

## Homeless seize houses □ Truckers block M-ways

# S. African workers

# assert strength

THINGS are happening very fast in South Africa at the moment. We are concerned that if we don't also move fast, events might overtake us.

In such a short time since the election, the Government of National Unity is in a big crisis. Although the leadership is trying to console itself, saying that what is happening is nothing new, it is clear that they have no quick solutions.

Unemployment is soaring. Young people, expecting jobs from the new government, are disgruntled. Homeless people are sick and tired of empty promises.

In the past few weeks the homeless have occupied new houses built by Toyota for their employees. They say they are not prepared to go on sleeping in the cold while there are empty houses.

### Demolish

With the permission of Minister of Housing, Joe Slovo, the Durban City Council tried to demolish shacks at Cato Manor, meaning that 400 people would be without shelter. But the shack owners resisted by taking up arms. They voted that anyone who comes to demolish their shacks will be met with violence. As a result the Durban City Council has had to back down.

See Workers Press comment — back page

On the spot report  
by NELSON LANGA

These things are not only happening in Natal, but all over the country. It shows clearly that the Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP) will not deliver the goods. There are even rumours in COSATU circles that workers will be asked to donate two weeks wages towards the RDP. But this is in the middle of a strike wave!

The strikes are spreading all over the country every day. At present the biggest hospital in Durban is closed because of the strike by nurses and other staff.

On 22 August the big cities were virtually cut off as more than 3,000 trucks blockaded motorway links. This action was spearheaded by an organisation called Turning Wheel International Workers Movement, which claims that it represents the truck drivers. The drivers voted to stay there all week unless their demands were met.

The blockade started at Mooi River, a small town in mid-Natal. The drivers wanted the labour minister Tito Mboweni to

## Follow the fight and help the fighters

YOU can follow the fight for working-class power in South Africa, at first hand, and assist the comrades who are directly involved, by subscribing to 'Workers International News'.

Issue 2, out now, features an interview with striking Pick 'n' Pay shopworkers, reports on other workers' struggles, and analyses of the Mandela government's budget, and the crisis in the South African Communist Party. Jabu Makathini makes the case for nationalisation with workers' control, and an article looks at the 'socialist confer-

ence' called by COSATU unions.

come and address their grievances. Among their demands were:

- A ban on overtime tax;
- The establishment of a National Industrial Council for the transport industry;
- The scrapping of oppressive labour laws;
- Compulsory trade union

membership upon employment;

- Payment of subsistence basic wages;
- No scab drivers to pick up the loads of striking drivers.

This action took the whole country by surprise. After negotiations with the Natal-Kwazulu Transport Minister failed to re-

solve the strike, Tito Mboweni had to fly from Cape Town to Mooi River to speak to the drivers. After further tough negotiations the drivers managed to win some of their demands, such as the establishment of the Industrial Council for the Transport Industry, the scrapping of repressive laws, the banning of overtime tax and the banning of scabs picking up their loads.

### Denounced

Ironically the T&GWU, which claims to represent truck drivers, didn't know about the action. The union denounced the Turning Wheel International Workers' Movement. Officials said that they didn't know that this organisation existed, and officials they will discipline those responsible.

At the same time the car workers' strike is now in its sixth week with no resolution in sight. All the workers are members of NUMSA, and their action is over a wage claim.

This strike reached a turning point in Durban when the Toyota workers stormed the NUMSA regional offices and demanded the expulsion of the Regional Secretary. According to the workers they occupied the

union offices because the officials refused to hire buses to take them to join a solidarity march.

The union officials are refusing to help the workers in their hour of need. One worker reported that when the workers were busy on the picket lines (toy-toying), phoning all over the place to get support and contacting journalists to report their plight the official was feeding himself with cheese and milk from the big fridge.

Workers International salutes the actions of the workers. We are against the trade union officials' disciplinary actions against workers taking strike action against their bosses. We condemn the officials who refuse to carry out their members' decisions.

It shows clearly that the trade union bureaucracy does not represent the interests of the workers, but acts as the policemen of the bosses.

Now is the time for the workers to stand together against the trade union bureaucracy. These people have no place in the trade union movement. We repeat our demand:

COSATU should break away from the alliance of the ANC and SACP!

## Nigerian union defiant

We have received the following statement from the National Union of Petroleum and National Gas Workers (NUPENG) of Nigeria

If NUPENG is proscribed, our alternative shall be —

THERE are now dangerous signals from Aso Rock, Abuja (the capital), that their next line of action against our Nigerian labour movement is to use unholy fiat to PROSCRIBE NUPENG at any time.

This is the recommendation of the tiny cabal that has now taken over decision-making at the federal seat of power. Their thinking is warped in egocentrism (i.e. believing that there can never be any organ in this country that can challenge all their illegalities).

But let us finally warn before they lead the entire country into darkness, that if NUPENG is proscribed today the following will surely happen:

1. There will be violent reactions from all sectors of the oil industry.
2. There will be violent reactions from our people in all the oil communi-

ties in the country.

3. The Nigeria Labour Congress (NLC) will act in solidarity with NUPENG in consonance with labour's cherished traditions.

4. Similarly, all the progressive industrial unions will automatically act in solidarity with NUPENG.

5. All pro-democracy organisations in the country will be in arms in solidarity with NUPENG.

6. NUPENG leadership will go underground and operate in a more deadly manner. By then there will be nobody to have a dialogue with.

7. NUPENG and its allies will ensure that there is a total sanction against Nigeria's crude oil export at the international oil market.

8. Furthermore, NUPENG and its allies will ensure that the process of making Nigeria a pariah state in the comity of nations is completed.

THE WAY OUT

The government should today reach a compromise with NUPENG on its ten-point demands as contained in our National Executive Council memorandum entitled 'Recent Developments in the Oil Industry and the State of the Nation', dated 18 June 1994.

Let us reiterate that every demand in the aforementioned document is rooted in the upliftment and progress of the oil industry and the nation at large.

Finally we seize this opportunity to thank all the patriotic organisations and well-meaning individuals across the country who have stood solidly behind us in our Herculean task to introduce justice and equity into the body politic of the nation. History will vindicate our just and historic struggle.

Solidarity forever, for the Union makes us strong

Frank Kokori  
Secretary General

■ Messages of solidarity to: African Solidarity Support Campaign, PO Box 256, London SE11 5TH.

■ Protests to: Nigerian High Commission, Nigeria House, 9 Northumberland Avenue, London WC2N 5BW.



Solidarity with Nigerian workers! Supporters of the struggle for democratic rights organised this London march last year. British and Norwegian offshore oil workers are backing Nigerian oil unions. All trade unionists must do the same.

# Workers Press

## Suffer the children . . .

NICK DAVIES's 'Stories from the Streets' series in last week's 'Guardian' made very disturbing reading.

In one of his articles he revealed that:

■ Prostitution by under 16s in Britain has grown enormously since 1991.

■ The age of the young people involved is constantly falling, with boys and girls of ten available for sex in most British cities.

■ There are men and women who use threats of horrendous violence to keep children working as prostitutes.

■ The children involved are often subjected to torture and violence at the hands of their 'clients'.

Another report in last week's press highlighted that child labour is now widespread in Britain and that local authorities do not have the power or the staff to track down and eradicate its use. Children at work are killed and injured in accidents or attacked for the money they carry. They work long into the night in bad conditions and with dangerous machinery.

And findings last week from the Low Pay Network showed that up to 30 per cent of low-paid workers have suffered pay cuts since the abolition of wages councils.

\* \* \* \* \*

NICK DAVIES warns in his series against a simplistic equation which assumes that poverty drives children to prostitution just to make up for low family incomes.

The evil he charts is more profound and disturbing. He describes a period of 16 years of social decay and degradation in Britain's working-class areas which has eroded the stability of communities and families and had a devastating effect on many of the children.

He describes children whose families have collapsed, who are taken into local authority care, who become uncontrollable at school. They are human beings whom society has excluded.

As he says, they have been robbed of their childhood. Everything they experience tells them they have no worth as human beings: 'Everything in their education — all they have learned about themselves and the world — has prepared them for this career.'

'It's just the way I am. I can't change anything', a 15-year-old girl prostitute in the East Midlands told Nick Davies.

Quite rightly Davies repeats endlessly that the government *did* this, that what he describes is the outcome of deliberate government policies since 1979.

But that presents a further question. Why is it that *this* government and its predecessors under Thatcher chose the path that led to this?

Capitalism itself was, and is, in terminal decay. Thatcher spoke most openly and directly for a class dominion by capital over society which demanded the closure of plants and factories and the crippling of the trades unions.

Tories who wanted to 'roll back' state expenditure on the things which made something like a human life possible for millions of people proclaimed that 'market forces' must be allowed to dominate society. But 'market forces' are not an efficient way of regulating human relations. They are the reason why more and more children go through a living hell in an apparently prosperous and secure country.

So long as capitalism exists, market forces will mean more and more of the inhuman degradation Davies describes.

These young people whom Nick Davies describes are part of the new generation of the working class. Class-conscious workers and others must work to knit together the working class in its unions and in its communities to counter the destructive work of capitalism.

However terrible the experiences the working class goes through as the victim of capitalism, it is this class, once it has gained the class consciousness to do so, which can put an end to capitalism and introduce a new socialist society where human beings are not physically and mentally crushed.

A party must be built in the working class which is imbued with that class consciousness and which unites all the best fighters in the working class in Britain and all over the world.

## To those who have . . .

DIRECTORS' average pay increased by 20 per cent last year, Labour Research reports.

Last month, the National Institute of Economic and Social Research reported that since 1989 executive salaries have risen by 77 per cent while the rest of us, if we have worked at all, have had on average an increase of 17 per cent.

Robert Bauman, boss of pharmaceuticals company Smith Kline Beecham, is actually paid £1.5 million a year. The word 'earn' can hardly be appropriate here.

Not to be outdone, Members of Parliament are to have an increase of five per cent, some of it accounted for by a catching-up exercise.

Teachers' and nurses' union leaders have already pointed out that this is a little tactless when, under government policy, public sector workers have been told to accept increases of 2.4 per cent.

But then, 'whom the gods wish to destroy, they first drive mad'.

# Letters

## Chopping criticism

I AM writing to you to protest in the strongest possible terms on two scores.

In the first place you have twice 'chopped' or edited my last two letters on the Scottish national question. Moreover my letters have been edited in such a way that they seem to be incoherent and/or disjointed. By cutting out my *linking* sentences, I appear to be writing about the disparate instead of the related themes of nationalism and internationalism.

Secondly, I must also protest at your extraordinary heading, 'Socialism in Scotland?', to my letter in your 20 August issue. I hope that this heading was inspired by the desire to provoke discussion about the Scottish na-

tional question, and not a reflection of a somewhat surreal and unsympathetic Great British chauvinism. I'd be most grateful for your clarification on this very important point.

In any case, the historical evidence proves beyond all shadow of doubt that Scotland was to the left of England at crucial moments of the international class struggle — for example during and immediately after the French revolution and the period of Red Clydeside.

In his book on 'Where is Britain Going?' that was published by the Communist Party of Great Britain, Leon Trotsky was well aware of the fact that, if I may put it in polemical terms without being 'edited', the Scots were to the left of their English counterparts. Or, in the idiom of the editor of 'Workers Press', there was *more* socialism in Scotland than in England.

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me to witness the rubbish and attempts to marginalise distinctive Scottish radicalism and socialism of successive generations without a word of protest?

On second thoughts, whatever the motivation behind your question, 'Socialism in Scotland?', the question is politically insensitive, condescending and historically unimaginative.

But then I am no doubt being 'utopian' and 'idealist' in the polemical sense of those who would assume that even the best socialists in England could have escaped the great English chauvinism that Lenin saw condemned in the communist movement in London in the early 1920s. What would you say if I asked the 'question', 'Socialism in England?'

James D. You  
Falk

## Announcement by Index Books

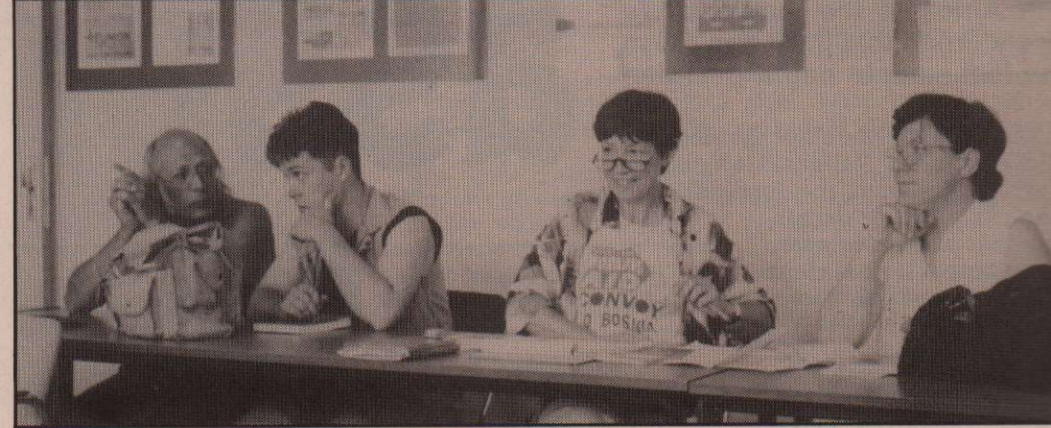
'REVOLUTIONARIES THEY COULDN'T BREAK; The Fight for the Fourth International in Indochina 1930-1945' by Ngo Van.

This 220-page book will be available by the end of the year. Index Books apologises to advance subscribers for the delay in publication. Editorial work has taken longer than expected.

This book recounts the history of the Vietnamese workers' movement that took shape in mortal conflict with the French colonial regime before World War II and suffered defeat in 1945, caught between French attempts to reassert control on the one side and an alliance of the Communist Party and reactionary nationalists on the other.

It covers in detail the part played by the Vietnamese Trotskyists, bringing alive the political lessons of a period in which the Trotskyist Fourth International and the Stalinist Third International clashed, not in the arena of ideas or slogans, but in life — among the workers and peasants who organised and fought in the face of poverty, police dictatorship and war.

Ngo Van, the author, was a worker, a Trotskyist and a participant in the events he describes. He was imprisoned in the 1930s by the French colonial regime and in 1945 escaped the Stalinist massacre. He lives in exile in Europe.



Workers Aid supporters waiting to meet CGT union representatives at the mine in St Avold, France

## Campaigning for workers' solidarity

During the recent Workers' Aid convoy to Bosnia, a team campaigned in France to win support for it. KEITH SCOTCHER reports

OUR first experience in France was an enthusiastic welcome by young members of the Sarajevo Association in Lille who fed us and joined us in the campaign in the Grande Place.

We collected 500 francs and met Veronique, a teacher. Next day Veronique returned with 20 jerrycans (worth £200) which she had convinced a supermarket to donate.

The Sarajevo Association

had organised a press conference, and a TV crew interviewed a team member.

We drove from Lille to rendezvous in Thionville with Murielle Soler, a town council employee who took us to the local fire station where the jerrycans were filled with 400 litres of diesel fuel donated by the town council.

It was a short drive from there to St Avold to be the guests of Sonja Kulovic and her family, refugees from Tuzla, where Sonja had been a technician in the Kreka mines.

Sonja and Francois, a local miner, joined us to visit the CGT, CFDT and CFTC union offices at the St. Avold mine seeking support for the convoys.

The team travelled on to Besancon and campaigned in the

main square with local Bosnian refugees. In Dole we met Habic family, also from Tuzla, who had collected aid to be sent back to their town.

The whole family, with Minja from Sarajevo, joined in the town centre, where we collected 722 francs.

The team drove across southern Germany on our way to former Yugoslavia, visiting the site of the Dachau concentration camp near Munich, now preserved as a memorial museum to the victims of Nazism.

Crossing Austria, we entered Slovenia and headed for Savdria to visit a refugee camp where aid had been delivered year before.

The camp, on a prime tourist site, was deserted except for army people. The refugees, treated like prisoners, had been sent to other, already overcrowded camps just 15 days before. Despite the abundance of tourists in Slovenia and Croatia the signs of the war were beginning to show.

Then we were due to meet with the convoy trucks for the more serious part of the journey, the road to Split and Bosnia.

## China: prisoners could be 'killed for spare parts'

MORE Chinese prisoners could be executed to feed a lucrative growing trade in organs for 'spare part' surgery, a human rights group has warned.

Up to 3,000 organs, mostly kidneys and corneas, are being taken from executed prisoners in China, according to a report from Human Rights Watch, which claims prisoners' families are either pressured into giving consent, or just not told.

The use of the death penalty is increasing in China. In some cases, the report claims, kidneys were removed the night before execution, or executions were deliberately botched to prolong the victim's life while organs were removed. Where eyes were required the prisoner may be shot in the heart instead of the head. The Chinese authorities have made large sums from organ export.

## Workers Press £3,000 Monthly Fund

August: In so far £1,344.42. We are bringing you news straight from the working-class battlefronts in South Africa and Nigeria. We are keeping you posted on pay struggles, working-class politics, and cultural developments.

Workers Press is proud of its Trotskyist tradition, and working-class history (see the review of Bill Hunter's book on the dockers, pages 4&5). We won't whitewash opportunist leaders, we won't insult your intelligence by talking down to you, and we won't let you down in the

struggle. There's only one problem — we're broke! Phone calls, postage, electricity and transport don't come cheap, and we've no mysterious millionaire backers — just you, our readers. If you've been away this month, you wouldn't have got far with only half your fare. The holidays are over. We've not even reached halfway with our monthly fund.

So help us keep up, and step up, the fight — rush your donations now to: Workers Press, PO Box 735, London SW8 1YB.

## We want to hear from you!

WE know some Workers Press readers have been away on holiday, but that doesn't mean other things have stopped happening. Yet few reports have come in this week from readers, on what is happening in your community or workplace.

So please remember, we want to hear from you! Let us have more reports and photos of events you are involved in; and then you can sell more Workers Press to colleagues and friends. If you sell just a couple more papers each week, you'll make the editor very happy! And your mates might thank you for opening their eyes.

### Regular

Have you asked your trade union organisation or community group to take a regular order for Workers Press? If they're not already taking it, let them see what they're missing. If you want any help, let us know. We can write to them asking them to take out a postal subscription.

Please let the circulation department know what you need, and we will provide it (anything but money that means!). The next few months will be the time to increase the sales of Workers Press — the best 30p. worth of newspaper in the workers' movement.

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# Problems at Transport House

BY MARY IDE

MEMBERS of the Transport and General Workers' Union (TGWU) are asking what is going on in the union. The union's head office is to move out of Transport House, to a building close to Buckingham Palace, at 16 Palace Street, where they have a five-year lease with an option for another five years.

It now seems that there are plans to sell or lease out the historic headquarters building in Smith Square, which has not only been the TGWU head office since the union's inception but was for many years the London office of both the TUC and the Labour Party.

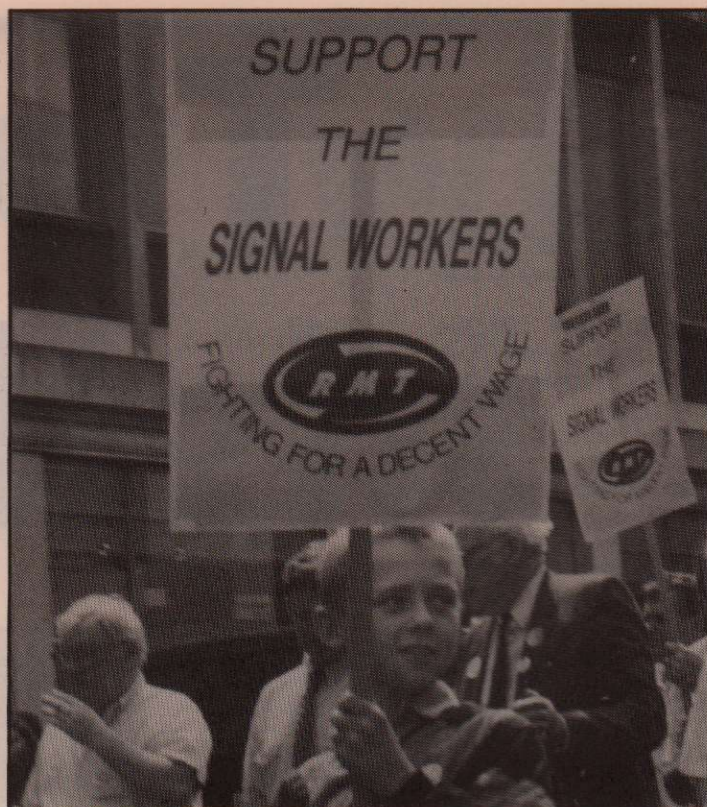
## History

The reason given for moving out of Transport House was to enable the building to be refurbished; but now some union members and officers think it has more to do with the financial consultants employed by TGWU general secretary Bill Morris. As might be expected, they think more like accountants, and neither know nor care much about the history of the working class.

The TGWU also has a problem in its Merseyside region, where three very senior full-time officers were suspended. One has since been dismissed, another has resigned. Accusations of financial problems and failure to implement union policy seem to be involved.

Supporters of the officials took over the TGWU's new computer centre in Newcastle, carrying their sleeping bags and food supplies, and planning to stay for some weeks. But in the end they left the same day. The suspended officials seem unlikely to get any widespread support in the rest of the union, but the employers can be expected to make the most of any fall off in union strength in north-east England.

Even more confusing is the report that Labour leader Tony Blair has offered Bill Morris a parliamentary seat to win at the general election. That would be a bit of a come-down from his present post.



RMT signals have received much support from street collections

# Widespread support for signal workers

BY BOB ARCHER

ABOUT £100,000 has been raised to help the signal workers to fight for their pay claim against Railtrack.

The money has come from trades unions, but also from the public in street collections.

Railway workers report that they find large numbers of the travelling public blame Railtrack — the body which runs the track and signal boxes — and the government for the dispute.

Train drivers have become increasingly worried by the quality of staff occupying the signal boxes on strike days.

If they feel it is unsafe to proceed, for example through a red signal, they are supposed to contact their immediate su-

pervisor for instructions. Railtrack has insisted that the steps they have taken to staff the boxes, aimed at taking the sting out of the periodic strikes, are perfectly safe.

But the pressure must be affecting Railtrack, because now there is a plan to use managers of British Rail — which operates the trains and stations — to help staff the signal boxes.

## Bans

Trade union legislation bans British Rail employees (like train drivers) from taking industrial action in support of Railtrack employees (like the signallers) because they work for different employers.

But there is nothing to stop two different employers (like British Rail and Railtrack) from

getting together to gang up on the signallers.

Meanwhile members of the Rail, Maritime and Transport (RMT) union and the train drivers' union, ASLEF, working on London Underground will start balloting next Monday for strike action over a wage claim.

Although BR drivers have been awarded a 2.5 per cent increase, London Underground drivers have only been offered 2 per cent, which is less than the increase in the cost of living.

Underground drivers had a big increase in wages recently, but it was tied up with rationalisation and huge increases in productivity.

Now it seems their employers want to keep the increases in productivity, but whittle away the drivers' standard of living.

# Has the TUC a future?

THIS week's Trades Union Congress (TUC), gathering in Blackpool's Winter Gardens for its 126th meeting this Monday, 5 September, has a most curious agenda. Divided into nine sections, it was clearly designed by the administrators to suit their view of life.

BY PETER GIBSON

Over the last year the TUC has been reorganised and the general council no longer meets every month. It has 'task groups' to look after things. This was, presumably, one of the bright ideas of Liberal-Democrat Des Wilson, who for a fee of £50,000 was called in by John Monks to give the TUC a new gloss.

## Ignored

Section two of the agenda, headed 'Task Groups', has however been ignored by all the unions. There are no motions or amendments in that section at all! You could well get the idea that the unions were trying to tell John Monks something! Section one of the agenda, called 'TUC relaunch', does have motions calling for the general council to go back to meeting

each month (bakers' union) and for an enhanced role for trades councils (UCATT, the builders' union).

The signal workers' union, the RMT, calls for the repeal of all anti-trade-union laws passed by the Tories; this motion has supporting amendments from the prison officers and the Society of Radiographers.

That should be an interesting debate since RMT general secretary Jimmy Knapp will be chair of the congress. TUC general secretary John Monks has always favoured a softer stance on the repeal of anti-union laws, but with the RMT signals staff on strike part of the TUC week, he may be in difficulty.

The National Association of Schoolmasters/Union of Women Teachers also calls for

workers to 'enjoy the right to be represented by the union of their choice, and to be able to withdraw their labour in pursuit of an industrial dispute'.

The Prison Officers Association calls for opposition to the Criminal Justice and Public Order Bill. There is one of the few unions that calls for the next Labour government to do anything. It says prison workers and staff at the GCHQ secret communications centre should have their right to strike restored.

## Decline

The decline in motions calling on the next Labour government to come to the defence of trades unions or their members must tell us a great deal about active trades unionists' and leading trade union officials' view of the Labour Party, and expectations of leaders like Tony Blair.

The Transport and General Workers' Union and the Fire Brigades Union call for improvements in health and safety standards. The TGWU says

'The future role of the Trades Union Congress, and its usefulness to working people, is clearly in question with this 1994 congress agenda.'

there should be a maximum working day of 11 hours for drivers, who can sometimes work a 15-hour day.

The TGWU is also urging the TUC to organise a 'major public event in 1995 on employment', and for 'policies to restore economic policy to the hands of democratically elected government rather than unelected bankers'.

It does not however seem to have a policy for mobilising working men and women to achieve such powers and control over the economy. The GMB general union calls on the Labour Party to stand by the commitment given by John Smith to last year's TUC conference on economic management.

The word 'socialist' has crept into the agenda (page 24, column two). The National Union of Mineworkers' amendment to a UNISON public sector union motion calls for socialist economic policies. The NUM also calls on the TUC to adopt a strategy for a 32-hour week, a ban on non-essential overtime and voluntary retirement at 55 on full pay.

The miners' union further calls for an 'overall economic strategy based on Clause Four of the Labour Party constitution, which calls for the workers by hand or by brain to take full control of their industries...'. Now there is a programme that could transform the TUC!

The small Electrical and Plumbing Industries Union (EPIU) raises some of the most interesting points. In calling for a campaign including 'extra-parliamentary action and full mobilisation of the whole movement to fight on behalf of those who carry a disproportionate

burden of the economic mismanagement of society', it seems to accept that the Tories and the bankers did not mean to create unemployment, deprivation and homelessness. But at least the EPIU proposes a mobilisation for struggle.

Reflecting its origins, in a rebellion by electrical and plumbing workers against the right-wing, scab-herding EETPU, the EPIU has the only motion on the agenda under the heading 'Trade Union Unity'.

At the 1993 TUC, 30 per cent of delegations nearly walked out over the readmission of the EETPU following its merger with the AEU engineers, to form the Amalgamated Engineering and Electrical Union. Undertakings were given by the new union that all outstanding disputes between the EETPU and other unions would be resolved, and John Monks called on all the unions to accept this.

It still hasn't happened, and the EPIU draws attention to this, calling for 'immediate resolution of the disputes'. Let's hope the TUC doesn't try to get Des Wilson to solve the problem.

The future role of the TUC, and its usefulness to working people, is clearly in question with this 1994 congress agenda. It is quite incapable of using its resources to assist anyone with problems at work, and is clearly seen by most unions as being of very little help to them.

It is worth noting that, in the year that Jimmy Knapp has been chair of the TUC, there has been no call by him, or any of the RMT executive, for TUC action in support of the signal workers. This is understandable, and the agenda tells us why.

# Wages fight on buses

BY ROY THOMAS

AT A time when the government is trying to sell off the London Transport bus companies, the workforce has been voting down the employers' response to their wage claim. In the London United company based in Hammersmith, Fulham and Richmond area, they voted to reject a £243 lump sum offer.

Transport and General Workers' Union (TGWU) officer Ken Fuller is quoted as saying: 'These payments are a con. They do not add to the wages proper, which remain the same. A lump sum is soon gone without lasting benefit.' A second ballot is planned over strike action for a proper wage increase.

In south London, an offer of a lump sum of £260 was put to the vote last week. Bus crews in the Croydon, Brixton and Norwood areas voted in three out of four garages to reject it, but Norwood garage voted overwhelmingly to accept, giving a small overall majority in favour.

In the Leaside company area, north London, covering Hackney, Enfield, Wood Green and Tottenham there was a tight vote to accept a lump sum,

in spite of a feeling among many bus crews for strike action.

In the Stockwell, Merton and Putney areas, south-west London, covered by London General Bus Company, a proposal is being put to bus crews for an increase to a 43 hour week, a cut to 30 minutes meal breaks, and cuts in sick pay or holidays, and the elimination of the subsidised canteen.

The company already has a high rate of staff turnover and local bus crews expect that up to five and a half hours in the driving cab without a break will lead to more people leaving the job.

The privatisation of London's bus network, which was seen by some of the larger private bus monopolies as rich pickings, lost much of its attraction when the proposal to deregulate public transport in the capital was dropped last year. The expected asking price of the bus company was halved, and in a number of cases it may well be that the managers end up buying the companies, if only to keep their own jobs.

## Unfit

AS PART of the preparation for privatisation all manner of cost-cutting has taken place. A great



'Payments to crews are con'

deal of this affected engineering maintenance support, causing some of the bus companies to find themselves in trouble with the Department of Transport inspectors because of unfit buses being found in service.

The South London company has to appear before the traffic commissioners in October for just such problems, and is likely to find its operator's licence at risk. That will hardly put up the price London Transport can ex-

pect to be offered for the company.

The battle now taking place over RMT signal workers' pay, the strike ballot to take place on London Underground's pay offer, and the struggles by bus crews, all give the lie to those who talk about the 'defeat of the working class', or a 'downturn in the struggle'.

Activists in all these struggles are working to bring them together. They all face the same Tory transport minister directing the employers' side. The threat to the community of less safe and more expensive public transport is a major issue in all of them.

Although London Transport will claim in public that each of its bus companies runs its own affairs, under its own manager, every one of them has made the same response to the union wage claim.

Every one has offered a lump sum close to £250, and demanded in return a worsening of working conditions, all in the desperate hope that they will be able to buy the company in the next few weeks.

The outstanding fact which emerges from all this is that it is not possible to run a safe and affordable bus service by 'market forces'.

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# Inside left

## Casting stones

THE Labour Party has got itself into a state over Liverpool councillor Petrona Lashley, who might have become the city's first black mayor. The 'Liverpool Echo' revealed that the Granby ward councillor was convicted in the 1970s for prostitution, and fined four years ago for obtaining property by deception.

This scandalised media hacks, who daily prostitute themselves for the press lords, and politicians who attain office by deception, and do their thieving when they're in. And it upset the respectable citizens of Knotty Ash who (when not kerb-crawling) resent having Granby's black ghetto, a reminder of how Liverpool merchants made their money from the slave trade.

On 9 August, quoting the gospel: 'Let him who is without sin cast the first stone', council leader Harry Rimmer said Labour would stand by councillor Lashley. Many local people praised her work in the community. But the regional Labour Party has announced it is dropping her as a council candidate. The people in Granby have no say in the matter.

## Brandy for the bureaucrat

ONE of my childhood treats was a trip to the 'Daily Worker' bazaar. Part of the pleasure was being told where we were going in whispers ('and don't tell Auntie Ada'). It was the height of the cold war, and hot war in Korea.

While my mother examined clothes and bric-à-brac, and chatted to old friends, I disregarded the Communist Party's call to 'Cut the Arms Bill', and purchased a battleship for a shilling. I looked at a stall displaying such rare gifts as Russian dolls, embroidered Ukrainian blouses, and Bulgarian wine, which were probably raffle prizes.

What prompted this reminiscence was the news that North Korea's ambassador in Finland, Kim Pyong Il, has sought asylum in the West, thus leaving his half-brother Kim Jong Il apparently in unrivalled possession of the throne back home, after the death of their father Kim Il Sung. ('People's Korea', as the 'Morning Star' calls it, has a dynasty.)

A team of Russian embalmers has been to North Korea's capital, Pyongyang, to measure up Kim Il Sung so he can be stuffed — at a cost of £200,000 — and put in a glass case for posterity. (Maybe they'll exhibit him at the Saatchi gallery?) When his son goes he'll more likely be pickled. Kim Jong Il is reportedly a boozy playboy, and the world's biggest single customer for the most expensive French cognac.

He has imported so much it's thought he must have used it lubricating various bureaucrats whose support he needed. Maybe it serves as acceptable hard currency for trade deals — how many bottles do you need for a nuclear reactor?

But just for a moment I thought of various claimants for the 'Daily Worker' succession, such as the 'Morning Star', 'Weekly Worker', and especially the New Communist Party's 'New Worker', which grew quite attached to Kim Il Sung's North Korea.

If they're holding a fund-raising bazaar, forget the bric-à-brac (there are some 50,000 statues of Kim Il Sung knocking around) — how about some rather superior bottles in the tombola?

Charlie Pottins

## DOT GIBSON reviews 'They Knew Why They Fought: Unofficial Struggles and Leadership on the Docks 1945-1989', by BILL HUNTER

BILL HUNTER's book, in just 134 pages, tells the story of the dockers' life and fight during 1945-89 without the sentimentality or liberal romanticism of some books on working-class history.

It is fresh and full of life. Hunter is not 'right after the event', but writes with an understanding of history as it happened.

The book calls to mind Spinoza's oft-quoted words: 'I have striven not to laugh at human actions, not to weep at them, nor to hate them, but to understand them.'

Hunter's preface explains: 'This book does not have its origins in academic considerations of writing history. . . . It was a lifetime's experience which convinced me that there was an imperative need to write about the key aspects of this dockers' history.'

I have the good fortune to know Bill as a comrade and friend, and his final words emphasise his concern for the working class: 'The new forces of struggle in the communities and the trade unions are going to be turbulent and volatile. . . . I hope that this small work will help those leaders who will emerge in this new chapter of struggle.'

Chapter One, 'Struggling out of the Abyss', sets the scene: 'The road out of the degradation and poverty that characterised the life of the dock workers and their communities in the last century was rough, tough and brutal.'

The book enables dockers' leaders to speak to a new generation. This important part of working-class life must be reconstructed. Vic Turner, dockers' leader imprisoned in the 1972 strike, says:

'Each generation in those days had a trade, not like the young people of today who are unemployed with no trade and no union. We were lucky, The old chaps had been there since the middle of the last century. It was them who built the docks and other industries, and they told us about their lives.'

Bill Hunter, a worker and Marxist who has long experience in the labour movement and who participated with the dockers in many of their struggles, in this book renews this collaboration; he has listened to them, fills in the historical background and draws the lessons.

Reading these pages brought back many memories for me. My family, too, voted for Labour in 1945, hoping for a new, fair society without war, unemployment and poverty.

As a child I was excited by Labour's victory, and found the bitter conflict between the government and the dockers during their 1945 strike hard to understand.

Names like Harry Constable and Bert Aylward hit the headlines, and my father, a wood-cutting machinist from the East End of London, complained: 'They aren't giving

Labour a chance.' But, I thought, all these dockers had voted Labour and were entitled to better conditions.

Hunter explains that Winston Churchill, the defeated Tory leader, 'knew more about these leaders than many workers who elected them to carry out radical change. On hearing the election results in 1945, the old Tory leader said: "I do not feel down at all. I am not certain that the Conservative Party could deal with the labour troubles that are coming."'

### Acting for their class

CHURCHILL spoke and acted for his class. Dockers Aylward, Constable and others spoke and acted for theirs.

Constable would not compromise on principles. He had a simple rule: 'You must make your base and fight your case.' He was offered incentives by the Transport and General Workers' Union (TGWU) leadership for him to become a union official, then, when that failed, he was expelled from the union, and later arrested by the state.

The bosses tried to prevent him from getting work, but the dockers refused to work unless he was employed. And that sets the scene for the story told in the book.

Fighting for such elementary things as the right to health, safety and permanent employment, the dockers came into conflict with the state, with governments — Labour and Tory — and with the leadership of the TGWU.

The ruling class was determined to break trade unionism in all its strongholds — docks, mines, steel, shipbuilding, printing — to discipline the whole working class in order to drive down wages and conditions and reimpose casual, part-time, low-paid work.

If the ruling class could not do this directly itself, it was sure of the help of the Labour and trade union leaders.

The book brought back another memory. In 1953, keen to work for the labour movement, I got a job with the TGWU in an office near the main entrance to its headquarters, Transport House, in Smith Square in London. Arthur Deakin was general secretary.

One day an official came in and told us: 'Lock the door, the dockers are coming!'

I couldn't believe that an official was warning us against members of the union.

Soon Smith Square was full of dockers. They stormed in demanding to see Deakin, who left by the back door!

An American, Joseph Goldstein, after a year studying the TGWU, wrote in his book, 'The Government of British Unions' (1952): 'It becom-



Three of the seven dockers' unofficial leaders in the 1951 conspiracy trial are chaired from court. Left to right, Harry Constable, Nudger Harrison, Bill Johnson

# They knew why they fought



TGWU leader Ron Todd with dockers at Tilbury during the 1989 strike (left)

es difficult to avoid the conclusion that the Transport and General Workers' Union is an oligarchy at every level of its structure, failing to elicit the active participation of its members.'

A review of Goldstein's book in the 'Portworkers' Clarion', the Birkenhead Portworkers' Defence Committee paper, asked: 'Have you ever stood on a garden rake and had the handle hit you in the eye? . . . That is how Arthur Deakin must have felt on reading this book.'

### Dock workers' scheme

THE post-war Labour government nationalised unprofitable sectors of industry, such as railways and mines. It suited the owners to get huge sums in compensation while taxpayers paid for modernisation.

Today's Tories are returning these industries to private ownership. But 'neither this [post-war] Labour government nor later Labour governments made any move at all towards the nationalisation of the docks industry', says Hunter.

The dockers' unofficial leaders,

especially Constable and Aylward, were demanding nationalisation under workers' control. The dockers had a great deal of power. They had to be pacified. In 1947 the Labour government introduced the Dock Workers (Regulation of Employment) Scheme, which gave registered dock workers the right to a permanent job and a guaranteed minimum wage.

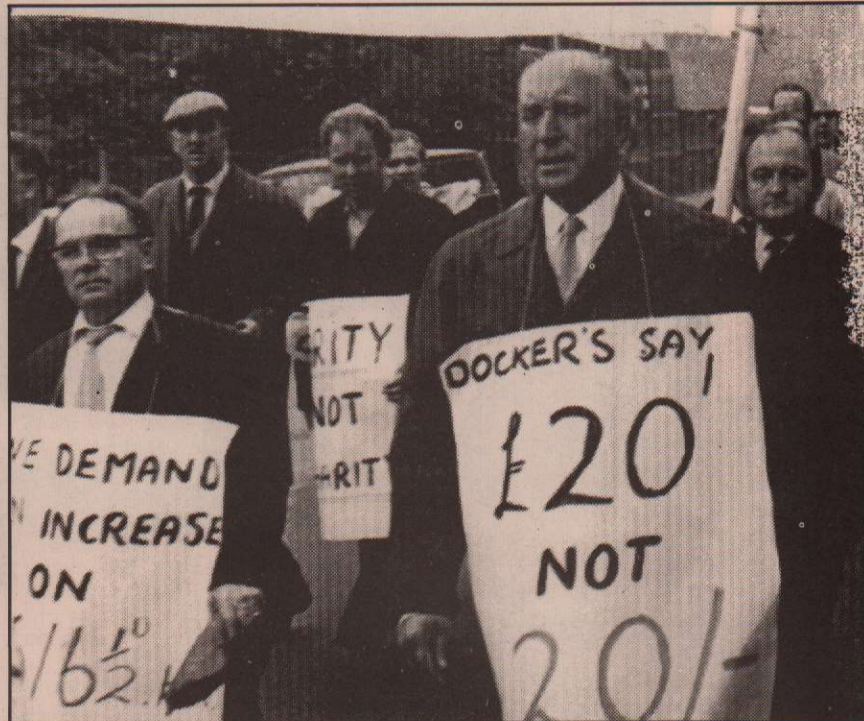
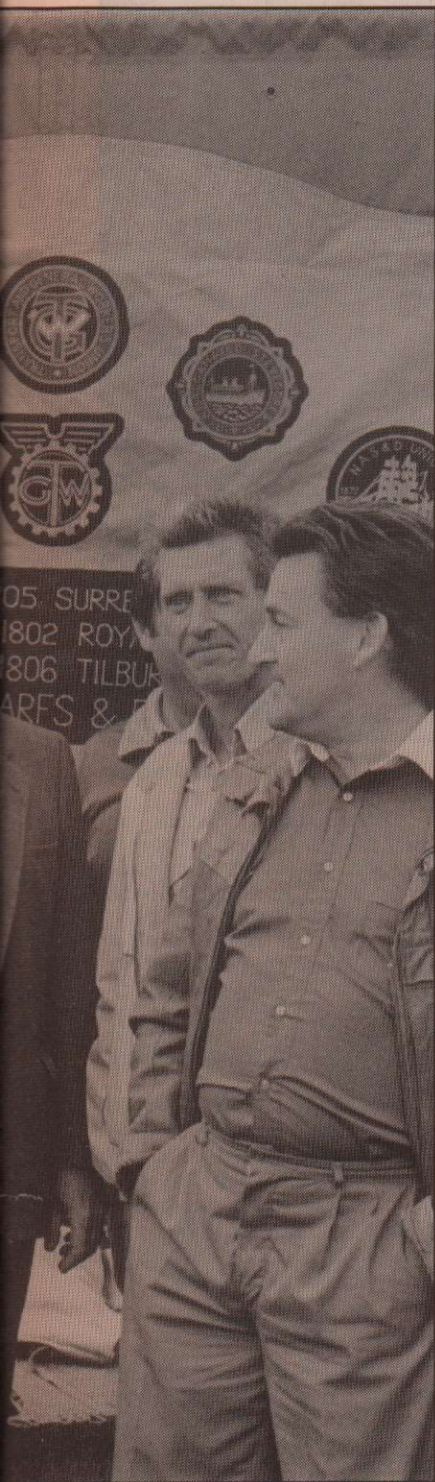
There were many strikes in defence of the scheme, including the last one in 1989 when the Tory government repealed it.

Bill Hunter explains: 'Though sometimes dockers' demands were phrased in terms of defending the Scheme, when the Scheme is examined in relation to the power which dockers enjoyed after the end of the war, its contradictory aspects become obvious.'

'The Scheme actually helped the employers to maintain discipline and to tighten their grip on labour during a period when the relationship of forces had moved in the dockers' favour. It did not, then, come into being as part of a socialist programme. The Labour government had no such guideline.'

'The Scheme was an attempt to

# Knew why fought



In 1970 half the country's dockers were on unofficial strike over a wages offer (right, above and top)

representatives. Union officials had acquired the power through the Scheme to deprive men of their livelihood. . . .

'In contrast to the set-up in the TGWU, the Blue Union embodied both militant and democratic traditions, traditions that were a great attraction for the northern men. All major decisions were referred back to the rank and file for final decision. This was a constant source of criticism by TGWU officials, employers and governments alike — a fact that did not go unnoticed by the dockers.'

I remember a very difficult decision taken by the Trotskyist group in the Labour Party, at a time when I was a new member of the group. Our paper, 'Socialist Outlook', was banned by the Labour Party in 1955 and we decided to cease publication to prevent mass expulsions.

That meant that we did not have a newspaper for two years at this crucial time of the dockers' struggles. In 1957 we launched 'The Newsletter', edited by Peter Fryer, who had been expelled from the Communist Party for opposing the Soviet bureaucracy's invasion of Hungary in 1956. Dockers Constable and Kerrigan joined the editorial board.

The dockers' mass strikes raised the question of the need for revolutionary trade unions; this found its parallel in, and was interconnected with, the Trotskyists' struggle against Stalinism and reformism (social democracy).

We Trotskyists were a very small group, but our historical goals met up with the dockers' aspirations. It was natural that some leading unofficial dockers' leaders became Trotskyists: Constable, Aylward, Kerrigan, and Cavanagh.

The TGWU and Labour bureaucracy put big resources into the fight against the dockers and the Blue Union. The Communist Party's Stalinist leadership covered their backs.

Hunter explains: 'The experience of the Blue Union, like the whole history of the docks, must be put in the context of the continuation of a right wing and opportunist left leadership of the trade union movement, and the weakness of a principled Marxist alternative leadership.'

'But such a principled leadership could only be built by participating in historic movements such as that of the Blue Union break. If it was not an adventure, neither was it an artificial movement, the product of "politically motivated men" which Labour leaders such as Attlee, Wilson and Gunter denounced. . . .

'Yes, there were "politically motivated men" who supported the Blue Union. We, Trotskyists, who later became the Socialist Labour League, supported them. We were almost the only group of politically-motivated men — and women — who gave consistent and loyal support to their struggle.'

## TGWU directives

TO HUNTER's credit, although he explains the role of Stalinism, he does not make scapegoats out of the many Communist Party dockers, who were instructed by the party to accept the directives of the TGWU's right-wing leadership in the Blue Union recognition strike.

There was a ban on Communist Party members holding office in that union, and the Stalinists took this opportunist line in the hope of recognition by the bureaucracy.

On this, Hunter quotes 'Frank Deegan, a Liverpool docker, who was a member of the Communist Party all his working life'. In his autobiography, 'There is no other way', Deegan explained that he and other docker members of his party went on delegations to the TGWU national officials.

They supported recognition of the Blue Union even though: 'We were not too keen on the idea that

the best way to help solve the problem would be to get recognition for the break-aways.' But Deegan added: 'We were determined that only the Transport Union would be responsible for dockers in the northern ports.'

In his autobiography, 'Good Morning Brothers!', Jack Dash, a Communist Party member and London dockers' leader, also shed some light on this dilemma:

'We TGWU men were torn between two loyalties; our own trade union executive had directed us to remain at work, but what were we to do when our fellow trade unionists, on strike, appealed to us not to cross the picket line? For myself, although I considered that the northern lads had justifiable grievances, I could not agree on the walkout, but at the same time I could not cross the picket line.'

But this 'looking both ways' reaped its reward. In 1989 the leadership of the TGWU, general secretary Ron Todd and the 'broad left' majority on the union's executive, bowed to the capitalist state, ditched the dockers and allowed the Dock Labour Scheme to be repealed without a fight.

I will never forget the sight of Tilbury dockers in tears at the realisation that their union was being derecognised and the workforce divided at the end of the 1989 strike.

On 1 August 1989, when the strike was called off, a docker on the steps

'The dockers' mass strikes raised the question of the need for revolutionary trade unions; this found its parallel in, and was interconnected with, the Trotskyists' struggle against Stalinism and reformism (social democracy).'

of Transport House said: 'Today I am glad my father is not alive. After all the struggles in the history of the docks, he would be ashamed!'

Hunter's book is telling this docker to lift his head. 'In the 1980s all the leading sections of the working class had their trade union organisation weakened. This was not the result of their lack of will to fight the attacks on their organisations by the state and their employers. . . .

'The workers' traditional organisations were weakened with trade union and labour leaders capitulating to a world of powerful international industrial and financial capitalist corruption.'

'These leaders betrayed workers under accumulating attacks on social benefits, on safety and security of working conditions, on trade union organisation, and suffering increasing unemployment and homelessness among working-class youth. . . .

'The attacks on the conquests which the working class gained throughout the world since the end of the Second World War pose either a fresh advance toward socialism or new capitalist dictatorships. That fresh advance can only take place if we build a revolutionary internationalist leadership.'

'In 1951, the Birkenhead unofficial dockers' committee decided to affiliate to the Fourth International. In future in a new upsurge which is coming in Britain, and which will bring new fresh young working men and women into struggle in industry and communities, necessity will compel them to think in that political and international way.'

■ 'They Knew Why They Fought: Unofficial Struggles and Leadership on the Docks 1945-1989', by Bill Hunter, is published by Index Books, priced £7.95. Index Books, 28 Charlotte Street, London W1P 1HJ (tel: 071-636 3532).

regulate conflicting relationships between workers and employers which could not be regulated.'

Hunter quotes Peter Kerrigan, a Merseyside unofficial dockers' leader: 'The Dock Labour Scheme was a two-edged thing. At the same time as it gave the benefits of a guaranteed minimum sum if you didn't get work, you had to pay for it with a certain loss of liberty. The people who ran it were the officials of the T&G and the employers. The people who punished you were also the people who were supposed to be your representatives.'

The scheme to some extent alleviated the harshness of dockers' lives. Kerrigan had started on the docks in 1935 and became a coal heaver at the young age of 19. He didn't have the pound and fourpence needed to buy the tally to start, and had to go to a fairground boxing ring to win it. 'I got about 30 shillings, gave my mother ten shillings and kept a pound and fourpence,' he says.

Joe Cubbins didn't have a tally so, after four years' casual work as a scaler on ships' boilers, he became a casual dock worker at 18 in 1936: 'I had to go on the stand for

work in the morning and the afternoon. The ship might be in for a week or a fortnight, but I still had to go to be hired twice a day. . . .

After seven years in the army, Cubbins returned to the docks in 1946 and was elected to the unofficial trade union committee. To these dockers a job was synonymous with being in a trade union.

John Magginis became a docker in Liverpool in 1951. 'I went to a control on the docks to pick up my registration book. I found myself in the middle of a strike. That morning, after we picked up our books, we went on the picket line. There was no question of us going to work. We were all the sons of dockers and had grown up in a time of one struggle after another on the docks.'

Vic Turner started work on the Royal group of London docks in 1951, and immediately became a member of the docks trade group of the TGWU. He walked into the dock in the middle of a dispute over working arrangements and conditions.

Magginis and Larry Kavanagh, who started at Birkenhead dock in 1964, describe the conditions which

finally gave rise to the six-week strike in 1967: there was no protective clothing or washing facilities and masks were unheard of. 'Often for ten days down a hatch we worked on rotten bags of asbestos which would burst open,' they recall.

## The 'Blue Union'

TIME and again the dockers rose up in solidarity actions in defence of jobs and conditions and in defence of other sections of the working class internationally — only to find that the TGWU would not give them official support.

Bill Hunter's book is important because it is about unofficial struggles and leadership, and he has firsthand knowledge of one of the most important periods for the dockers — the northern dockers' mass walk-out from the 'White Union' (TGWU) to the 'Blue Union' (the National Association of Stevedores and Dockers) in 1954. Kerrigan calls it a 'prison break'.

Hunter explains: 'Militant trade unionists who kicked against working conditions quickly found that they had to fight not only their employers but also their own repre-



## PERSONAL COLUMN

### Blairing the issues

FEW people, I imagine, would think of turning to the 'New Yorker' for any sort of insight into the present state of the British Labour Party.

But here in the current (22 & 29 August) issue — sitting incongruously among the ads for gold Nantucket buckets and for 'the ultimate escape vacation' (being 'sinfully pampered' aboard a 'magnificent private yacht') — is a revealing article by the novelist Julian Barnes.

'The Modernizer' is about Tony Blair, and it's illustrated by the above sketch from the adroit pen of Gerald Scarfe, showing Labour's youngest-ever leader looking rather like Heinrich Hoffmann's Struwwelpeter, who, you may remember, had his thumbs cut off by the Scissor Man for the crime of sucking them.

It's not a bad comparison, for where except his thumb does Blair get his ideas from? Barnes quotes a fellow Blair-watcher who heard him address a meeting of Charter 88: 'He absolutely charmed them, but he didn't say a chipolata sausage.'

Barnes's article is full of succulent quotations. One is attributed to an unnamed left-wing MP: 'If you tried supporting the 1945 Labour manifesto today, you'd be thrown out of the Party as a Trotskyist.'

For the modernisers, says Barnes flatly, socialism is dead. And Blair 'believes in keeping the trade unions at a distance'.

One journalist calls him 'Little Boy Blue', so right-wing has he become. Another says: 'He's trying to be Harold Wilson.'

Barnes comments: 'One of the constant fascinations . . . of politics lies in the disparity between the Onward Christian Soldiers rhetoric and the subsequent announcement that, sorry, folks, we can't afford the lance and the breastplate, and, by the way, the horse has been downsized to a mule.'

### The trouncing of Hugo Oehler

A READER has challenged me to give chapter and verse for my statement (2 July) that Trotsky trounced Hugo Oehler in 1935. I'm happy to do so.

Oehler, as many readers will know, opposed on principle the so-called 'French turn' made by Trotsky's French supporters in 1934, when they decided to enter the Socialist Party with the aim of extending their influence.

In a letter written on 24 September 1935, Trotsky wrote the following:

'[T]he Oehler group stood in the course of this all-important year on the other side of the barricades, in closest association with people who fought our sections, slandered and lied about them. . . .

'The whole method of thought of Oehler is un-Marxian and undialectical. He . . . bothers little about the realities of any situation. . . .

'I have not considered a single political tenet of Oehler which was correct. . . . He has no political mind and the tragedy of it is that he presents himself as a political leader, thus causing confusion.

'The anti-Marxist pattern of thought which he uses and which is completely divorced from all reality must, in my opinion, be examined in the most decisive manner by the

W[orkers] P[arty of the US], for one must learn from such events in order to be able to go forward.'

The next day, in another letter, Trotsky described Oehler's fears and denunciations of the 'French turn' as 'sectarian childish babble'.

These passages will be found in 'Writings of Leon Trotsky: Supplement (1934-40)' (New York, Pathfinder, 1979, pp. 610-11, 614).

I could give more such quotations, but these should do to be going on with.

### No room on the shelf

LAST week I briefly mentioned the British Library's decision to end its traditional policy of being, so far as possible, all-inclusive. From now on it will no longer retain a copy of every book and journal published in this country.

On the ground that it has nowhere to store them, it will cease to keep Mills & Boon and other romantic novels, some children's books, and dress-making patterns.

Other items destined for the chop include 'obscure amateur publications produced on word processors for limited circulation'.

A government spokesperson is quoted as describing the library's collecting policy as 'out of control', adding: 'The library is desperate for space, but its shelves are full of useless bits of paper that nobody wants and nobody reads.'

These words betray a wretched lack of vision and a pretty thorough ignorance of how historians work and what their needs are.

One century's 'useless bits of paper that nobody wants and nobody reads' are often a later century's cherished and revealing source-material.

Seventeenth- and 18th-century chap-books, vilely printed and crudely illustrated, can be purest gold to the social historian. So can those three-decker romantic novels of the late 18th and 19th centuries. So can early children's books.

Who are we, in the last decade of the 20th century, to lay down the law about what the historians of, say, 200 years from now will be looking for in the printed matter our culture is currently producing?

Even the dress-making patterns of the 1990s may well prove to be a valuable source of knowledge for the future social historian of these troubled times.

As to those 'obscure amateur publications', the government's unimaginative arrogance defies belief. Why, the despised 'fan-zines' of so recent a decade as the 1970s, besides being eagerly sought after by collectors ready to pay good money for them, are already rich quarries for many a Ph.D. dissertation, and as the years go by are likely to be valued more and more for the light they shed on their times.

The same is true of political publications produced by 'obscure amateurs'.

The historian Macaulay says something somewhere to the effect that no printed matter, however ephemeral or trivial or indecent or 'low', is out of place in a national library.

Macaulay was right. The government should see to it that the necessary space is found. Otherwise this philistine break with tradition will do immense harm to the British Library's claim to be the world's leading resource for scholarly inquiry.

And once the gap is created it can never be filled.

**Peter Fryer**

## Edinburgh Festival

# Agony, ecstasy and politics

BY TERRY BROTHERSTONE

AESCHYLUS's the 'Oresteia' is the only three-part tragedy to survive from the period that, so far as we know, saw the birth of Western drama. It was first performed in Athens in 458 BC. The latest production is by the noted German director, Peter Stein, and is in Russian.

At the 48th Edinburgh International Festival (which ends this weekend), it was seen in a converted ice-rink but not overendowed with warmth. It lasted about seven and a half hours.

At this point I hear a spluttering of cornflakes as some regular readers exclaim: '(Expletive deleted), he's not going to pretend he enjoyed that!' But I am, that's to say, I did . . . and so did my two companions. None of us took 'the Greek' at school, none of us speak more than a few words of Russian; and all three of us were pretty hazy about the story of the 'Oresteia' when the show began.

At the beginning a watchman, atop a huge black wall which represents the palace of Agamemnon, the king of Argos, stokes his fire (real flames) and speaks. One unequivocally life-enhancing contribution of new technology over the past few years is the development, for foreign-language theatre, of super-titles which actually work. So I can give you a rough idea of what he said.

'The gods I beg for deliverance from these toils, / from my watch a year long, through which, sleeping upon (this) house . . . like a dog, / I have learned to know the assembly of the stars at night . . .'

### Joy

Then he breaks into delirious joy as a distant light tells him that the ten-year-long siege of Troy is over, the Greek warriors are returning to Argos, and he can be relieved of his oppressive duties. Anyone who was a member of the Workers Revolutionary Party in the days when guard duty was an obsession immediately knows how he feels; and those who missed out on that soul-enriching experience doubtless found parallels in their own lives.

Accordingly the long afternoon and evening stretching ahead immediately seemed *ours*. The story may be ancient and mythological, full of intra-familial killings, vengeance and warring gods. But the experience is of *now*, and *for us*. The themes transcend time and, given the dramatic vision of this produc-



Orestes (Evgueni Mironov) surrounded by the Furies in 'Oresteia'

Photo: Sean Hudson

tion, allow all who reflect on them imaginatively to explore their own times, their own lives.

These are plays for political people particularly, dealing with the contradictions between public and private responsibilities; with the difficulty of defining just causes; with the search for dialectical unity between what is determined by the gods (or the 'objective situation') and what lies within the scope of human decision; and with the aspiration for extremes of human passion to be moderated by the need for social cohesion.

Despite his disclaimer, director Stein may have been over-affected by the dramatic circumstances of his production's creation — during the second failed Moscow coup and the Russian parliamentary elections of 1993. In the third play, the goddess Pallas Athene introduces the citizens of Athens to the rule of law and justice, to be achieved by voting.

The god Apollo (Igor Kostolevski), counsel for Orestes (Evgueni Mironov), who stands accused of matricide, arrives out of the roof and camps it up with his lyre, while Pallas Athene (Elena Maiorova), also making an impressive overhead entrance, looks a bit like Marilyn Monroe presiding at an Oscar ceremony. Arguably we here lose some of the sense of a cathartic transcending of the foregoing agony, and get instead some rather nervous fun as a German director worries about being accused of trying to teach the Russians 'Western' ways.

But the ambiguities are in Aeschylus too. Order is established only conditionally, and only — some would say this the most significant thing — by excluding women from active politics. In this production the brilliantly choreographed female 'Furies' end up assured of privileges and respect, but bound like mummies in blood-red, imprisoning swathes of cloth.

\*\*\*\*\*

'IF YOU'VE ever seen anything more beautiful, you must have died and gone to heaven.' So claimed the ecstatic advance publicity for Baz ('Strictly Ballroom') Luhrmann's Australian Opera production of Benjamin Britten's 'A Midsummer Night's Dream', which played three performances in Edinburgh.

### Vulgar.

As the audience entered the Festival Theatre and cast its eyes upon the newest, and largest, proscenium stage space in the UK, it was not disappointed. The heaven to which this set is an antechamber must be a very Australian one, gloriously vulgar, self-mocking and republican in its often homoerotic humour.

We are in British India in 1923. Shakespeare's (and Britten's) young Athenian lovers have become imperial subalterns. Duke Theseus and Hippolyta, when they eventually appear, are the viceroy and his lady. The proscenium arch is draped with portraits of George V and Queen Mary. The mechanicals are squaddies putting on a play for their superiors.

Peter Quince, Bottom and their mates, as they prepare to perform the most universally funny scene in English literature, look as if they have stepped out of 'It Ain't 'Alf Hot, Mum!' The dram-befuddled lovers, their emotions turned inside-out by Oberon's magic juice, perform pantsdown antics borrowed from a Whitehall farce.

The orchestra (in this case the Scottish Chamber Orchestra) has been recruited into the cast: the musicians are on a huge centre-stage bandstand, clad in red military tunics, selflessly subordinating themselves to the action around them.

### Brashly

The singing is good without, on the whole, achieving greatness. Luhrmann has made advantage out of the problem the company has of recruiting and retaining voices of the highest quality. He has brashly made the opera into one thing an opera should be — a great musical show. It might not work for Verdi or Wagner, but for Britten it seems fair dinkum.

One reason the Ozzie 'Dream' works so well is that Britten, though he abbreviated Shakespeare's text, stayed loyal to it. Shakespeare, like Aeschylus, speaks across continents and ages.

Across language barriers too. Festival-goers in Edinburgh this year could see a German 'Anthony and Cleopatra' (Peter Zadek's political panorama of a production for the Berliner Ensemble) and a French 'The Winter's Tale' (Stéphane Braunschweig's subversive interpretation from Orléans).

Venture on to the Edinburgh Fringe, and there was a vigorous and sexy 'Romeo and Juliet' in Estonian (lovers poised dangerously on the railings of an old schoolyard); and a Russian language 'Othello' from the Ukraine, acted (and swum) in the Infirmary Street public baths.

Given his capacity still to inspire such originality, and so to promote internationalism in this way, it's no wonder Shakespeare was one of Marx's favourite and most-quoted authors, as was Aeschylus.



Bottom (Gary Rowley) with ass's ears surrounded by Indian boy-fairies in 'A Midsummer Night's Dream' Photo: Sean Hudson

# Vicious circle or Gordian knot for workers?

This article by Polish Trotskyist LUDWIK HASS first appeared in 'Sprawy i Ludzie' ('People and Events') no 42, 1994. It analyses recent developments in Poland sparked off by a strike of a section of the miners' union in mid-April this year over plans to privatise the coal mines. Other coal mines in Upper Silesia soon joined in the strike, putting economic demands on Pawlak's coalition government of social-democratic and peasant parties. The right-wing leadership of 'Solidarnosc' saw an opportunity to attack the post-Communist government, calling a general strike and rallying the right around anti-communist slogans. The translation is by Bozena Langley

AT THE beginning of the present chain of events, about the middle of April, all those on the independent left were faced with a question: what attitude to adopt to the strikes breaking out?

The workers' demands deserved their support after all: the abolition of *popiwiek* [a tax on state-owned enterprises], an improvement and stabilisation of the economic situation, social security, an end to the thieving privatisation of the workplaces, 'social enfranchisement' and a new social system.

Adapted to the changed situation, this programme seemed to reproduce that advanced in the struggle against the bureaucratic machine of the degenerated workers' state.

Exceptionally anti-communist phrases crept in here and there. But we told ourselves that this was only the form; the content was all right. It was just that workers could not phrase it better, since the apparatchiks of the Polish United Workers Party [the former ruling Communists] had never taught them how.

But two weeks later it would have been mere self-delusion to carry on with this reasoning.

First of all an arrogant trade union leader, a candidate to repeat the career of his predecessor Lech Walesa, who 'jumped over the fence' (but with much less effort), assured us the strikes had no political dimension.

Now this leader says that it is mainly about 'the system of government', meaning who and what sort of people will be in power. So it is no longer about wages, social security, and other similar 'trifles'.

## Tighten

Tomorrow he will undoubtedly explain that the workers must tighten their belts a little for the good of the Motherland and the better future of capitalism.

This is what this trade union leader has been arguing, more or less clearly, for the last three years. To remove any doubt, the supporters of this trade union president — in his presence — have been singing: "Once with sickle, once with hammer —

strike the red riff-raff [banner]."

Obviously these supporters do not see themselves as hired riff-raff, but as departmental and higher managers in local authorities. That is what happened two or three years ago to their more fortunate pals who had also held positions in the trades unions.

The leader of the extreme-nationalist and almost crypto-fascist group inside the trades unions speaks even more clearly than the chief, saying that the government needs to be driven out and a new (meaning his) interim one set up.

This supposedly democratic admirer of the US system does not mention that the government he intends to remove is a legally elected one.

On 7 May, when the press published the statement of this nationalist leader, the editor of the national social-democratic paper said: 'Something like this should not turn back the logic of democracy and the market economy.'

This is like saying 'get well soon!' to a suicide case. At the same time, it is an example of the attempts to disarm the remnants of the left by implying that the division into right and left is now out-dated.

This supposedly left editor's statement is, to put it politely, untrue. The issue is not one of the link between democracy and the market economy.

After all democracy was apparently flourishing in Chile, under Pinochet's government. On the other hand, it is also well known that in Mussolini's Italy there was planned economy.

The stability of Poland's democratic order is not assured. Does not the government's social-democratic policy, based on the transformation of the economy into a capitalist free-market, inevitably mean throwing millions more workers (including white-collar workers) onto the street?

This will mean that increasingly desperate mass strikes of those threatened with unemployment will inevitably break out. This will happen whatever the persuasion of the 'post-Communist' ministers or — we have already seen the symptoms — of

the 'post-inquisition' people.

[These are right-wing groups and parties which emerged from the Solidarnosc movement. They oppose abortion and supported the unconstitutional introduction of religion into schools. They are viciously anti-communist — trs.] If the fight against the threat of unemployment is not led by the left, then this will give an opportunity to the extreme right.

The recent victory of the right-wing coalition in Italy is a dangerous warning. The fas-

oriented, also thanks to the social democrats.

And the right has already achieved one thing — it has come out of isolation.

Not one regional secretary of the only proper trade union, nor its smartly-dressed general secretary, has spoken out against even the loudest groups on the right or their representatives in the union!

Meanwhile, the coalition government, supposedly a government of workers and peasants, and its parliamentary

Union, a small social-democratic party with roots in Solidarnosc], which strikes 'left attitudes', does not understand, or pretends not to.

The coalition government needs organised pressure from the left of the trade unions, progressive groups, etc. Maybe in this way it can be immunised against the hypocritical wooing of the 'educated' right, instead of lapping up their compliments.

At all costs the pro-capitalist fanatics among the social democrats and their supporters must be separated from the rest, whom they are psychologically pressuring and dominating.

We must criticise them unsparingly, without any polite gestures or illusions. The others are our comrades in the fight for the future of the working class, and of our whole country, not separate from the whole of 'post-bureaucratic' Europe.

To achieve this it is necessary to have the courage to think logically and say openly some things which sound old-fashioned:

■ Right-wing groups from 'Solidarnosc' have usurped the label 'reformers' and are pulling our country backwards, towards old-fashioned capitalism, making us dependent on those 'good' masters over the ocean and places nearer.

We are the authentic reformers and must take a stand against the thieving capitalist restoration, which is a continuation of the practice of the Stalinist bureaucracy, the 'owners of the People's Poland';

■ Market economy (capitalism) means a drastic increase of poverty;

■ To say that state ownership is inefficient and that the factories should therefore be sold off for next to nothing is nonsense. There were quite a few state-owned enterprises before the war and they prospered well. That is what we must aim for;

■ The pleasant-sounding slogan of 'social enfranchisement' through privatised ownership of one form or other is a

deliberate attempt to deceive the working class. Poverty will soon force the workers to get rid of their shares, and the 'enfranchised' will again turn out to be proletarians (a very unfashionable word nowadays);

■ The method of privatisation being prepared is a parody of justice. The descendants of those expropriated will have the properties given to them, while there will be no examination of how the supposedly 'honest' fortunes were made. Meanwhile the bank debts — like the taxes owed before the war — will be quietly forgotten.

■ The Social Democratic Union's supporters never voted for 'the decisive Euro-Atlantic orientation' in which the party now sees Poland's strategic interests and security. The fruits of this 'orientation' are being experienced now in Yugoslavia, where every intervention based on this 'orientation' increases the number of human deaths and makes the prospect of peace more distant.

## Praises

We must demand, that the social-democratic daily 'Trybuna' which praises pluralism so much, also gives space to the above point of view. We buy it, it exists thanks to our pennies.

The decisive breakthrough in the situation can only be achieved by a new workers' party, based on a clear understanding of developing trends.

The basis for this view is in the writings of Leon Trotsky, who already in the 1920s clearly foresaw the transformation of the Stalinist bureaucracy into a bourgeois class.

A new workers' party should be a part of a close common understanding on a world scale between similar groups in other countries, because 'unity means strength'.

The possibilities are incomparably greater, and the prospects more favourable, than those frightened by the right's offensive or the pro-capitalists' gibberish can imagine.



A market trader in Warsaw: market economy means poverty

cists are back in government. The Italian example shows that, without a clear perspective, the discontent that leads to workers' strikes and demonstrations can become a weapon in the hands of the extreme right.

'There is at present no organised mass movement on the streets, such as Mussolini or Hitler had before they took power', the learned social-democratic editor might argue. Yet this argument ignores that the workers' movement is weak, almost non-existent, and its fragments are deeply dis-

groups are doing their best to discourage their voters.

Are those people on the left in a no-win situation? On the one hand the present government, on the other the perspective of the right coming to power?

Our duty is to defend the present government, despite the mistaken and harmful steps it has taken. After all the only alternative at present is a right-wing regime which will take revenge on the whole left, a government of reactionary terror and emergency decrees. This is something Unia Pracy [Labour

## Book review

*The Individual and Society — A Marxist Approach to Human Psychology* by John Robinson.

THE keynote of this book is that a knowledge of the relationship between individuals and society is essential for an understanding of human psychology. Further, such knowledge is not possible unless it is derived from Marx's understanding of what society actually is.

The book highlights the fundamental flaws inherent in modern academic psychology. In criticising these flaws Robinson lays the basis for an alternative approach. There are two such fundamental flaws: the basic assumptions of *functionalism* and of *mechanics*. It is necessary to consider each of these, in turn.

The standpoint of functionalism sees society as an entity standing above and apart from individuals. Further, individuals are conceptualised as having to adapt to society, just as non-human animals have to adapt to their respective environments. It is this alleged adaptation to society that lays the basis for the development of the mind. (One wonders how it is that individuals can make revolutions which overthrow particular forms of society!)

# Matter in mind

One weakness of the functionalist outlook is that it lacks a clear understanding of what constitutes society. For Marx, however, the nature of society was clear. It constitutes the sum total of social relations, all of which are ultimately based on the relations of production. It is the transmission (and changing) of these social relations (employer/worker, parent/child, teacher/pupil and so on) from generation to generation that constitutes an essential aspect of human history.

## Absorb

Every new-born child has to absorb the concepts, categories of thought, and so on, of society. This is achieved through his or her social relationships with parents, teachers and others. When children become adolescents and adults, they in turn create anew the social relationships that have made them what they are psychologically. They become parents, teachers, employers, workers or play other social roles.

Since social relations create individuals and individuals create social relations, the dichotomy between individuals and society is a false one. Rather, it would be true to say that the social is the individual and the individual is the social. It is this conception that makes possible an understanding of the basis of the mind.

The basis of the mind is social relationships, together with their means and media such as categories of thought, concepts, values and so on, and with more tangible aspects of the world like money, food, clothing, houses, cars and books. An essential aim of Robinson's book is to show the superiority of this approach to that of modern psychology, which sees the basis of the mind as the individual's adaptation to a 'society' existing over and apart from them.

The second fundamental error of modern academic psychology, that of *mechanics*, is closely linked to functionalism. The mechanical approach to the mind starts from the assumption that the human body (brain) acts like

a machine. This implies that its functioning is determined by its internal structure. In terms of psychology, sensory input enters the five senses where it is 'processed' by the structure of the brain to form the mind. In contrast to this, John Robinson's approach to the mind is that it is produced, not by the brain as such, but by the social relationships into which each child has to enter.

## Fallacy

The mechanical approach of modern academic psychology is typified by its widespread belief that a study of computers is the key to an understanding of the human mind. The latter is seen as no more than the working of a sophisticated computer. An important chapter of John Robinson's book, 'Why humans are not machines', exposes this fallacy.

Another chapter gives a brief critical outline of 11 theories of personality ranging from those of Freud and Jung to Fromm and Eysenck. Another chapter, 'Some Applications', applies the

ideas in the book to such questions as the 'nature-nurture' controversy, the 'mind-body' problem, and the extent to which behaviour and thinking can be changed.

John Robinson bases much of his work on the classics of Marxism. In addition he draws inspiration from work carried out in the former Soviet Union, especially connected with teaching blind deaf-mutes. (The implications of this work were highlighted by the philosopher Felix Mikhailov in 'The Riddle of the Self', Progress Publishers 1980). This work has been closely connected with the early Soviet psychologist Lev Vygotsky, whose writings were banned by Stalin.

## Genuine

Owing to the repression of original and genuine Marxist thought by Stalinism, the full implications of Vygotsky's work have not been adequately examined. 'The Individual and Society' represents an original and significant contribution.

Mike Kulyk

■ *The Individual and Society — A Marxist Approach to Human Psychology* by John Robinson is published by Index Books, 28 Charlotte Street, London W1P 1HJ (tel: 071-636 3532). Price: £16.99.

# Hurd challenged over killings in Indonesia

BY CHARLIE POTTINS

THE Tory government keeps insisting that British equipment sold to Indonesia is not suitable for internal repression. Alvis of Coventry recently obtained a £6 million order to upgrade 150 British-made armoured vehicles. British Aerospace is supplying Hawk aircraft. Earlier in the year a Vickers sales team was in Jakarta trying to win orders for the new Mark II, claimed to have the firepower of a tank and the versatility of an armoured car.

In the past four years British economic aid to the Indonesian regime has risen almost eight-fold.

## Cheap

Besides oil and raw materials, Indonesia provides investment opportunities for big companies seeking cheap labour without union rights. The independent Indonesia Prosperous Labour Union (SBSI) was outlawed after ten days of strikes in April.

As for political stability, since taking power in an army coup and slaughtering a million people, President Suharto has been in charge for 30 years and has no plans to go.

'What we need is responsible openness,' he declared recently, demonstrating what he meant by closing three weekly papers



**GARLANDED** in Jakarta. British Foreign Secretary Douglas Hurd, one of a steady stream of government ministers going to do business with the Indonesian dictators.

which he accused of 'sowing discord' within his government. One of them, 'Tempo', had taken too much interest in a deal with Germany's Chancellor

Kohl to buy 39 mothballed warships of the former east German navy.

Steve Carr, a reporter for the German broadcasting company Deutsche Welle, had a taste of Indonesian freedom after he filed a story about Marsinah, the young woman trade unionist tortured to death by the military after a strike at the watch factory where she worked.

## Room

Leaving Indonesia, Carr was told there was no room on an Air India flight to Singapore. Offered a place on a Sempati, Indonesian airline flight, he found a security service tough waiting in his seat, who told him 'We've come to get you'. Carr ran up to the cockpit, where the captain said he couldn't do anything. The frightened journalist made a commotion, before the 'heavy' decided to get off without him.

Brian Peters wasn't so

lucky. Nineteen years ago the British-born television cameraman went to East Timor with a team from Australia's Channel Nine, on an assignment to monitor Indonesian army incursions. On 16 October 1975, Peters and the four journalists with him were killed.

Eyewitnesses say the hut they were operating from was clearly marked with the word 'AUSTRALIA', and when Indonesian troops approached the men had put up their hands and shouted 'Journalists, journalists!'

In late November 1975, Brian's sister Maureen Tolfree went out to Australia. Trying to find out what she could about her brother's death, she decided to stop over in Jakarta, the Indonesian capital, on her way home.

While waiting at the airport for permission to enter she had a phone call from an Australian or British official advising her to continue her journey, as they

'could not guarantee [her] safety'.

Back home in Bristol, Maureen tried without success to get help from the Foreign Office. All her MP, Tony Benn, was able to tell her was that her brother's remains were unidentifiable, and that all five newsmen had been buried in Indonesia.

Meanwhile, unbeknown to her, campaigners for East Timor independence had also approached the British government, but were told that relatives of Brian Peters and murdered journalist Malcolm Rennie, who also had British nationality, did not wish to pursue the matter.

For some years Maureen Tolfree did give up trying to do any more about her brother's death, because it was too upsetting for her and her father, who had three heart attacks, and died in 1990.

## Fighters

Then in March this year, Maureen heard about a protest in her home town against British Aerospace supplying Hawk fighters to Indonesia. She decided to contact the organisers, and was introduced to organisations like Tapol, the Indonesia Human Rights Campaign.

Maureen Tolfree resumed her struggle for truth and justice. On 13 July, addressing the UN Special Committee on Decolonisation, in New York, Maureen called for the people of East Timor to be given the right to vote on their future.

'I also want governments, including my own, to stop lying about East Timor. I want to know why my brother and his colleagues are buried in Jakarta. I want their bodies to be re-buried in East Timor or Australia, as their surviving relatives want.'

'I want a properly conducted investigation into the deaths of the five journalists. But most of all, I want everything possible to be done for the people of East Timor. I'm 100 per cent sure that that is what Brian would have wanted if he had not been murdered.'

Since then, after writing to MPs seeking help to have an investigation into her brother's death, Maureen and her former



**MURDERED:** British-born cameraman Brian Peters while with Australian TV crew covering Indonesian invasion of East Timor. Foreign Office blames 'crossfire'.

MP, Tony Benn, have been from the Foreign Office. A letter from a Whitehall official trying to discourage her from going any further, claims: 'house in which your brother and other members of the crew who sheltering was caught in the crossfire between the forces of the three internal warring parties of East Timor (UDT, APO and Fretilin) and set on fire'.

'Crossfire', 'warring party' — from Ireland to Bosnia — East Timor, it seems the language of Whitehall hypocrisy and cover-ups doesn't vary!

In response, Lord Avebury has written to challenge Foreign Secretary Douglas Hurd. 'Why are you so anxious to deny the role of Indonesian forces in the Balibo murders, acknowledged by every single authority...'

'The reason why you would dissuade anybody from reopening the issue today is that Britain sells Indonesia arms worth several hundred million pounds and that Indonesia is one of our best trading partners.'

Accusing the government of a 'despicable' cover-up for murder, Avebury acknowledges: 'There may be very little hope of persuading you or your government as a whole to change your minds on this issue but it should be left in no doubt of fact that many people are extremely unhappy about what they consider to be a dishonourable episode in our history.'

But with \$2 billion of British investment in Indonesia, Tories aren't worried about 'honour', nor about the death of trades unionists, Timorese people, and journalists prepared to tell the truth.

(Information taken from TAPOL Bulletin, available from TAPOL, 111 Northwood Road, Thornton Heath, Surrey CR8 8HW, UK.)

■ The Campaign Against Arms Trade launches a series of protest actions focusing on sales of Indonesia and other oppressive regimes this week, starting with picket at Farnborough air station on Monday, and including a demonstration outside Campsall refugee detention centre. Contact Sue Brown 071-281 0297.

## Workers Press comment Africa: We have a responsibility

The working class in Nigeria and in South Africa is starting to come forward, with a growing consciousness of their own strength.

Courageous trade unionists in Brazil have recently been killed for fighting for the working class. Miners all over Eastern Europe and the former USSR are fighting for their independent unions. They are faced with the privatisation of the mines and massive job losses. Has the apparatus of the British trade union movement been harnessed to explain these struggles to workers here? What leader of a major union has spoken out in support of Nigerian oil workers? Many on the 'left' in Britain are too scared of 'rocking the boat' for Mandela's government to mention the great struggles unfolding in South Africa.

We must build a real forum where active workers from different parts of the world can share experiences and organise together.

Bob Archer

# Justice for Rwanda massacre victims

BY FRANK GIRLING

THERE have been close on 1,000,000 deaths during the past four months in Rwanda. We must come to grips with this disaster and explain its origins and those responsible. Otherwise there will be more massacres.

## Privileged

This is the view expressed with cogency and passion by Alex de Wald, who is co-ordinator of African Rights, a recently established human rights organisation.

He writes: 'Elements of the story can be sought in desperate land pressures in Rwanda, in rural poverty intensified by the collapse of the international cotton price and in the determination of a privileged coterie to

retain their commanding positions in the government and the army in the face of political and economic "re-adjustment" of the state.

'These have been fuel for the fire. But what ignited the genocide is an extremist racial ideology that would be laughable were it not so demoniacally powerful.'

De Wald is right in what he

writes so far, but he does not by any means go far enough. The conflicts taking place in Rwanda and Burundi can only be understood in a much wider context.

This is not simply a situation concerning the populations in these two small countries of central Africa. There are involved here struggles for power which go beyond these two coun-

tries. These are a part of a struggle for the great lakes. Zaire and Uganda are involved.

Mitterrand, Mobutu and many others are a part of the plot. So this is only the beginning of the search for justice for Rwandese and many other plighted people. It will involve investigation of other atrocities. And an unmasking of many of 'respectable' perpetrators.

could be repeated. 'We don't have to accept governments that kill people in the midst.

'The Zairean government protecting these killers and they are organising them to do the same thing again.

'I haven't heard the world the UN, or even Amnesty International publicly condemn Zaire.'

## French forces accused of complicity in murder

FRENCH forces in Rwanda shielded killers who had massacred civilians, Ethiopia's Colonel Tadele Slassie alleged last week. The colonel, in charge of Ethiopian United Nations troops in south-west Rwanda, said his French counterpart had failed to hand over prisoners, including a Rwandan commander wanted for the massacre of 3,000 people.

Colonel Slassie, a former intelligence officer with guerrillas who overthrew Ethiopia's military dictatorship, accused the French forces of escorting Rwandan government troops into Zaire, and intimidating Rwandan refugees against returning.

The colonel warned that failure to punish the criminals meant the slaughter in Rwanda

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