group or help set

one up contact us. You can reach us at:

Workers Aid for Bosnia, PO Box 9, Eccles SO, M30 7FX. Or Telephone: 071-582 5462 (London) or 061-707 1584 (Manchester).

New plot begins against Bosnia

A NEW plot against Bosnia is being hatched by the great powers. Foreign ministers from the European Union (EU) were meeting in Geneva this week, with representatives from Russia and the United States invited.

They were to discuss their latest so-called 'peace plan'. This would lift sanctions against the aggressor Serbia if it returns a paltry 3.5 per cent of the territory plundered from Bosnia in its war to establish a Greater Serbia.

Meanwhile the starvation of Bosnia would continue, sanctioned by the United Nations.

Foreign secretary Douglas Hurd made a scarcely-veiled threat to Bosnia when he said last week that 'aid to Bosnia cannot continue indefinitely'.

Blistering

The French-based aid agency Médicins sans Frontières (MSF) is the latest organisation to launch a blistering attack on

Speaking on behalf of MSF, Anne-Marie Huby said:

'The UN Protection Force (UNPROFOR) is a fraud. It doesn't protect anybody except itself. Every decision is taken in regard to possible implications for the UN troops on the ground.'

These sentiments were repeated by MSF's head of legal affairs, Ms Bouchet-Saulinier, who said: 'We are wondering what they are doing there. . They don't help humanitarian organisations, they don't help civilians, and they don't help

The meeting in Geneva comes a week after Bosnian Serb and Croat leaders promised that their forces would not shoot at convoys, but would allow them through to areas needing aid. Within 24 hours the pledge was broken.



Twenty thousand marched in London last Saturday protesting against the cuts in the NHS. The march was TUC-organised

Photo: Alan Clark

Workers Press

Another GCHQ

THE 29,000-strong Prison Officers' Association has been effectively banned from taking strike action. This is the result of last week's High Court ruling stopping the POA from taking industrial action, following an application to the courts by the home secretary, Michael Howard.

The High Court ordered the POA to revoke its planned three days of industrial action or its leaders would risk fines and imprisonment for being in contempt of court.

The POA action was planned against the growing overcrowding of prisons and the effects of the government's privatisation of jails.

Howard's application claimed that under the 1952 Prison Act and the 1992 trade union legislation prison officers had the same powers and privileges as police constables.

THE Police Federation is deemed by the law to be a staff association which is not allowed to strike. The POA, ruled the High Court, is in a similar position and therefore enjoys no legal immunities or protection from the costs of industrial action.

The chairman of the POA, John Bartell, was quite right when he said that the home secretary was using a 'shabby recourse to the courts to create another GCHQ'.

The POA's demand for the right to strike should be supported throughout the labour

As countless prisoners, especially black prisoners, will testify, the POA, like the Police Federation, is riddled with racism, and corruption is rife among its members. And no doubt the British National Party enjoys disporportionate support among prisoner officers, as it does among the police.

But in connection with the right of both the Prison Officers' Association and the Police Federation to strike this is not the issue.

There is much racism among workers, not least because of the refusal of the Labour and trade union leaders to fight for the unity of the working class against the common enemy the employers and the Tory government.

But this does not mean that we oppose trade unionism among such workers. On the contrary, to fight for trades unions that really represent the interests of their members and of the working class in general is an integral aspect of the fight against racism.

THE Tory drive to privatise the prisons is leading to a deterioration of working conditions for prison officers, and to a justified fear that the government wants to break up the POA so that all resistance to its plans is ended.

The Tory government knows that its plans to destroy the system of welfare benefits will plunge millions into dire poverty and provoke enormous social and political unrest.

It cannot tolerate even the slightest opposition to its plans among those who staff key elements in the state machine: the police, the prisons and the army.

That is why, after an uproar in the police force, the government was forced to retreat on its plans to worsen conditions for the police.

In the case of the prisons, the government is hell-bent on privatisation, not because it will save money but because it will lead to the employment of non-organised labour in the jails.

If the Prison Officers' Association decides to take action to defend jobs and conditions and organise as a union, it must be supported by the labour movement as a whole.

Letters

WE WELCOME LETTERS **SEND THEM TO: WORKERS PRES** PO BOX 735, LONDON SW8 1YB

— OR PHONE 071-582 8882

Delegates, disinformation and the convoy

I AM not a member of any political party, and I joined the Workers Aid convoy in Dundee on 9 August 1993.

The decision of the USec [United Secretariat of the Fourth International] to ignore the resolution passed by Workers Aid's Manchester conference on 30 October saddened but did not surprise me.

My experience of the behaviour of certain of its members while I was working on the convoy left me in no doubt as to

the nature of this organisation.
One member in particular had such an outstanding talent for performing political, moral and intellectual somersaults I felt like holding up score cards whenever he opened his mouth. The extremely insensitive, autocratic and, in one potentially lethal situation, criminally stupid way in which he operated was outrageous.

Nothing USec is capable of can surprise me any more. The USec member I refer to is our erstwhile 'International Coordinator', Mr Steve Myers.

While this might sound like so much sour grapes, I feel compelled to defend myself in the face of the astounding disinformation that the 'Co-ordinator' has been issuing on my and the convoy's behalf, and his ludicrous claims about the Manchester conference.

In fact I was confidently informed yesterday (20 November) that the convoy organised by his International Workers Aid left Dundee on 7 August. This was of course two days before the Workers Aid Convoy left; it seems Steve had split the organisation even then.

In his capacity as 'International Co-ordinator' Steve was prone to issue 'International reports'. There were seven of these, as far as I am aware. I saw the first and managed to see the seventh. He never gave any to the convoy.

I now know why: these inept efforts are nothing but a farrago of factual inaccuracies, inane personal assertions and downright bullshit.

Luckily the members of the convoy managed to see a copy of

his seventh effort before it was sent out. This report was so personally offensive to all the comrades on the convoy and so patently untrue that it had to be amended.

It was the first time the convoy had been allowed participation in any of these reports regarding our progress. We were never even consulted on the content before.

In his report he claimed that we were returning home because of 'personal commitments', and implied that we were demoralised and fainthearted. I cannot express how much anger I felt over this.

Interestingly Steve was due to go down to the front line with us, but literally seconds after a rather negative report of Serbian military activity he announced he had to stay in Zagreb to 'deepen relationships with local trades unions'. In other words, he was staying because his filofax was fully booked! This caused a great deal of consternation amongst the comrades.

Steve was also given to issuing press statements, once again without any consultation with the convoy. One gem that sticks in my mind is his celebrated anti-Serbian statement.

This was a highly inflamma-

tory press release condemni the Serbian aggression and ca ing them fascists. Unfortuna ly we were at the front li trying to negotiate a safe p sage from them at the time.

We read this press release stunned silence. A highly s rited meeting then took place discuss what could be do about Steve, as Serbian mort shells fell not 3km from us.

The pièce de résistance Steve's consummate incomp tence came with his method dealing with the convoy's solution to return and regrou

He offered a resolution, the was a vote and it was defeate Then using his unique debati skills he asserted that the vo was unfair. Heard this befor

I was working on the conv from when it left Dundee un its return to Britain. Why wa not informed of the Sund meeting in Manchester [on October, which launched USe International Workers Aid Why was I not given the oppo tunity to vote for a 'delegate

Did anyone vote for the delegates? Frankly if this how the self-appointed 'leade of the working class' operate am not impressed at all.

George Ang

Origins of revisionism

THE RECENT spate of letters in Workers Press against the ideas in Bill Hunter's interview (23 October) have something in common - they do not deal with what he said. These letters actually add nothing to the concrete discussion on how revisionism developed then.

Although the criticism started against Hunter it now moves on to those outside the WRP, a sectarian attack against Trotsky and the Fourth International, using some of the points made against Hunter.

The critical phrases so far add nothing useful to the discussion - either they are paraphrases of what Hunter wrote, or we are back to the old stuff where phrases substitute for an

historical discussion. Simon Pirani (6 November) says Pablo and Mandel capitulated before the ideological pressure of Stalinism. 'They turned their backs on the struggle to develop Marxist theory against Stalinist distortion and inversion of it.

Hunter, however, deals with the way in which their capitulation developed: their view of forces ever advancing in favour of the working class; the repudiation of the Transitional Programme and the crisis of leadership; the refusal to turn to the questions of the mass movement; seeing the central axis of struggle as that between Stalinism and imperialism; spontaneity and the revolutionary party; self-reform of the bureaucracy.

Why discuss this now? Because we have entered a new phase of development for the Fourth International and therefore a new phase of struggle against revisionism.

The practice of the Workers Aid convoy helped enrich our theory by showing that one of the central tasks before the European and world working class is the opening of the northern route to Tuzla.

The USec seeks to impose its will from the outside. It talks of internationalism but ignores the Bosnians and insults representatives from the Tuzla Information Centre.

It talks of unity and democracy and organises a split meeting on the Sunday (31 October) after the convoy's reportback meeting, splits the convoy in Zagreb and sets up a separate organisation in Britain, going further now than suggested at its Sunday meeting.

Our tasks are to show the connection between Pabloism then and now, and to show concretely where and to what extent Trotskyism made connections with the masses in t

Trotsky explained the Mar ist method in an article writt in 1924: 'We do not bring truth to t

people from the outside, though truth were something flexibly fixed and given for time, and we do not say to t people "Here is the truth; g down on your knees to it!" 'No, we take the world as it

and in a practical way, active we extract from the foundation of this living world the means f building a new one.

'This is the essence of t Marxist and Leninist method

Those who use a differe method generate such distri and hostility from those worke who are moving into struggle a are seeking to respond to wor events that their method ends destroying, not creating.

Inquiry reveals injury danger for aircrews

In so far: £1,285.77

Workers Press has been at the centre of the campaign in the

Workers Press is widely circulated in the Bosnian refugee com-

working class to defend the multi-ethnic culture and people of Bosnia

munity in Britain and is considered 'essential reading' by others who are seeking to defend Bosnia-Herzegovina. Very few of these people

would agree 100 per cent — or even 50 per cent — with our politics.

isolation of the Fourth International from the workers' movement. But

we need more money than we've got in this month to keep going.

Money to Workers Press, PO Box 735, London SW8 1YB.

But this is a good thing. The paper is slowly breaking out of the

BY ROY THOMAS

AIRLINE workers suffer high levels of injury at work, according to an investigation by the US Health and Safety Organisation.

Aircrews and attendants are more susceptible to accidents due to diminished alertness

This is either because they are preoccupied by preparations for a flight, or they have disembarked following a full day's or night's work.

More alarming is the num-

against the barbarism of ethnic cleansing.

ber of injuries caused by 'air pressure'. This is second only to injuries caused by handcarts which are pushed and pulled up and down aircraft.

Savage

These types of injuries can affect passengers as well as aircrews. The steady rise in such injuries takes place as the savage war between airlines escalates. This leads to cost-cutting and corner-cutting.

Once again we see lives being put at risk in the pursuit BY ROY THOMAS

AN EARLY action in the US government's anti-union offensive of the 1980s was the sacking of the 11,000 air traffic controllers during their strike, and the jailing of the strike leaders.

Pictures in the press of the strike leaders being led away in chains were meant as a message to workers throughout the - this is what you get if you

Following the collapse of a

controllers is lifted number of US airlines and the crisis facing the airline indu try, with more and more cas of near misses following the deregulation of the industr there has now been a

about-turn.

Lifted

The government has lift the ban on the re-employment sacked air traffic controllers.

It is quite another question of course, as to how many them will want to go back to the highly stressful job they we sacked from 12 years ago.

Ban on US air traffic

SATURDAY 27 NOVEMBER: John Maclean 75th anniversary meeting, held by the English Republican Forum, 1pm, Lucas Arms, Gray's Inn Road, London WC1 (near King's

THURSDAY 2 DECEMBER: Workers Aid for Bosnia public meeting on

the report-back meeting for convoy held in Manchester on October. Highfields Youth and Cor munity Centre, Melbourne Roa Leicester. Speakers include Fan Ibrahimovic from Radio Tuzi Phone 0533 531053 for furth

INDEX BOOKCENTRES

071-274 8342

Workers Press £3,000 **Monthly Fighting Fund**

LAST Saturday at the Workers Aid for Bosnia steering committee meeting it was decided to mount an appeal to aim for a convoy at Cross station).

28 Charlotte Street, London W1P 1HJ 071-636 3532

10-12 Atlantic Road, London SW9 8HY

Budget will mean benefit robbery

HE unemployed and the sick will be the main targets the latest attack on the welfare state to be announced the budget on 30 November.

■ Entitlement to unemployment benefit is to be cut from year to six months. After that all benefits will be meanssted. Those with over £8,000 in savings would lose all enefits after six months.

BY PETER JEFFRIES

make separate pension

intends that pensioners

should be forced to use their

homes as assets before they

can claim money from the

As one cynical Tory MP

■ The Treasury also

arrangements.

Curbs on sick pay and ousing benefit are in the peline, together with a nger-term plan to encourge people to opt out of the ate pension scheme and ake their own arrangeents for private insurance

■ The government is getng ready to tax child beefit, and to force wives to

hen they fall sick.

said, this is the 'eat your house' strategy.

So much for Major's 'property-owning democracy'!

David Willets, former director of the Centre for Policy Studies, a right-wing body founded by Baroness Thatcher, has outlined a six-point plan which has already been discussed in the Treasury.

Work

Willets wants to see a tightening up of rules for receipt of invalidity benefit, including more stringent medical tests; single parents made to work once their children reach school age; those on unemployment benefit forced to sign on more

buy their own food and rent their own rooms when in

Part of his plan is the idea that pensioners should be forced to sell their assets.

Labour called these measures 'assault and robbery'.

This is just words. For Labour has set up its own commission to look at how the system of welfare benefits can be 'rationalised', that is cut.

However much the Labour leaders attack the Tories in words, their deeds are something different.

Last week John Monks, new general secretary of the TUC, revealed that he had been in private discussions with Tory

weeks and was now looking forward to better relations with the government.

This is the same government that is about to launch more devastating attacks on the vulnerable people in Britain, casting tens of thousands more people into destitution.

This is the same government that for a decade and more has launched a vicious legal attack on trade unionism

All those threatened in the latest attacks must unite against the Tories, and at the same time take up the fight against all those in the labour movement, such as Monks, who in practice join hands with the Tories against the working class.

Ford pay deal is pushed through

BY SCOTT KENDAL

MOST Ford plants in Britain have voted to accept a two-year pay deal for a 2.5 per cent wage rise in the first year and 3.5 per cent in the second. Marginal increases in pension payments were included, but no concessions were won on shorter hours and longer holidays, nor on equal terms with white-collar staff on items such as bereavement leave.

The unions' negotiating team, led by James Airlie of the AEEU engineers' union, recommended acceptance at only its second meeting. They said they did not think any more could be got out of the Ford

Reject

That many stewards and workers thought otherwise was evident at plants such as Dagenham's assembly plant, where 70 per cent voted to reject, and its engine plant, where one-third of the stewards opposed the recommendation, and the workers voted to accept by 773 votes to 772 — a majority

Dagenham stewards believe that if the call from the negotiating team had been for rejection the vote would have gone the other way.

The leaders could then have been sent back with a strong mandate to demand more. Instead they were landed with a deal that sees them falling behind in the car industry on pay and conditions.

Hours limit regularly ignored on roads

THE DEATHS of 13 school students on the M40 in a minibus crash, and of ten American sightseers on their way to Canterbury on the M2 in Kent, give rise to serious doubts about the length of time people spend driving. The schoolteacher who

was driving the school's minibus had been at work for 15 hours. Even if only five hours were spent driving, the whole working day must have had an impact on the alertness of the driver.

The M2 crash took place at 9.30am, but police are now believed to be conducting a detailed inquiry into driving hours records of all drivers employed by the company.

The legal limit of ten hours driving per day which does not apply to private vehicles — is regularly ignored by bus and lorry companies. A west London bus company found to have broken the driving hours law 270 times in one month had the cases dropped by the Crown Prosecution Service, not because of lack of evidence, but because they had 'not been criminally negli-

More flexible use of vehicles and drivers, through the abolition of regulations that restrict profits, is given as the reason for endangering drivers' and passengers'

The increase in stress and fatigue caused by driving even the existing legal hours is now blamed for a steady increase in health problems and accidents. Deregulation or longer driving hours will mean more deaths, but more

Resist attack on safe driving laws!

IDEAS to increase the use of vehicles, and implement more flexible use of drivers, have been asked for in a Department of Transport circular to employers organisations and the TUC.

Among the suggestions by the government are increasing the maximum daily driving time of ten hours, reducing the minimum daily rest breaks, and reducing the minimum time off between each day's work.

This is in direct opposition to the demand of bus and lorry drivers for shorter working hours and longer breaks because of an increasing amount of sickness. This is caused by the poor design of driving seats and cabs, and the growing stress of driving on congested

Clearly drivers will be forced, in the interests of their own health and safety, as well as of the safety of all other road users, to organise to prevent longer hours behind the wheel. This battle must begin now.



Marchers on last weekend's London demonstration organised by the TUC against the attack on the NHS. See page 1 Photo: Alan Clark

council con-trick

E of the Tory government's gest con-tricks was its promthat Britain was soon to come a 'property-owning mocracy

As part of this fraud, council use tenants were encouraged buy their homes and flats at ock-down prices. The governent has just started another and of publicity to encourage

Disowned

Now about 120,000 people livin former council property d that they have been effecely disowned by the building rieties.

■ Their property has fallen arply in value, part of the neral slump in house prices of

last three years and more

the result of the need to repair what are often delapidated or even structurally unsound blocks of flats.

More and more cases are coming to light of people who bought their flats on the basis of service charges of £6 a week and who are now faced with charges six or seven times that

■ Many building societies have now decided that they will not lend money on former council property, thus making thousands of flats and houses unsaleable.

In some cases, owners of property they thought would fetch £40,000 on the market have been offered £5,000 for their

Many owners have decided They are faced with to simply leave their property

Buyers stranded in Fighting fascism and racism

ATTACKS on black and Asian people, and the ineffectiveness of many anti-racist campaigns launched by the left, have led to the second Fighting Fascism and Racism conference, to be held in London on 4 December.

The trade union and Labour leaders have either ignored the problem or seen it in only electoral terms, say Bexley Trade Union Council, one of the conference organisers.

The TUC wants anti-racist activities to be 'broad-based' it wants to include the Liberal Democrats and Tories in the planned demonstration in east London. Yet it has been told by local trade unions and community groups that these parties are unwelcome.

The first conference in July grew from a handful of local activists in south-east and east And the campaign has the mandate to become a national one.

The 4 December conference which is for delegates only is supported by the Greater London Association of Trades Councils and the South East Regional Council of the TUC.

Local

But it is still based on delegates at the local level — from the Anti-Nazi League, the Anti-Racist Alliance, Youth against Racism in Europe, and the Anti-Fascist Alliance, as well as trades unions and the Labour

■ The Fighting Fascism and Racism conference is on Saturday 4 December from 10am-5pm, at the TUC, Congress House, Great Russell Street, London WC1. (Nearest tube Tottenham Court

WORKERS PRESS IS THE PAPER OF THE WORKERS REVOLUTIONARY PARTY

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Inside left

Missing name

CLAIMING the Workers Aid for Bosnia campaign is just a 'front for the WRP', Steve Myers and his comrades have taken the name 'International Workers Aid for Bosnia' for their breakaway, which is backed by their organisation, the sectarian 'United Secretariat of the Fourth International' (USec).

The Workers Aid report-back meeting for its convoy to Tuzla, Bosnia, on 30 October decided to support the campaign to open the northern corridor route to that town. A minority, including Myers, did not support this, and the breakaway campaign was formed the next day. He has now adopted the worn-out trick of right-wing Labourites, by claiming meetings where he lost the vote were 'hijacked' (see these pages).

Has Myers also learnt a trick from the Stalinists? His International Workers Aid report has an appendix of news cuttings, etc., including Workers Press items like our frontpage lead of 7 August, "Timex to Tuzla — convoy ready to roll!" In each case, his photocopyer seems to have missed the *name* of our paper. What will he do next, use an airbrush to remove comrades from convoy photographs?

UNFORTUNATELY, I couldn't make Lambeth trades council's November meeting. According to the minutes, a delegate who supports 'Socialist Outlook' — paper of the International Socialist Group (ISG), the British section of USec — reported that the Workers Aid convoy meeting in Manchester on 30 October had been 'marred by sectarianism', but 'International Workers Aid' looked better.

Whether he told the trades council anything about the convoy's report back, what Bosnians advised, or what was decided, the minutes don't say. If the omissions are the minute-taker's, perhaps the delegate will correct them, lest we get the idea his report was sectarian.

Will 'Socialist Outlook' explain why leading ISG member Alan Thornett, addressing Lambeth trades council's October meeting, didn't mention the 'international conference' — which launched the breakaway International Workers Aid — planned for the day after the Manchester meeting, nor did his comrades on the trades council? Like the Bosnian supporters of the Workers Aid convoy, Lambeth trades unionists weren't invited!

Where we were

'WHERE were you when President Kennedy was assassinated?', is a popular parlour-game in some circles (although a BBC discussion the other evening condemned 'conspiracy theories' rather than the killing).

I know where I was. On Friday 22 November 1963, Willesden East Young Socialists met at Alderman (later Labour MP) Reg Freeson's house, in Kilburn, London.

Ashen-faced, reformist Bernard Reaney announced a disaster: Labour deputy-leader and shadow foreign secretary George Brown had shambled onto TV, in what newspapers called his 'tired and emotional' state, slurring out something about his 'old pal, Jack Kennedy'.

As 'his lot' trembled at possible electoral consequences for Labour, 'our lot' fell about laughing with a comrade who quoted Radio Peking's comment: 'Yet another Yankee imperialist bites the dust!'

Just over a year before JFK had taken the world to the brink of nuclear war with his blockade of Cuba. Lifted from the protesting crowd in Whitehall, I and another comrade spent the night in police cells.

Otherwise, we'd have been out that morning distributing leaflets from the Socialist Labour League (forerunner of the WRP) calling for industrial action and solidarity with Cuba. I'm reminded of this whenever some people accuse our party, because it never bowed to Castroism, of not defending the Cuban revolution against imperialism.

mperialism.

Charlie Pottins

DOT GIBSON looks at some lessons of the Workers Aid for Bosnia campaign, in particular at the charge made by one of its former participants that the campaign has been 'hijacked' by the Workers Revolutionary Party.

IN A REPORT in 'Socialist Outlook' (13 November), paper of the International Socialist Group, Alan Thornett claims that the result of the Workers Aid for Bosnia convoy's report-back meeting, which was held in Manchester on 30 October, is that this organisation is now 'a front for the WRP'.

Some of our readers say that we should simply refuse to take part in a discussion on this issue because it is just another example of opportunism and sectarianism in 'left' groups which try to control campaigns and other actions in the workers' movement.

However, this opportunism and sectarianism threaten the endeavours of the many people who have joined the campaign to come to the aid of the Bosnian people. That is why we must discuss Thornett's statement.

Principles dropped

AMONG the points in the programme of action agreed when Workers Aid for Bosnia was founded at a meeting in London on 6 June was: 'The immediate lifting of the British-backed United Nations arms embargo on Bosnia and the withdrawal of UN troops.'

The experience and struggle of the convoy reinforced and brought into sharp relief the correctness of this original aim. The convoy established beyond any doubt that the UN — which prevented it from reaching its destination of Tuzla, the working-class capital of Bosnia — is the main instrument for the isolation of the working people of Bosnia from the rest of the European workers, and is the main force imposing the infamous Vance-Owen plan to break up Bosnia.

Steve Myers and other supporters of 'Socialist Outlook' voted on 6 June for this founding principle. At Manchester in October they dropped this, turning away from a fight against the UN, hoping to find favour with their associates in Europe.

'Democratic structures'

'THE lack of elected structures is always in fact a formula for control by an unelected minority who control the apparatus — the office, the bank account, the telephone number, the addresses and the knowledge of what is going on,' says Thornett in 'Socialist Outlook'. *

Taken outside of the real-life development of the campaign, this sounds like a call for working-class democracy. But is it?

In a campaign like Workers Aid for Bosnia it is understandable that the most active and the most articulate become the organisers. This is normal, but not something which should continue. There are plenty of examples in our own past history when the Workers Revolutionary Party put its own immediate and narrow interests before the interests of the working class as a whole

The rebuilding of internationalism in the workers' movement requires the self-organisation of the working class. It is on this basis

'The convoy established beyond any doubt that the UN... is the main instrument for the isolation of the working people of Bosnia from the rest of the European workers, and is the main force imposing the infamous Vance-Owen plan to break up Bosnia.'

that we now participate in the workers' movement. That is why we led the fight for sponsors for the convoy and continually broadened out the campaign inside the labour movement.

There were differences between ourselves and 'Socialist Outlook' on the type of gathering International Workers Aid for Bosnia should have on 30 October:

■ 'Socialist Outlook' said that this should be a conference to elect a leadership at which delegates from labour movement organisations would be allowed to vote and others would be visitors.

■ We said that it should be a report-back meeting from the convoy, attended by the widest possible number of people who had taken part in the convoy campaign as preparation for a properly prepared conference at a later date.

It is clear that 'elections' at an



Democ

moven

and the

Campaigning for workers Aid. the most active and the most articulate become

early stage in campaigns such as this usually mean that the leading committee is dominated by those who have been at the centre of it. Bosnians, young people, and others not in trades unions or any organisation who had been very active in support of the convoy would be deprived of an effective voice.

In fact, from the experience of this type of control in the antipoll-tax campaign, the Anti-Nazi League, the miners' support groups, etc., we are anxious that Workers Aid's successful initiative does not become the 'property' of one political group, or even several.

The 9 January conference called by the National Miners' Support Groups Network in Sheffield was a graphic example of the sort of 'democracy' Thornett talks about.

People around 'Socialist Outlook' were key elements in organising this conference. Most of the day was spent discussing 'structures'

and organising 'workshops', so effectively preventing the meeting as a whole from considering the way in which the fight alongside the miners should be carried forward.

Before last Christmas, a meeting of the National Miners' Support Groups Network had been called which voted strongly in favour of the Sheffield conference being open to all, who would be able freely to discuss the next stage of the fight in defence of the miners.

But those running the conference — including members of the International Socialist Group — trampelled on the decision and organised a stage-managed event which gave pride of place to MPs Tony Benn and Jeremy Corbyn, so that those who were active in the miners' support groups were left out in the cold.

We believe that there must be discussions amongst a broad layer of people in the trades unions and community organisations to decide what kind of organisation is needed to develop Workers Aid for Bosnia. Thousands of individual workers and their trades unions gave their solidarity, time, money and humanitarian aid to the convoy. Seven trucks were bought.

The campaign over a period of only five months was so intense, the job so big, and the work at the centre of it carried out by so few, that it was not possible to have a proper membership and affiliated organisations list.

Nor was it possible in the short time since the convoy returned from Croatia to compile the financial and organisation report. But those reports must be presented, not only to a conference but to all those organisations who



As in the anti-poll-tax campaign, those active in Workers Aid must not be deprived of an effective voice

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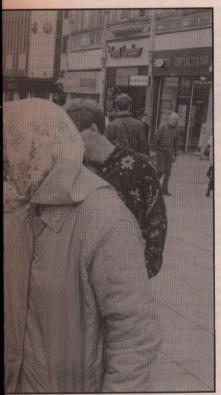


Photo: Anthony Myers organisers

contributed to the work of the convoy.

In the course of the weeks before the report-back meeting, we were able to observe the 'democracy' of 'Socialist Outlook'. All those who have been through any of the socalled 'left' organisations' struggles for control of campaigns know exactly what I mean.

Leading up to and after the founding conference of 'Workers Aid for Bosnia' on 6 June there were regular Thursday evening meetings in London of all those wanting to participate in the campaign. But, as the campaign developed, local committees were established in a number of towns throughout Britain, including Leicester, Leeds and Manchester.

The Manchester committee was particularly significant because so many Bosnians took part in its discussions and work. That was the reason for the decision by both the London and Manchester committees that the report-back meeting should be held in Manchester. This was advertised on leaflets distributed by the convoy team on their way through Britain from the starting-point in Dundee.

'Socialist Outlook' suddenly brought about 12 members to one of the Thursday night meetings in London and pushed through a resolution that the report-back meeting should become a 'conference'. The campaign had become 'successful', and the fight for control had begun!

We brought 20 people to the following meeting and reversed the decision, not only proving in practice how destructive this 'powerseeking' is, but also trying to ensure that a form of organisation

is derived from the experience of

everybody in the campaign and

which enables real participation. Meanwhile, in the spirit of the way the campaign had been conducted up to that point, the Manchester committee enthusiastically went ahead to organise the reportback meeting in their city.

However, at a time when the convoy was in Croatia fighting for the right to take its aid to the people of Tuzla, instead of its political and organisational problems and tasks being at the centre of discussions at the London meeting, there were agitated outbursts from 'Socialist Outlook' members about 'democratic structures'.

Then, having conceded on their call for a delegate conference, they insisted that there must be an elected committee at the report-back meeting. We opposed this. Organisations (like ours and theirs) at the centre of the campaign would know in advance and could prepare to nominate for such a committee, but what about everybody else? Also surely, we said, those of us who have taken a lead in the campaign, particularly I and Steve Myers, must account for our actions?

Our financial and organisation reports, plus proposals and amendments from local groups, individual members, and affiliated organisations should, we said, be circulated in advance so that everybody has the chance to prepare questions and put down amendments.

Every effort was made to avoid a beargarden. In the final week before the report-back meeting agreement was reached on the agenda and chair. Steve Myers and I would give reports and make proposals that would be voted on by the whole meeting. It was when

their proposals had been defeated that 'Socialist Outlook' decided the campaign had become a front for

'International Workers Aid'

NOW Thornett states that 'Socialist Outlook' 'refuses to recognise the legitimacy' of the decisions of the 30 October convoy report-back meeting. He says that instead the paper's supporters 'will continue to build Workers Aid through supporting the initiatives of International Workers Aid'

What is this? A meeting on the day following the convoy reportback was turned into a meeting to set up 'International Workers Aid' by 'Socialist Outlook'.

For the same reasons that we wanted not a 'conference' but a 'meeting' for the convoy to report back, we also opposed this type of 'international' meeting organised by 'Socialist Outlook'. The original decision had been that those who participated in the convoy campaign in other parts of Europe, and who were able to attend the reportback meeting, should have the chance to report and discuss their experiences on the following day.

But the type of meeting organ-

'Alan Thornett and his supporters have now split with the Workers Aid for Bosnia campaign in Britain.

They try and present the convoy as their personal property, against all those others who built it and took part in it ...'

ised by 'Socialist Outlook' to take decisions about the campaign gave no possibility for proper preparation; many who carried out important work for the convoy knew nothing about it. In fact those present were forced to acknowledge this by deciding that they would have only 'indicative' votes.

Under cover of the 'decision' to set up 'International Workers Aid', Alan Thornett and his supporters have now split with the Workers Aid for Bosnia campaign in Britain.

They try and present the convoy as their personal property, against all those others who built it and took part in it, and they have set out to confuse the workers' movement by circulating leaflets calling for workers' organisations to pay affiliation fees to their 'International Workers Aid'.

I wonder what kind of democratic rights Thornett is offering? I wonder what the others who 'indicatively' voted for 'International Workers Aid' think of 'Socialist Outlook's' actions?



Workers Aid marchers in London in September

Photo: Alan Clark

Germany's welfare crisis

A BITTER row is brewing in Germany over the country's contributions to the European Union

Edmund Stoiber, prime minister of Bavaria and a member of the regional CSU party, which is allied to the ruling Christian Democratic Party, recently angered the government with a series of statements criticising European integration.

More than half of Germany's balance of payments deficit for last year, amounting to 39.5 billion Deutschmarks, was accounted for by payments to the European Community.

At the end of October unemployment in west Germany, even accepting official figures, stood at 2.45 million, up more than 530,000 compared with a year ago. In east Germany the number out of work rose by 70,000 in the year ending October, to 1.17m.

Over the same period earnings of west German companies slumped by 16 per cent, while their liquid assets were down sharply and their overseas investment were a fifth less than the previous year.

The slump has led to higher social security and unemployment benefits bills for the government. Increases under these heads account for over half the increase in total government spending this vear.

Thanks to these extra costs, and the continuing high transfer of capital to eastern Germany, the central government's cash deficit more than doubled to DM48.5 billion, compared with DM22bn in the same period last year.

The German system of welfare benefits, part of the much-celebrated 'social market economy' of the post-war years, is under increasingly intolerable strain.

A month ago 100,000 building workers descended on Bonn to protest at the scrapping of 'bad weather money', a state subsidy given to the building industry to ensure workers are not simply sent home when it snows.

A few days earlier it had been the turn of the steelworkers, who had taken to the streets over the government's introduction of new rules on unemployment benefits.

In future, earnings-related payments - currently at around twothirds of previous income — will no longer be available for the rest of a person's working life. They will be restricted to a four-year period, after which workers will have to get by on subsistence-level social assistance.

The government is now considering a proposal for a 3 per cent cut in unemployment benefit.

Both these demonstrations are an index of the anger in the working class against the destruction of the welfare payments system.

Those still in work are being hit, with Volkswagen threatening to sack 30,000 if the labour force does not accept a four-day week.

THE discussion about the crisis of the German welfare system centres on a series of 'unfavourable demographic trends'.

Today a fifth of the population is aged 20 or under, with the same proportion being over 60.

By the year 2000 the over 60s will come to one in four. By the year 2030 those over 60 will be 38 per cent, and only 16 per cent of the

population under 20. Now the com servatives, and their liberal partners in the ruling coalition, are looking at ways of making cuts in existing provision, and they are being joined by the social-democratic opposition.

■ The country's unification added 17 million potential new claimants to the system. Total social spending rocketed from DM744bn in 1991 to DM1,001bn in 1992 because of new demands on the pensions and unemployment

■ Unemployment in both halves of the country will reach 4 million by next year. As in Britain this has reduced payments into the social security fund, just as the costs of maintaining benefits have shot up.

■ A third factor is the promise made by the government to introduce a third element — nursing care insurance — into the welfare system. The scheme is intended to provide guaranteed residential care for some 1.65 million elderly and handicapped people who need constant nursing.

Chancellor Kohl has staked his reputation on getting the plan made law before the elections next October, partly to try and allay mounting anger in the working class at the cuts already made.

But nobody knows how such a scheme - running to DM13bn a year - can be financed.

Combined social insurance costs have shot up from 26.5 per cent of gross wages to a forecast 40 per cent next year. German employers complain bitterly that these 'ancillary costs' are driving them out of world markets.

The government is considering the abolition of two of the ten national holidays or a cut in holiday pay of 20 per cent.

The social-democratic opposition agrees with the government that the present level of benefits cannot be sustained. It proposes that the taxation burden to finance welfare benefits should be switched away from the employers, thus imposing even greater burdens on working people.

Calamity Ukraine

THE economic situation is Russia is calamitous; it is even worse in Ukraine.

With national income shrinking at a rate of 20 per cent a year, a balance of payments deficit out of control, with the country having virtually no oil or petrol, a string of new decrees has been issued by President Leonid Kravchuk which bid fair to make matters worse.

■ The Kiev currency market has been officially closed - a crude attempt to hide the deterioration of the national currency (the coupon) which is presently inflating at over 70 per cent a month.

■ Enterprises are to be forced to sell half their hard currency earnings to the state at a fixed rate. This is to be fixed by Kravchuk at about a fifth of the black-market coupon to dollar rate, so the decree amounts to confiscation.

But managers have long experience of evading such instructions.

Parts of the old central planning system are being revived. Prices will be partly fixed by allowing wholesalers to raise prices only in line with their input costs, and producers of 'strategic goods' will have to hand over some 40 per cent of their output to central ministries.

The government justifies the last move because it wants to see the population housed and fed. The more cynical suggest it is designed to increase scope for bureaucratic corruption.

Threadneedle

The misuse of sex

I FULLY expected that my piece on 'The sense of sex education' (6 November) would ruffle a few feathers. I didn't expect that it would ruffle an entire turkey, in the shape of Keith Flett.

His letter last week is entirely typical of his dishonest

It starts with an outright lie. As I pointed out in the brief note I appended to it, I have never called Flett 'Flagellator Flett'.

To the best of my knowledge he has never flogged anything but dead horses, an exercise in which he engages with monotonous regularity

Flett's letter goes on to express pleasure that I am 'now calling for openness in sex education to combat ignorance' (emphasis added)

What is the function of the word 'now' in that sentence? It is to suggest that I have only just started making such a call.

As usual, Flett is a long way behind the fair — 28 years behind, in fact. In 'The Birth Controllers' (1965), I wrote as

'Much ignorance, prejudice, superstition, and carelessness remain. The only answer to fear and old wives' tales is know-

'The current weakening of taboos makes it possible to give knowledge about the sex organs and their functioning, including knowledge about the use of contraceptives, in a matter-of-fact, unmysterious way, to adolescents and adults alike.

'Above all, it is imperative that such knowledge be given, by competent persons, to young people before they leave

Flett goes on: 'I trust that [Fryer] includes within his demand the kind of positive images of lesbian and gay sexuality outlawed by Section 28 of the Local Government Act.'

This is Flett's inadequate paraphrase of Section 28 of the Local Government Act 1988, the relevant portion of which reads as follows:

'A local authority shall not -(a) intentionally promote homosexuality or publish material with the intention of promoting homosexuality; (b) promote the teaching in any maintained school of the acceptability of homosexuality as a pretended family relationship.'

I quote the original because, unlike his paraphrase, it shows how absurd and question-begging is Section 28, as well as how disingenuously Flett seeks to force an open door.

In my view, neither gender nor sexual orientation is a valid criterion for the fitness of any person or any couple to bring up children.

I should add however that, like every other aspect of sex education, information on lesbian and gay sexuality is in my view best given when the child asks the appropriate question or questions, and not before.

'While it is no doubt true', and the advertising industry have created a culture which is almost obsessed by sex and sexual images, I doubt if this in itself can account for the actions of individual people."

Flett should read more carefully that which he criticises. I neither said nor suggested that there was a direct causal relationship between what I called 'this media obsession with sex' and what Flett calls 'the actions

of individual people' The connection I suggested was more complex and more subtle: with the sexual ignor-ance — in the widest sense of that word — of many young people; and with what I called their 'tragic sexual mores', by which I meant the tacky ethical agnosticism and disregard of sexual good manners that were revealed in the recent 'date

PERSONAL COLUMN

cultural and ethical norms in sexual matters to which children and young people are exposed every day of their lives, on television and in the sewer press.

ON rape and 'date rape', and 'leading a man on and then changing your mind', I deliberately wrote provocatively. I did so because I wished to challenge the received wisdom which asserts that while some men behave badly or criminally to women, women never behave in an analogous way towards men.

I'm sorry that I wrote in such a way as to disturb Jeff Jackson (Letters, 20 November). And, on reflection, I do now think the word 'analogue' would have been a better choice than 'equivalent'

With all due respect to Flett, by 'leading a man on and then changing your mind' I was not referring to manner of dress.

I had in mind those neurotic or psychopathic or sadistic women, fortunately few, who resemble male rapists in that sexual activity is for them not a source of mutual joy but an opportunity to exercise power. to dominate and humiliate; who, having aroused their victim with caresses, then say 'no' at the moment of intromission (or cry rape afterwards).

Such misuse of sex, such doing dirt on sex — which can and should be the most beautiful and mutually enriching of human relationships - is dehumanising and damaging. It may not do much lasting physical damage, but can do great psychological damage.

An example, admittedly extreme, of the cynical misuse of sexual activity by a woman came to light only last week when Sandra Wignall was jailed for life for the murder of her husband.

According to the evidence, she led him into dark, deserted woods, where she fellated him so as divert his attention as her two accomplices approached to strike him on the head and stab

Anachronism

LAST Monday's 'Guardian' carried an obituary of 101-year-old Sanko Nosaka, the Japanese Stalinist responsible for the execution by firing squad in the USSR in 1939 of his fellow leader Kenzo Yamamoto.

Nosaka had accused Yamamoto of communicating with the Japanese secret police after going to Moscow in 1928.

The writer of the obituary, Stuart Griffin, wrote that in 1950 Nosaka 'was bitterly denounced by the Comintern for advocating peaceful methods for power seizure by Japan's commun-

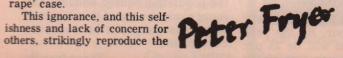
Since the Comintern had been dissolved in 1943, it is hard to see how it could have denounced anybody in 1950.

Acute discomfiture

THE gremlin that afflicts all who have to do with the printed word struck this column a mortifying blow last week. It removed the acute accent from the first 'e' of the word 'Révolutionnaires' and put it over the

That wouldn't have mattered nearly so much if the paragraph where this occurred hadn't been listing 'a large number of misprints' in another publication.

Perhaps my suggestion about utilising the services of a competent proof-reader has wider application than I supposed.



Television

Avoiding the question

CANADIAN journalist Michael Ignatieff continued his BBC2 series about oppressed nationalities, BLOOD AND BELONG-ING, by looking at the Kurds.

In 'Dreaming a Nation' (18 November) he journeyed to the so-called new Kurdish state in Iraq and travelled through towns like Halabja — gassed by Saddam Hussein in 1988 — interviewing members of the Kurdish Democratic Party and later, in the mountains, women fighters from the the PKK (Kurdish Workers Party).

Refugees

At the Iranian border he spoke with Iranian Kurdish refugees, and then in Turkey with government officials and Kurdish villagers.

It wasn't just that the programme said nothing new about the Kurdish question. It blatantly understated their oppression by concentrating on their national aspirations and divisions. Particularly in relation to the rump state created by the West.

While the fragility of this

Review by Jill Oxley

'state' in what is formally still Iraqi territory was clear — 'If the Kurds make too many demands the patrolling US planes would leave,' said Ignatieff — the history of its creation was left extremely vague.

Ignatieff at one point briefly referred to 'Nations and empires in the 19th century dropping borders on the mountains' and so ignoring these stateless people.

But he did not attempt to expose or analyse the role of Western imperialism, either in the initial creation of the statelessness of the Kurdish people or in its reluctance to deal with the well-documented atrocities perpetrated against them. That is, until the Gulf war, when it became useful propaganda against Saddam Hussein.

As the 1992 report of the British trade union delegation to Turkey puts it: 'The poison gas massacre of the village of Halabja in 1988 had been recalled by the West during the Gulf war. At the actual time it had occurred, however, the silence had been deafening. Saddam Hussein had then been an ally of the West'

Incidentally Ignatieff referred to this as the first chemical attack on people since World War I. But what about Vietnam?

He also referred, in discussions with Kurdish politicians, to divisions amongst them and other political groups. When they refused to discuss their divisions, his comment was simply that the Kurdish people are anxious to appear united.

In the mountains, members of an all-women corps of the PKK stated their aims to be socialist but, after displaying banal surprise, Ignatieff did not pursue the politics of the PKK or its relationship, for example, to the Turkish Communist Party.

In Turkey there was the humiliating sight of Turkish soldiers, armed with machineguns, pacing up and down behind Kurdish villagers and

calling out that the Turkish go ernment was their father an that the PKK kills only Kurds

And, while the Turkish go ernor of the region claime there was equality and freedon for all, we saw footage of a larg public celebration of Newroz the Kurdish new year - bein broken up by gun-fire.

Atrocities

Yet this was a terrible unde statement of the atrocities con mitted against the Kurds by th Turkish state. Atrocities which have been substantially docu mented over the years by man internationally-recognised au thorities. Atrocities at least a appalling as those in Iraq.

Most of all, the plight of th Kurdish people and their de mand for autonomy was not pu in an international context - i particular the role Western in perialism is playing in Iraq. 'Saddam Hussein? Wh

don't you kill him?' asked Kurdish woman. A questio Ignatieff could not - or woul not - answer.

Programme guide

Saturday 27 November THE GREAT DEPRESSION: 'We Have a Plan'. The poor and destitute flocked in their thousands to California — 'the sunshine state' — from all over the US (7.20pm, BBC2). PER-FORMANCE: 'Hedda Gabler'. This production of Henrik Ibsen's classic drama marks acclaimed theatre director Deborah Warner's first television commission (8.35pm, BBC2).

Sunday 28 November HIGH IN-TEREST: 'What Price Pensions?'. Investigates why, for far too many people in Britain, old age is proving to be the age of impoverishment (5.15pm, Channel 4). THE MONEY PROGRAMME. A report on the consequences of the col-



Fiona Shaw as Ibsen's Hedda

lapse of London United Investments, the British insurance company which went bust in 1990 with debts of at least \$5 billion (7pm, BBC2). THE BROADCAST TAPES OF DR PETER: 'Aids Recognition'. A weekly series of AIDS diaries by Peter Jepson-Yong, the Canadian doctor who turned his own private battle against AIDS into a public crusade (9.20pm, BBC2).

Monday 29 November OPEN SPACE: 'All Those in Favour'. As the TUC marks its 125th anniversary, a report by two Sheffield-based trades unionists about the effects of Thatcherism on the movement (7.30pm, BBC2).

Tuesday 30 November 'Autumn Budget '93'. Live coverage of Chancellor Kenneth Clarke's speech followed by studio analysis (2.15pm, BBC2). ASSIGNMENT: 'No Easy Road to Freedom'. This programme questions whether the ANC can ever become a viable political party in South Africa. Includes an exclusive interview with Nelson Mandela (7.45pm, BBC2).

Wednesday 1 December STATES OF TERROR: 'The Organisation'. Traces the rise and fall of ETA, the Basque



'What Price Pensions?' looks at why old age is coming to mean the age of impoverishment in Britain (Channel 4, Sunday)

separatist group (9.40pm,

Thursday 2 December THE PLAGUE: 'Hunting the Virus'. Second of major four-part series telling the social, political and medical story of AIDS (9pm, Channel 4). BLOOD AND BELONGING: 'Lifting the Yolk'. Has independence from Russia, achieved two years ago, meant anything at all to Ukraine? (9.30pm, BBC2)

Selected films

LOVE STREAMS (1984). Complex examination of the nature of love and psychological survival. Gena Rowlands and John Cassavetes (who also directed) as the sister and brother (Saturday, 10.45pm, Channel 4) WHILE THE CITY SLEEPS (1956). Dana Andrews is a newspaper reporter hunting a maniacal killer. Veteran cast-list directed by Fritz Lang (Monday, 12 midnight, BBC2). FATHERLAND (1986). Expelled east German songwriter finds a certain fame in the West as he goes in search of his father. Directed by Ken Loach (Wednesday, 12.20am, Channel

Cassavetes and Rowlands in 'Love Streams', C4, Sunday

Letters

MORE LETTERS ON PAGE 2

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Comintern and the Barking up Balkan question

FOR the benefit of readers less well informed on Balkan history than Attila Hoare ('Letters', 20 November), let me explain why the Comunist International resolution on Macedonia in 1924 had such a negative effect on the fortunes of the Communist Party in Greece, and disgusted some of its members with the Moscow leadership.

Here is a quotation from 'Greece 1941-1949', by H. Vlavianos, published in 1992 (pages

'The endorsement of the KKE [Communist Party of Greece] in 1924 of the Comintern resolution for "a united and in-dependent Macedonia and Thrace", at a time when 700,000 Greek refugees from Asia Minor had already settled in Greek Macedonia, and the Greek element there formed a

majority of more than 95 per cent of the total population, isolated the party and provoked a strong nationalist reaction.'

As Vlavianos mentions, the Comintern resolution also covered Thrace. A previously unknown Thracian nationality was discovered and its 'independence' (from Greece) demanded. The point of this bizarre item in the Comintern's menu was that Western Thrace had briefly belonged to Bulgaria and, like Macedonia, formed part of the country's irredenta.

Just as, in Central Europe, the Comintern connived at German revanchisme, so in the Balkans, using coded language, it objectively promoted Bulgarian aspirations at the expense of Yugoslavia and Greece.

Brian Pearce New Barnet, Herts

wrong tree

AL RICHARDSON ('Letters', 20 November) appears to be 'barking up the wrong tree' in ascribing the crisis of the Fourth International to the general acceptance of the 'structural assimilation theory', which he

describes as reformist. At the end of World War II. countries of eastern Europe were 'liberated' from Nazi rule by a combination of the military advance of the Red Army and a degree of popular uprising, which was soon strangled by bureaucratic rule. Stalinist regimes suppressed all hopes of real liberation.

Capitalists were expropriated, but, as Trotsky pointed out in relation to Poland in 1939, this was secondary to the reactionary methods of the bureauc-

racy.
It was indeed Michel Pablo and his supporters in the Fourth International who said that Stalinism did have a progressive

role to play. This was the dividassimilation'.

Al Richardson doesn't mention Stalinism in his letter or the capitulation and adaptation to it by Pablo and others. This was the real source of degeneration and it was a revision of the analysis and programme of the Fourth International.

Pablo and Ernest Mandel said Stalinism could play a progressive role, and that the 'epicentre' of revolution had shifted to the 'third world' (Ho Chi Minh, Castro, Mandel, etc.).

We do not defend any 'spotless creed' of Healy, Lambert or whoever, but we are resolved to overcome the crisis of the Fourth International through the struggle to rebuild the workers' movement internationally.

Pablo's readmittance to the United Secretariat of the Fourth International after more than 30 years (Workers Press, 25 September) does represent a further stage of that organisation's degeneration.

Keith Scotcher Barking, Essex

Review set to attack Two health and safety

WHAT should be done about health and safety regulations that aren't applied? The government's answer to this question is: abolish the regulations!

A review has been set up which is costing the Health and Safety Executive £100,000 to carry out. This comes, says a Department of Trade and Industry report, as the result of 50 letters of complaint to MPs from individuals and from business which had been received by [the Health and Safety Executive] and by [DTI] Ministers from April 1992 to the end of February 1993, and which were mainly concerned with health and safety legislation'.

On 11 May the Health and Safety Commission — the government department which is advised by the HSE - launched this review of about 400 sets of regulations 'to ensure that they do not impose unreasonable burdens on business'. The review is to be completed by April 1994.

Meanwhile the government is proposing to revoke 30 sets of regulations before the review is even finished.

The review consists of seven 'sectoral task groups' (STGs), which will have two Confederation of British Industry nominees, two TUC nominees, a small business representative, and are chaired in addition by a businessman. So that's four employers' representatives to two from the trade union bureaucracy. An HSC steering group is co-ordinating the review.

The chairs of the STGs are hand-picked and the review is carried out with them already 'briefed' on the 'burdens' on business that the DTI claims to have found. The work is based on a pre-set proforma that makes the considerations biased towards finance.

The GMB general union has produced its pamphlet, 'Freedom to Kill?', on the review which points out that on average 42 of its members are killed each year in industrial accidents. In the construction industry there are about 140 deaths per year.

So for one letter from a businessman to the DTI as against at least three workers' lives, the safety laws come under attack for profit.

And what was the substance of these letters? 'In many cases the concern of business about the burdens which the new legislation is placing on them is due to a misunderstanding of the reA new all-round attack on health and safety in Britain has been launched by the government. MIKE COOKE comments with the help of the GMB general union's pamphlet, 'Freedom to Kill? - the case against deregulation'.



A wreath being laid at a Construction Safety Campaign protest

on the scrutiny review of the implementation and enforcement of European Community law in the UK.

It is this report that talks about the 50 letters. It was set up in January 1993 by Michael Heseltine, the president of the Board of Trade, in response to complaints that the HSE had been over-zealous in enforcing EC directives. Heseltine stated: 'This report shows conclusively that recent EC health and safety legislation has been implemented in the UK without the addition of unnecessary requirements.

Direct action

IT IS a complete myth that the HSE is over-zealous in enforcing health and safety regulations. In most cases it is workers themselves, with or without the help of their trades unions, who have to carry the burden of ensuring that health and safety laws are enforced.

The Construction Safety Campaign had to fight for years against a corrupt right-wing leadership to get recognition from the Union of Construction, Allied Trades and Technicians (UCATT).

It took, and continues to take, direct action against employers — by going down to building sites where a death

families, and demanding that contractors are held responsible by the HSE and Crown Prosecution Service so that they are taken to court for manslaughter and imprisonment sought.

The HSC review's attack is aimed at the 1974 Health and Safety at Work Act, the socalled 'six-pack' of EC directives that have just come into force, Noise at Work Regulations, and the 1988 Control of Substances Hazardous to Health Regulations (COSHH).

'Blitzes' by the HSE re-



vealed that only 23 per cent of employers were complying with the new EC directives. Only 56 per cent were complying with COSHH.

In 1992, at 600 out of 2,500

considered prosecution in 122

In 1985, 191 out of 300 clothing factories visited were not even registered with the HSE - this is a legal offence. In these 300 factories the HSE raised 1,257 points of health and safety, 16 improvement notices and four prohibition notices were issued, and two prosecutions made.

But as the 'Independent' has pointed out: '[In 1992], only 16 out of the Executive's 2,254 prosecutions were taken against directors or managers. Only six of these resulted from investigations into the year's 538 fatal injuries or 30,684 major injuries. This is despite the HSE's own figures showing that in more than 65 per cent of workplace deaths, responsibility lay with senior management.

It's easier to prosecute working people, especially when many are not in unions and the pressure is to destroy working-class organisation.

Welfare attack

'FREEDOM to Kill?', the GMB pamphlet, complains that it is not in the interests of business to ignore safety since this costs them in compensation, insurance, etc.

But if there are no regulations they won't be negligent. If there are no regulations the government can cut the minimal protection provided by the Health and Safety Executive.

The GMB argues that the government 'speaks with for-ked tongue' — it talks about relieving safety costs to business and yet is now proposing that it takes up the cost of sick pay, etc. But these transferred costs to business will not be paid in many cases. It is mainly small businesses that will suffer if the costs are enforced.

What the GMB can't see because of its politics - which are to make capitalism work - is that it's not about 'checks and balances', democracy and all that. It is an attack on welfare gains by the working

The British state is in crisis. It has a £50 billion debt — the Public Sector Borrowing Requirement, the difference between state revenues and expenditure. It can no longer afford these welfare crumbs from imperialism's table.

■ The GMB pamphlet of 33 pages contains much useful information about what is happen-



Safety Campaign protest vigil in Westminster against the Health & Safety Executive

Bronwen Handyside reports

nations



Accidents will happen

FORMER radical Keith Waterhouse, author of 'Billy Liar', is to be found these days writing a column in the 'Daily Mail'.

His latest piece gives praise to the Tory government's proposals to abolish much of the safety legislation which has to some degree - protected workers' lives and limbs from the unrestrained greed of employers.

Waterhouse says: 'I doubt whether the number of workpeople falling off ladders, tripping over cables, inhaling noxious fumes, dropping hammers on their toes or sitting on tin tacks will rise significantly - with the possible exception of the tin tack sitters — as a result of this legislation, or rather this anti-legislation.

'There will be accidents of course. . . . But accidents WILL happen - and they're noted for it . . . no amount of regulation can stop them happening.'

It's kind of Mr Waterhouse to share with gutter press readers his musings upon fate and life, and the imponderable way that accidents have of happening.

I am sure his attitude will be comforting to such people as Maureen Brennan — who has fought a bitter battle for five years against the company directors who sent her 19-year-old son on his first day on a building site to drive a dumper truck to his death.

Not only had her son no training in driving such a vehicle, he did not even have a driving licence - and there were no protective stops on the edge of the trench into which the truck overturned.

Maureen has received no justice, no compensation, no redress — not even an apology. But the philosophical Mr Waterhouse's ability to take such events as this death in his stride will, I am sure, be some consolation.

In the meantime Maureen has won the right to a judicial review over the dropping of the case against J.F. McMahon Ltd, which avoided prosecution by going into liquidation after her son's death. The directors opened another company afterwards, under a different name.

Bureaucracy and the NHS

WATERHOUSE praises the abolition of safety regulations as a victory over red-tape and bureaucracy.

It is interesting, therefore, at this point to turn our eyes on the National Health Service which will have to pick up the pieces (and I do mean pieces) after the health and safety regulations have been swept away.

Ten days ago John Redwood. the Welsh secretary, exploded into print protesting at the fact that the government's NHS reforms in Wales have so far added 1,500 new managers to the payroll, but only 20 more

The Welsh secretary's discoveries are as nothing to the situation in the rest of Britain. The NHS now employs - and pays for - more than 13,000 managers, costing last year £384 million. Ten years ago there were none - costing nothing.

In the same decade, the number of doctors has increased by just over 7,500.

Accidents and the NHS

WATERHOUSE might also be

staff of the accident and emergency ward at Charing Cross hospital, London, sent to the 'Guardian' newspaper last

They write: 'Plans have been announced to close the eight-bedded Accident and Emergency ward of Charing Cross Hospital in December, redeploying the 11 nursing staff.

Closure of this short-stay ward will apparently contribute towards a £350,000 cut in the Emergency, Trauma and Orthopaedic budget of Riverside Hospitals. There is, we are told, no alternative.

'Since 6 April, 1,375 patients have been cared for on the ward, most being discharged after 24 hours due to the facilities we have for prompt treatment of referral to other appropriate services. When required, a side-room can be allocated for the dying patient where they and their relatives can be given privacy and dignity. .

'Many of our patients are homeless or living in bed and breakfast accommodation. Our patients are some of the most vulnerable members of society and have little say in decisions made about their

'Without the Accident and Emergency ward, these patients would have been admitted to other under-staffed and financially stretched wards, remained on trolleys in casualty, or been discharged prematurely to an unsafe environment.

'Closure will be a false economy. The financial burden will fall elsewhere, either into other areas of the hospital or the community and voluntary services. So where is the saving really

Let me see . . . if you sacked seven managers on £50,000 a

Because the lady lives in my flat

UNDER the category of: there is a moral here, but I'm not quite sure what it is.

The man who acted in the Milk Tray advertisements gallantly climbing mountains, plunging into oceans and parachuting out of aeroplanes to bring his lady love a box of chocolates - is in danger of going to prison after admitting to a vicious campaign of harassment on a woman tenant living in his flat.

He-man Graham Rogers, who decided to sell the flat to settle his debts, admitted a 14-month regime of terror including writing threatening letters, and smashing the bath, toilet bowl, wash-basin, cooker and sink.

He also owned up to making a threatening phonecall, removing personal belongings and some of the furniture, and boarding up the doors and windows.

Rogers was recently paid £15,000 for ten days filming in Jamaica for the Milk Tray

Single parents and prime ministers

IN the same category, did you know that 15 out of the 24 prime ministers since 1809 lost a parent in childhood, and one was illegitimate - thus making a grand total of 63 per cent of them the products of singleparent or no-parent families?

If you have any material for this column, please send it to me at Workers Press, PO Box 735,

Saturday 27 November 1993 Page 8

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RUSSIANMINERSIN RIFIWITHYELTSIN

THIRTY thousand workers, mostly miners, went on strike in the northern Siberian city of Vorkuta on 11 November. The strikers demanded payment of two months' wages owing to them. Before the one-day stoppage 15 workers' leaders staged a ten-day hunger strike.

The strike was the first sign of a political break with President Yeltsin by miners' organisations, whose leaders have until now supported him wholeheartedly. Such a break would be a major turning-point for the Russian workers' movement.

BY SIMON PIRANI

The Independent Miners Union of Vorkuta has now called for a national political strike against Yeltsin starting on 1 December.

The president of the Vorkuta

ga, called for the government to resign, and for the presidential elections - postponed by Yeltsin to 1995 — to be brought forward.

Of the 12 December election of a new parliament, Shulga said: 'The politicians in the government are too busy in the election campaign and pay no attention to our needs. We will boycott their parties and lists.

In the Kuzbass mining belt, leaders of the Council of Workers Committees, who previously pursued a policy of unashamed collaboration with Yeltsin and international private mining firms, have issued an open letter of protest to the president about the threat of pit closures.

Workers' assemblies in Kuzbass have reportedly resolved to join the 1 December strike as they have in Chelyabinsk and Rostov.

Telegrams have arrived in Vorkuta from miners' organisa-

Ukraine. They propose to take action against their own government, co-ordinated with the Russian strike on 1 December.

Byelorussian miners, merchant seafarers and air-traffic controllers have also indicated support for Vorkuta. A meeting of 'left communist trade union forces' in Nizhni-Novgorod is reported to have declared soli-

The Independent Miners Union leadership has provided an important pillar of support for Yeltsin, but a miners' revolt could pull it down.

The confrontation is fuelled by an economic crisis that Yeltsin cannot solve.

Ravaged

The mines, like most Russian industry, are being ravaged by the government's attempts to integrate Russia into the world market as a colony. Industrial production is plummeting. There are 10 million workers effectively laid off who could soon be unemployed.

As prices are increased and subsidies cut, industries can neither market their goods, nor buy raw materials or equipment from each other. Everyone owes everyone else vast amounts. The Vorkuta coal company is owed 72 million rubles by the government and the

Every time miners in the former Soviet Union have struck this year, the issue of this debt has been raised. It means, among other things, that their wages are left unpaid.

On 6 September, a strike called by the old official miners' union over the issue brought out tens of thousands of workers at about 120 pits.

The response came in spite of the indifference miners feel towards the official union which did not support their hisAlso, in spite of the Independent Miners Union leaders, who said no-one should strike 'until the World Bank's decision on the refinancing of the mining industry is known'.

Demanded

The 11 November strike in Vorkuta also concerned the nonpayment of wages. It further demanded implementation of a law, passed by the now-dissolved parliament, granting an 80 per cent wage increase and retirement at 45 for those working north of the Arctic Circle.

■ Workers everywhere should send messages of support to the Vorkuta miners. NPG/Strike Committee, Leningradskaya 5, 169 907 Vorkuta, Komi Republic, Russian Federation.

■ With thanks to Pavel Slutski. and comrades in Belgium, who sent information used in this

Moscow union leader opposes strikes

AS WORKERS prepare for action against the Yeltsin regime, the leader of Russia's largest trade union federation, Mikhail Shmakov, has spoken out AGAINST strikes.

Shmakov - who emerged from the Moscow Federation of Trade Unions which has close links with Ken Livingstone MP and other British 'lefts' - is calling for trades unions to work in 'partnership' with the govern-

Shmakov became head of the Federation of Independent Unions, the old 'official' union structure, which claims a membership of 57 million, just after Yeltsin crushed the Rutskoi-Khasbulatov revolt.
The previous Federation

leader, Igor Kluchkov, condemned Yeltsin's action as a 'coup d'état'. As it became clear the parliamentary group were losers, he switched his position and denounced them. Too late.

An emergency congress of the Federation was called and he was removed. The Moscow Federation of Trades Unions, which posed as a 'left' opposition to Kluchkov, made their move. Shmakov was elected.

Shmakov criticised his predecessor not only for supporting Rutskoi - but also for threatening strikes over the government's failure to implement pay increases agreed in March. The former leadership con-

centrated on direct and open pressure on the authorities without considering the economic realities', he said, according to the 'Guardian'. 'It thus disrupted partnership with the govern-

Shmakov said unions should concentrate on defending wage levels instead of putting political pressure on the government but adopted the 'no strike' line at the same time.

With the change of policy, a government threat to the Federation's apparatus has receded.

Yeltsin had already issued a decree abolishing the unions' control of the national social insurance fund which pays sickness and injury benefits. He was preparing to go further, ending check-off collection of union subscriptions and confiscating the unions' property holdings including holiday camps, sanatoria, etc.

Since Shmakov's election, these measures have been put on the back-burner.

The British workers' movement cannot remain neutral in Russia's 'winter of discontent'.

Advocate

We must help to defeat Shmakov and all who advocate 'partnership' with Yeltsin whether they claim to be 'official' or 'independent' trades un-

We cannot take the word of those posing as 'lefts', like the Moscow Federation of Trade Unions leaders, that they deserve support.

Internationalism means supporting only those workers' organisations ready to pursue the struggle against Yeltsin to the very end.

Moscow building workers are up in arms at the government's decision to bring in Turkish building workers to repair and refurbish the gutted White House in the Russian capital.

The Turkish workers are times the wage of the average Russian worker.

Vultures feed on China

BY MIKE COOKE

DREAMS of a new propsperity for ordinary people in China through the authoritarian reintroduction of capitalism in special economic zones have gone up in smoke in factories throughout the country.

International vulture capital has gone in to find the cheapest possible labour and totally ignores any restrictions on investment. The lives of workers are sacrificed to the striving for greater and greater profit.

The deal has been that the Chinese Stalinists maintain their political oppression and allow capitalism to be reintroduced with virtually no rights for workers.

Strikes

Strikes have been the response of some workers to the driving down of wages and conditions in China, where previously industrial action was unheard of. Workers at the Hanbee Shoe Company went on strike for three days in February and several hundred went on strike there again in June.

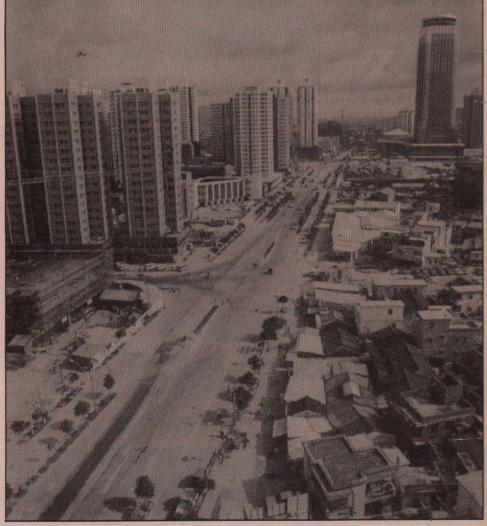
Workers in one South Koreanowned shoe factory in north-east China were earning 9p an hour and worked a 12-hour day from 8am until 9pm, with an hour off for lunch.

And Chinese workers are often treated shamefully. In one incident last year, three South Korean managers ordered three Chinese women to kneel in a row with their hands around their heads as a punishment for supposedly working too slowly. When the women refused the managers kicked them until they were on their knees

Some foreign companies delay payment of wages.

In China the major investors are from the British colony of Hong Kong and from Japan, the US, Taiwan and South Korea. Foreign investment in the country was \$4.2 billion in 1991 and \$11 billion in 1992. It is estimated that it will hit £23 billion this year.

Chinese law says that all foreignowned enterprises should establish unions and pay workers 25 to 50 per cent more than in state factories this is a sham. Before the influx of foreign capital, workers in state factories workers received housing and medical benefits along with job security. The new capitalist enterprises will have none of this.



A particularly graphic expression of the ravages wrought on the Chinese working class by capitalist exploitation is in the area around the boom-town Shenzen (above) where, in August 1992, there were riots on queues to get

A few weeks ago, 81 workers were killed and 36 injured in a fire that swept through a doll factory. Many were trampled to death in the crush to escape.

It was the third major fire in the town in four

'Thick black smoke was all around me, it was like hell,' Deng Jiyin, from a poor village in Sichuan, told journalists. 'I crawled down the staircases floor after floor, holding my breath until I touched an exit door.

The windows and doors of the factory were locked to keep the workers inside. The victims were mainly migrant women attracted, like

many, to labour-hungry Shenzen by the promise of a better life

Firefighters arrived half an hour after the blaze started - probably through an electrical fault in the machine room. Strong winds fanned the flames and smoke swept into the second and third floors where most of the 240 workers were making the dolls.

The firefighters ran short of water and had to hunt around for hydrants.

The fire department sent a notice last March asking for safety improvements at the factory - but they were never carried out.

More than 170 workers have been killed by factory fires in the area since May 1991.

Overseas investors in Shenzen, as in this case, mainly come from the British colony of Hong Kong. The partner of the Hong Kong investor is, in the time-honoured phrase, 'helping the authorities with their enquiries'.

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