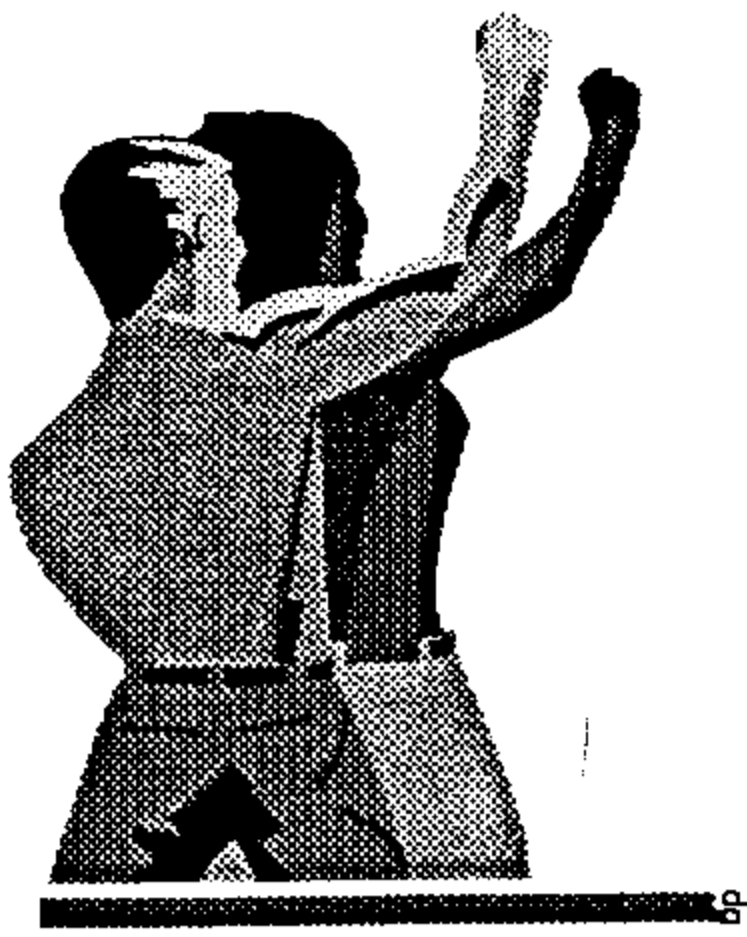


# *socialist* **VOICE**



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# COMMUNITIES



# JOINING THE FIGHT

Uniting the Struggles

**ORVILLE BLACKWOOD** campaign  
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**UNITE THE STRUGGLE**

**DEFEND**

**SERVICES**

**AND JOBS**

**CHINA / SWEDEN / LAOS**



Monthly Paper  
of the  
International  
Socialist  
League



British Section  
of the  
International  
Workers'  
League  
[4th International]

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### This Issue By

Ed Barbor, David Dunnico,

Peter Money,

Martin Ralph and Peter Windeler

*signed articles do not*

*necessarily reflect*

*the views of the ISL*

### Contributions

We welcome letters, articles,  
and comments from readers.

## THE VOICE SAYS

The calls from the Tories, which are also echoed by EEC President Jacques Delors, for the ending of the welfare state, cutting unemployment benefit and the lowering of wages, are getting louder all the time.

The results of local elections, by-elections or public opinion seem to have no impact on the pace of privatisation's, cuts and closures.

But as the miners dispute showed, many hundreds of thousands want to enter the struggle. This desire is expressed in the sentiments of people from many different walks of life who say: "Is it not time we took a united stand, is it not time we took practical steps to stop closures?"

In February the International Socialist League helped organise a conference called "Unite The Struggles in the Communities and the Public Sector". It attracted delegates from the trade union movement, including the north sea oil workers union and London bus workers, from the anti-poll tax movement, the black community organising against state attacks on their youth and many others. Since then there have been at least five conferences on the theme of uniting in struggle, and more are being organised.

Not one of the conferences was called by the trade union or labour leadership. In fact many openly opposed these conferences. The only union to support such moves at a national level has been the building workers union, Union of Construction and Allied Technical Trades, and the London bus workers' section of the Transport and General Workers Union.

It is a sobering thought that after over a century of trade unionism we are forced to campaign to unite our struggles in this way. This new movement comes from the ranks of the unions and the communities and is in response to thirteen years of Tory attacks and the utter failure of the present leadership to defend their organisations and the working class.

The Trades Union Council and Labour Party leadership have told us to "obey the law", they have worked to isolate the miners, printers, dockers, National Health Service and council workers, many others in small factories and workshops, and the unemployed. Labour councillors have implemented cuts in public and social services.

What is the result of the actions of these "leaders"? Our mines, hospitals and public services are being privatised; rank-and-file leaders - shop stewards, health and safety representatives - have been discriminated against and sacked; unemployment has risen to over four million and tens of thousands are homeless. Many young people have had no job since leaving school - skills and workshop practices are being destroyed; racism, police violence, drugs abuse and alcoholism are increasing.

Since the Labour Party lost the last election the widespread support for organised struggle is unmistakable. That feeling is not only common in the working class but also amongst large sections of the middle class.

The crisis of society is so deep that any conflict can blow into a major problem for the government. British capitalism is intensifying its attacks on the working class. With each month that passes the government and many in the councils seek to divide our communities; the unemployed from the employed and white against black.

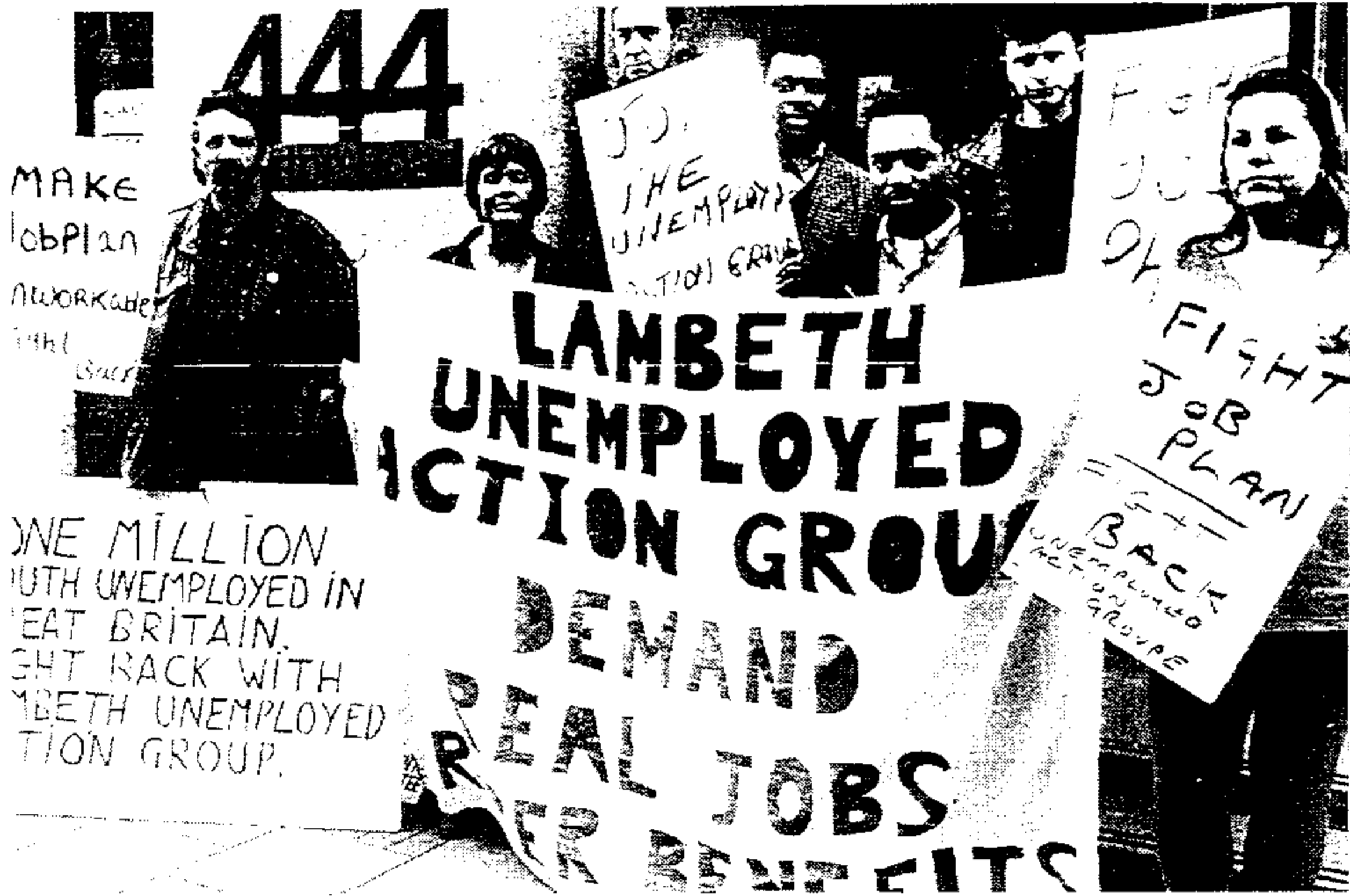
During the first year of this government a quarter of a million jobs were lost. With unemployment in some areas now reaching more than 30 per cent any form of attack on living standards can force people from a position of just surviving to worse.

While the crisis in Britain shows itself in the rapid increase in the numbers of the poor, the economic, political and social crisis is also exploding throughout Europe. Not a single European country will remain unchanged in this new phase of capitalist crisis. The great mobilisations and general strikes of the last few years in Western Europe mean that the masses are being driven onto the same road as they struggle for control over their lives and communities. There are no problems facing workers in one country in Europe which are not at the same time being experienced by workers in another European country.

The task of unity in struggle is more possible now than at any time since the immediate post war struggles. That is why we have great confidence in the movements now developing. Even though some appear no bigger than a cloud the size of a man's hand. They are the developing storm which is going to break over the Tories heads and all those who support them.

## ISL COMMENT

# JOB PLAN NOT JOB-PLAN



Successes, as in Lambeth, will help build the unity of the working class

Unemployed people in Lambeth have been staging weekly protests against the government's new scheme - Jobplan Workshop. Members of the Lambeth Unemployed Action Group (LUAG) have made their presence felt by waving placards, chanting and handing out leaflets outside the Brixton Small Business Centre in Ferndale Road where the sessions are held.

Jobplan is a compulsory scheme for people who have been out of work for more than twelve months. Although the government claims the scheme will prepare claimants for the job market, participants said that in reality it offers no real chance of improving their job prospects. They believe the real objective of the scheme is to prepare the

ground for the introduction of workfare.

Ray Baker one of the unemployed people on the workshop who organised the protest said:

*"There were sixteen of us in a stuffy room with no drinking water or kitchen facilities. The whole exercise seemed designed to make us feel that it was our fault that we were unemployed. I have never been so humiliated and patronised in all my life. The fact that all of us on the workshop acted together shows we all felt the same. With 3 million people on the dole I don't see how they can blame us. I want a real job with decent pay, but where are they all?"*

Everyone refused to take an active part in the proceedings, after making a series of requests to improve their conditions and the way the workshop was

run. All the participants were sent home on the second morning of the five day course. They were told that their benefits would not be affected.

This shows that resistance organised by the unemployed can defeat Tory schemes. The Unemployed Action Group plan to picket the scheme every week to keep up the pressure and encourage other unemployed participants to take similar action. They are also in touch with groups around the country trying to organise a wider fight back demanding:

- Real Jobs
- Decent benefits
- Real training and apprenticeships at proper rates of pay.

## CRISES IN LAMBETH

- HOSPITALS are being privatised and closed down.
- COUNCIL SERVICES have been privatised and run into the ground.
- The TUBE costs a fortune, and gets dirtier, shabbier, more dangerous and more inefficient every day.
- Unemployment has soared to 28.8 per cent, and more and more people are finding themselves homeless.
- It is not safe to walk the streets - RACISM, POLICE VIOLENCE, CRIME,

The following leaflet was distributed in Lambeth. A banner reading "One Million Unemployed Youth" attracted attention and five hundred leaflets were handed out in one hour.

DRUGS ABUSE ARE ALL INCREASING.

- Workers in the FIRE SERVICE are underpaid and overworked.

We are people who live and work in Lambeth. We intend to invite all the Lambeth Labour councillors who make the decisions about Lambeth's council services, the members of the Area Health Authority (who take the decisions about Lambeth's health services), and the Police authority (which makes decisions

about Lambeth's policing) to a meeting in Lambeth Town Hall on Saturday 10 July from 2pm to 4pm to ask them how, as our elected representatives, they plan to improve our services and our quality of life.

Signed: Lambeth NALGO, Lambeth Unemployed Action Group, Crises in Lambeth Campaign, Lambeth Against the Poll Tax, CLARA BUCKLEY (from the Orville Blackwood Community Campaign)

# DEATH SENTENCE

Orville Blackwood was killed in the Broadmoor Special Hospital on 28th August 1991. He was the third black man in eight years to be killed at Broadmoor in similar circumstances. The Orville Blackwood Community Campaign wants justice.

## Why was Orville in Prison

In January 1986, Orville Blackwood went to a betting shop in Walthamstow with a toy pistol. He told staff his name and asked for his bus fare home. Out of a till full of money he took just £24. He was sentenced to four years imprisonment.

While Orville was in prison, it was recognised that he had suffered from depression before and that this had got worse. He was then transferred to the Dennis Hill Unit of the Bethlehem Royal Hospital. In October 1987, in the hospital, Orville was refused a drink by a nurse and an incident followed. It was alleged that he hit a nurse and broke a door. Fourteen policemen with riot shields and helmets came to the hospital, handcuffed him and took him to Broadmoor. By April 1990, Orville had completed his prison sentence but continued to be kept in Broadmoor under the 1983 Mental Health Act. He expected to be discharged by a Tribunal on 10th September 1991, as he had had two prior favourable Tribunal hearings.

## What Was Done to Orville

In the official account of Broadmoor Hospital, on 28th August 1991, Orville had peacefully declined to attend occupational therapy; he was entitled under the hospital's own rules to go to his room instead. Five hours later he was forcefully held down and given two fatal injections against his will. He died of a heart attack within minutes.

The injections that killed Orville contained three times the maximum recommended dosage of both drugs. The psychiatrists who allowed the injections to be given would, or should have known that these drugs (Modecate and Sparine) given together might prove fatal. This was the case with Orville, as it had been with two other black patients who had died in similar circumstances in Broadmoor.



Orville Blackwood

## Racism in the Mental Health System

Despite the evidence of malpractice and gross negligence, the Coroner in charge of the inquest withheld several issues from the jury, including the possibility of a 'lack of care verdict' and the evidence of the two previous deaths. The jury delivered a verdict of 'accidental death'. On 16th November 1992, however, a High Court ruling ordered a new inquest on Orville's death, after the Coroner leading the original inquest admitted that "justice was not seen to be done".

Earlier in 1992, a report by Sir Louis Blom-Cooper QC on his inquiry into the Ashworth Hospital had shaken the country by revealing the grossly oppressive and racist practices in use at Ashworth and the membership of the British National Party by nurses there. However, it did not examine how widespread these problems are.

There are many other signs of rampant racism in the mental health system. The over-representation of black people in mental hospitals, the segregation in locked wards, the widespread use of massive dosages of dangerous drugs, all point at the misuse of a system and raise the question: "Could this happen to you too?"

## The Orville Blackwood Community Campaign

The Orville Blackwood Community Campaign has been set up to support Orville's family in their struggle for justice and to stop the careless use of psychiatric drugs and the reckless brutality that killed Orville from recurring. On the anniversary of Orville's death, the Campaign held a meeting and laid a wreath at Broadmoor. This was followed by a very successful conference held on 19th September 1992, where members of the community decided to step up the fight against the injustice and systematic oppression ingrained in the mental health system. The campaign aims at a reform of the system through a strong current of public opinion. What is needed to achieve this is a grassroots campaign supported by many sympathetic and committed individuals and organisations.



Clara Buckley, Orville's mother

# THE ORVILLE BLACKWOOD COMMUNITY CAMPAIGN: AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

The Orville Blackwood Community Campaign has been set up to support Orville's family in their struggle for justice and to stop the careless use of psychiatric drugs and the reckless brutality that killed Orville from recurring. On the anniversary of Orville's death, the Campaign held a meeting and laid a wreath at Broadmoor. This was followed by a very successful conference held on 19th September 1992, where members of the community decided to step up the fight against the injustice and systematic oppression ingrained in the mental health system. The campaign aims at a reform of the system through a strong current of public opinion. What is needed to achieve this is a grassroots campaign supported by many sympathetic and committed individuals and organisations.

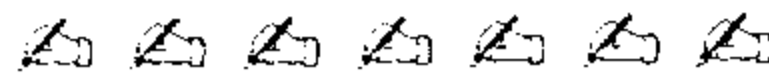
The aims and objectives of the campaign are as follows:

- 1 Seek a public inquiry into Orville's death and similar cases.
- 2 Organise financial and moral support for Orville's family.
- 3 Provide practical support to patients/families, including a network to visit patients in hospitals.
- 4 Campaign against the forced drugging of patients.
- 5 Establish a charter of patients' rights.
- 6 Establish a mental health trust in memory of Orville
- 7 Encourage families and survivors to establish support groups.
- 8 Campaign for change in the racist/sexist practices in psychiatric hospitals.
- 9 Mobilise all sections of the community to join the campaign and help in achieving the above aims.

The campaign is open to all individuals and organisations which share its aims. Meetings are held at Lambeth Town Hall, 7.00 PM on the first Monday of every month.

The address of the campaign is: c/o New Testament Assembly, 7 Beechcroft Road, London SW17

★ **St Margaret's Hospital in Essex has started advertising a new service in the local paper. Anyone can turn up at the hospital and get their dirty washing done from only £2 a bag. Proving once again that there is no crisis in the NHS.**



## INTERNATIONAL SUPPORT

While he was in prison for not paying his Poll Tax, Norman Laws received this letter from Shop Stewards working for the Norwegian offshore builder, Aker Stord.

Aker Stord is the largest offshore yard in Norway it has about 1700 employees. Shop stewards from different Stord and other Aker companies went for a trip to England and Scotland to study conditions for British oil industry workers, and to build future relationships. They wrote:

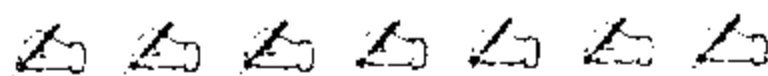
*"During our stay in Newcastle, during a visit to trade union colleagues in England and Scotland, we were made aware that you are in prison because of your fight against the Poll Tax. We are impressed that a 71 year old pensioner is willing to fight for his and others rights like you are, and we hope that your fight will inspire others.*

*We send you our greetings, and wish you good luck in your fight against the Tax!"*



A letter which we received from a women in Zagreb included the following information:

An independent trade union in Zagreb (Croatia) organised a strike in March of railway workers, teachers and retail workers because the wages of their members were only sufficient to buy bread and milk.



★ **The Labour Party has less than 90,000 fully paid up members, according to a secret internal report leaked last month to 'The Observer' newspaper. This compares to a peak of 1 million in 1952 and around 300,000 when Kinnock began his drive to make it a "million member strong mass party". Labour's accounts reveal that they spent over £1 1/3 million on membership processing, plus nearly another million on computers. Now you know what John Smith means when he talks about "value for money" and "prudent financial management". Mind you, Kinnock promised his 'reforms' would bring the party to power in 1987 and 1992.**

★ **Staff at magazine publishers IPC, recently voted in a secret ballot 97% in favour of trade unions having the right to negotiate on pay and conditions. IPC refused to recognise the result of the ballot, saying that votes were not the way to decide things.**

IPC are one of the publishers who opposed the government's plans to introduce VAT on books, newspapers and magazines, saying it would be a 'tax on democracy'.

Even more hypocritically, when a firm applied for planning permission to build a hellpad next door, IPC tried to prove their staffs opposition by... holding a ballot.

# CONFERENCE SAYS BUILD

Martin Ralph reports on the national conference to defend local services organised by the Citizen's Associations of Birmingham and Coventry, Hereford and Worcester Community Alliance and Harlow Community Alliance which was held in Birmingham on 22nd May.

The Citizens Association national conference in defence of local services on 22nd May in Birmingham began with a speaker from Harlow - Elaine Shears who spoke on the terrible problems that the people of Harlow were suffering because of the closure or threatened closure of so many services. She said that the entertainment, creche and unemployed facilities were all going.

She outlined the problem for mothers who needed creche facilities but without the council creche would have to pay £1.80 per hour per child. Having to pay that amount of money would force some mothers to give up work.

She also dealt with the attacks on the pensioners of Harlow, who were represented in force at the meeting, and said that bus passes and centres for pensioners were threatened.

The answer of the Secretary of State to all this was to accuse Harlow of wasting money but it was the government who had forced this level of cuts by capping Harlow.

Elaine spoke movingly about the decimation of hospitals. She said that there was a shortage of staff but newly qualified nurses could not get a job and that this was not a problem just for the nurses, it was a problem for all health workers.

She said that they were preparing to privatise the last of the services completely.

Phillis Starkey from the Local Government Information Unit gave a global picture of what the government and councils were doing to services. She said that three councils had been capped by the government. In all £510 million had been taken out of education and social services last year. She said that the cuts were preceded by years of cuts and next year they would make a further cut of 2% in all services and that this would mean the closure of old people's homes, libraries and a great increase in suffering.

Another speaker from Harlow who was also the National Secretary of Pensioners Actions, said that pensioners were angry and called amongst other things for a campaign against VAT on domestic fuel.

He received loud cheers when he demanded the government be brought down.

A speaker from the National Association of Sub-Post Masters called on every one to use the 19,000 sub-post offices - "use them or lose them", she said.

She said that the government had not asked people if they wanted to keep receiving state benefits in cash, they

were going to be forced to accept ACT - automated credit transfer. She said that this would mean many sub-post offices closing and she reminded the conference that in many villages the postal service was at the centre of the village's daily life, it was a place, not only to buy a stamp, but to meet people. At present pensioners who could not pick up their pensions could ask the home help or someone else to do that. But with ACT they would have to give such a person their bank card and pin number - would pensioners want that, she asked. For the bank it meant more business, they would charge the government for the scheme.

## UNITE THE STRUGGLE DEFEND SERVICES AND JOBS

S a t u r d a y  
1 0 t h J u l y  
H A R L O W  
E S S E X

Supported by  
Harlow Community Alliance  
Birmingham and Coventry Citizen's Association  
Hereford and Worcester Community Alliance  
Community and Union Action Campaign

# UNITY IN STRUGGLE

and they would charge the pensioner.

Bill Anderson, Secretary of Birmingham National Union of Teachers, spoke of the recent campaign against testing. He said that the resistance to it was similar to the anti-poll tax in that it involved wide sections of the communities.

He went on to explain that the government's local management of schools really wanted to create 28,000 small businesses (the schools) which would be financed by the numbers of clients (children) which passed through the doors - irrespective of conditions inside. He said that already there are classes of 35 in primary schools being taught by teachers where numbers should not exceed 25.

He said that the concept of developing the child as a whole was now being reversed. Children are being educated to expect unemployment and low paid jobs and involved in all these struggles was the struggle for ideas.

Linda Thomlinson speaking on behalf of Lancashire Women Against Pit Closures said that the women's pit camps had become a focal point for communities. She talked about the recent occupation of Trentham Pit. The management had surrounded the three women who had chained themselves to the pit head with guards and barbed wire and had refused them water and food but the women outside had forced their way in with provisions. She said that they took courage from the necessity of the action and that the act of the women who fought had shown others not to be frightened and their success gave many others courage.

A speaker on behalf the National Union Of Students, Jill Sutton, said that on average students now were £1,600 in debt and were turning to begging and prostitution in order to finance their courses.

Dr. Nazeem was the last main speaker. He asked what sort of society was going to take shape when students had to turn to prostitution in order to live. Society must provide the means of livelihood and the circumstances which allows human beings to develop. Against this we now have a 65% rise in mental illness amongst the youth. Referring to the aims of the Citizens Association he said that we must be ready to "chal-

lenge the existing social, political and economic value systems in our society and to offer alternative solutions." One of the greatest problems was the role that money played in society over which we had no control.

In the following discussion an actor from Cardiff raised the need of the struggle for culture, a speaker from the Chocolate Run spoke of the actions in helping the homeless people in London. Lecturers, representatives from the miners support groups and many others spoke about the problems they and the sectors they represented faced.

Mick O'Farrell, Martin and Celia Ralph spoke about the need for uniting our struggles. They spoke on behalf of the Community and Union Action Campaign which had been set up at the conference in February. The last committee meeting of CUAC had agreed to support the conference resolution from Harlow and to work together with the Citizens Association on the national march on 10th July.

They stressed the need to discuss how we could develop the struggles together. One way was in developing the paper which had been produced from the conference in February which sought to be a paper of struggle reflecting the developing movement. They also made it clear that the paper, Unity, would be open to all fighters to contribute to.

Celia Ralph added about the struggle against the Labour council in Manchester over so-called community care which the councils could only impose on the severely disabled by removing their rights to protest.

## ■■■■■■■■■■ CONFERENCE RESOLUTION ■■■■■■■■■■

The Citizen's Association pledges itself to wage a national campaign to oppose all cuts in local services.

We support the stand being taken by communities such as Harlow and Coventry in defence of services threatened with cuts or closures. No school, hospital or old people's home must be allowed to close! No more cuts shall be made in schools, community or nursery education, the youth services, provision for the elderly and the very young, the health service, or in funding to the arts! No more council workers or public sector workers jobs must be lost!

We call on all sections of the community including trade unionists, the youth and the elderly, housewives, the homeless, residents associations and other community groups to unit in this campaign and to be ready to take action, including industrial action, to ensure that the present level of services is maintained in their communities. Where necessary the community should be ready to run the services and raise funds to keep them running, while campaigning to get the cuts made by local or central government reversed.

To this end we resolve to organise a national demonstration in July to demand the restoration of funding to services that have been cut and the reinstatement of jobs lost.

# WELSH COMMUNITY RESISTANCE CONFERENCE

All over England, Scotland & Wales new forms of struggle are arising as a response to the paralysis of the old political & union leaders.

In Lambeth Civil and Public Service Association (CPSA) members fighting the replacement of union members jobs in benefit offices with jobplan trainees are building a united campaign with the local unemployed action group which opposes the exploitation of the unemployed. In East London parents worried about the education of their children stand shoulder to shoulder in the struggle against the Standard Assessment Tests with teachers protesting at excessive workloads.

This movement has produced in England the Community and Union Action Campaign (CUAC) and the Citizens Association and in Wales it has had an affect too.

In February of this year the first Welsh Community Resistance conference was held and its follow up will be on June 12th in Aberystwyth.

The conference will include representatives of struggles against water privatisation, miners, rail workers and fire-fighters amongst others. We must support this and all other movements for a fighting, independent and united leadership

Contact: PO Box 661 Wreccsam, LL11 1QU. Tel: 0978 843401

**Socialist Voice interviewed James Lee who participated in the heroic students struggle in Tiananmen Square 1989**

# Workers Took the Brunt

THE STUDENT movement erupted against corruption and bureaucracy. The students did not want the bureaucracy, they wanted western-style democracy but they did not want capitalism.

There had been a growth in the living standards in the previous years. In some areas wages had increased four fold. But beneath that success there was a sustained economic crisis. The way individual businessmen got and are getting rich is very dirty. It is done through connections and corruption. A small official can make a lot of money but workers were deprived of becoming rich quickly and students were the poorest.

Foreign investment brought wealth but it also means that the economy is very reliant on foreign investment and if it withdraws there would be collapse.

In my college as in all the colleges and the factories there was an official state trade union. As our protest started we resigned from that and established our own autonomous trade union.

Our union was very loose and spontaneous we had discussions every day on how we were going to change things quickly. The discussions were very radical and we wanted to change things quickly. We wanted to know why China was behind the West. We thought we needed western style democracy, a multi-party system, we wanted a general election and an end to the one party dictatorship.

In our own college we wanted our own organisation and direct elections we thought the teachers should have that as well. The general mood was that we did not want capitalism. There was also a real feeling that the students wanted to be of benefit to the whole country.

All the colleges and universities in Beijing were going through the same process.

After we occupied Tiananmen Square we established an autonomous co-ordination of all colleges. The centre of it was the Monument of heroes where we met every day and representatives were elected from each college.

If we had anything to co-ordinate we announced it through the square, if we had disagreements the monument was the final place of decision. And we made a lot of decisions. We wanted to get rid of corruption, give people more equality, more jobs and open the colleges. More and more slogans developed and we began to demand a fundamental change of the system, the system should be run by the people in a democratic way without a single party state.

*"Workers said we can run our own factories, we do not need bureaucrats or state unions to do it"*

We demanded the government talk to us and that if they did not we would go on hunger strike. Our discussions got nowhere.

We made a special area for hunger strikes and the Central TV showed enormous sympathy for the hunger strike.

At the start the students were isolated but they did win support from the masses. And later we did win massive support from workers.

Workers came to us individually and then later their unions came. Workers became really inspired by what we were doing. They began to bring financial aid, food, soft drinks and the tents were supplied by workers.

Central Beijing is mainly manufacturing and textile industries but all supported us from this area in the end.

Even the police later supported us. They marched in the square with their uniforms, they told us they were not prepared to support the state.

Workers finally founded the Worker Autonomous Federation and it established a place by the Mausoleum in the Square and we had very close connections with them. We co-ordinated our activities with them and we asked if they wanted help etc. I met some leaders of the workers federation and they were very determined and devoted. One I remember was later arrested and was released only last year.

Workers demanded that they should have their own organisation and unions. The official trade union has very strong control in the factories and has control over every aspect of the life of workers and that is why normally they do not speak out. The trade union leaders at every level were party members.

So the new trade unions demanded that the official union cease to exist. At the beginning their presence was very small in the Square but later it grew and each factory sent representatives. They were very brave to establish themselves inside the Square.

They built support amongst the factories by sending representatives to all the factories and they called workers to organise a general strike. Every day there were demonstrations. Central Beijing responded to the strike. Some of course just voluntarily stayed at home because it was impossible to get to work. My family just stayed at home.

Workers were also discussing what their tasks were and they said we should support the students but we also begin by establishing our own organisation and we should participate directly in the running of the country. They said we can run our own factories we do not need bureaucrats or state unions to do that.

While we started the action workers played a major role in mobilising the masses and they played a major role in opposing the army.

They issued many statements calling on workers to stop the army, to protect the students and resist the troops marching into Beijing. The students could not have stopped the army. It was the workers who persuaded the troops not to move and they told the troops "you have been sent to kill students."

Later the government published the figures of numbers killed and they said it was 26 students and 360 workers. The actual number of deaths no-one knows. But it was hundreds and it could be thousands.

Until the government is overthrown there will be real figure of the deaths. Many students were only 20 years old, but the workers took the brunt of the killings more of them died than the students.



Andrew Nette reports from Vientiane, Laos in an article published in 'Communist Intervention' the paper of our Australian section

**L A O S**

# Laos Today

Laos is bound up with China and more specifically with the development of the working class and peasantry in the entire region. As with China, and perhaps more rapidly in Laos, workers and peasants are experiencing at first hand not only bureaucratic workers leaders (stalinists) but also the rule of capitalism.



**W**alking around Vientiane one has a strong feeling that the world is now a very different place to that when the Vietnam war was at its height. The hundreds of Soviet advisers who were once stationed in Laos are now long gone.

Their influence is now restricted to piles of yellowing propaganda that lies unsold in the government book store, and the Soviet - now Russian - Cultural Centre's Monday night film showings. Here you pay \$2 for Hollywood versions of Soviet history like "Dr Zhivago" or "Nicholas and Alexandra". On the street corners, decaying picture boards continue to celebrate the 1975 revolution. And although most Lao recognise the gains that have been made earlier under the LPRP (Lao People's Revolutionary Party) in health and education, they are equally sceptical about the future.

Prostitution is again growing to service the increase in foreign transit through the cities. There are few jobs for the young, and little entertainment except for images from Thai TV, which for the most part they will never be able to emulate, creating a corrosive resentment at the government. There is also an increasing gap between the rich and the poor, as thousands of Lao who fled before the revolution return with money they made overseas, and ideals of free enterprise in their heads.

*"There is also an increasing gap between the rich and the poor, as thousands of Lao who fled before the revolution return with money they made overseas, and ideals of free enterprise in their heads."*

Thailand has been keen to develop Laos as a gateway to trade and investment with Vietnam and China. Thai investment in Laos in the first quarter of 1992 alone totalled US\$128 million, or 28% of all foreign investment in the

country. This new position has placed Vietnamese-Laos relations under a great deal of strain. In mid-August last year, Vietnamese Communist Party chief Do Moui made a formal visit to Vientiane, which although described in the Vietnamese press as a "routine visit to a fraternal ally", was in fact part of a wider effort by Hanoi to alter Laos's drift towards China and Thailand.

Shifts in Laos's position reflects a two-line struggle that has been going on within the LPRP for many years between those opposed to what they call "the gradual re-introduction of petty capitalism" into Laos, and those wanting to open up the country to greater foreign investment.

The increasing levels of foreign capital flowing into the country would seem to suggest that the reformers are winning. Following on from the introduction, in the mid eighties, of the New Economic Mechanism, the Lao government announced widespread cut-backs in funding to the public sector and measures aimed at increasing the role of the

Continues on following pages

# LAOS

private sector and privatising state enterprises.

On the strength of this, in May, last year, the IMF approved a US\$8 million structural adjustment loan, conditional upon further moves towards a free-market economy.

Despite recent changes in Laos things are still a long way from becoming like Vientiane of the sixties and early seventies, when thousands of military personnel partied the night away in famous brothels like Madam Lu Lu's and The Purple Porpoise, in between fighting a war that never officially existed.

Cambodia was "the side show", fought by CIA-trained and financed Hmong guerillas and Thai mercenaries, and supported by US air power flying out covert bases in Vientiane and on the Plain of Jars in Central Laos. Indeed, American officials were so successful in keeping their activities secret, that until 1969 the war in Laos was referred to simply as "the other theatre".

That year the Nixon administration ordered the first B52 bombing mission over Laos in an effort to close the Ho Chi Minh Trail, that snaked down the lower east side of the country between North and South Vietnam.

From then, the bombing grew to the point where, in the seventies US planes were flying over Laos one-and-a-half times the number of bombing missions allocated to the entire Vietnam theatre.

## Backward

Laos was the most backward of all the "Indochina" states - Laos, Vietnam and Cambodia - at the outbreak of the second Indochina war in the mid-sixties. With a population of diverse ethnic groups scattered across the rugged mountains that cover most of the country, the Royal Family in Luan Prabang had exercised little real control. Effective power lay instead in the hands of a number of regionally based aristocratic families. This produced a feudal fragmentation of power that gave rise to the most archaic of the region's three nationalist movements.

Under French rule, which began in the 19th Century, only a handful of Lao, mostly the aristocracy, received any education. Thus a layer revolutionaries who came from the middle-class and had played such an important role in kick-starting the Cambodian and Vietnamese revolutions was almost non-existent.

The first stirrings of nationalist sentiment occurred during World War Two, when the Japanese invaded Laos, overthrowing the French and installing a puppet Lao government. This, however, was incapable of putting up anything but scattered resistance to the return of the French in 1945. The French reimposed their rule, splitting the nationalist Lao forces into two camps. The first formed the French-controlled RLG, while the second, smaller, more militant group, fled into the countryside where they developed links with the Viet minh. In 1950, this latter group established the Pathet Lao (Nation of Laos) and embarked on a policy of armed

struggle, formalising their relationship with the Viet minh.

The Geneva Conference that presided over the division of North and South Vietnam provided a similar arrangement for Laos, with a plan to integrate the Pathet Lao into the RLG and form a coalition government.

This broke down under the growth of American involvement in South Vietnam and the RLG's slow drift into the American camp. In the early sixties the RLG opened Laos to US military bases and began to receive American economic and military aid.

By the time that the first American combat troops hit the beaches of Da Nang in 1965, relations between the RLG and the Pathet Lao had degenerated into complete warfare.

The key factor in the Pathet Lao's victory was its ability to forge an alliance across the wide spectrum of ethnic groups in Laos, compared to the narrow base of the RLG, which, with the exception of sections of the Hmong, never built a support base beyond the minority low land ethnic

Lao. As with the regime in Saigon and Phnom Penh, the RLG was completely dependent on the external support of the US. As such, the Pathet Lao's eventual success resulted less from military victory on the battle field, as it did on the ability of the North Vietnamese to negotiate an American withdrawal from Indochina.

The Pathet Lao did not take power as much as it simply filled a vacuum created by the collapse of the royalist government after the Americans ceased their support.

## Realities

This situation demonstrated the realities that have since guided the Lao government's actions in the region. On the one hand, its strategic position - Laos shares borders with China, Vietnam, Burma, Thailand and Cambodia - has not allowed it to drift into neutralism.

The exaggerated sense of geopolitical importance was matched by its political, military and economic weakness, which meant that a solution to its problems was impossible outside the framework of the wider anti-capitalist struggle in Indochina.

The LPRP, under which the Pathet Lao took power in 1975, had since never numbered more than approximately 60,000 members, mainly from the country's huge rural areas. Its ideology has never progressed beyond a type of basic peasant socialism, typical of most of the national liberation movements in the sixties and seventies.

The country was closed off by the LPRP's own "Great Leap Forward" towards rapid socialist transformation. Strict controls were introduced over private commerce and a programme of massive forced co-operisation of agriculture was introduced throughout the country.

Early in 1976 a campaign of "cultural and ideological rectification" attempted to stamp out all vestiges of Western influence. Tens of thousands of people were arrested and sent to re-education camps, often on the basis of anony-

*"The Pathet Lao did not take power as much as it simply filled a vacuum created by the collapse of the royalist government after the Americans ceased their support."*

# LAOS

mous denunciations.

The problems inherent in this situation were made even worse by the enormous damage inflicted on Laos by the war. This created a huge disparity in favour of the cities over the countryside, as hundreds of thousands of people had fled to the urban areas to escape the bombing and find food.

Not only did this have a debilitating effect on agricultural production after the war, but commerce in the cities - dependent on raw materials from the US and Thailand collapsed when these dried up in 1975, leaving behind massive unemployment.

Foreign military personnel also left a huge legacy of prostitution and drug addiction. In Vientiane alone there were an estimated 15,000 orphans after the war.

Perhaps most crippling, 300,000 people, or 10% of the population had fled the country in the closing stages of the conflict. Included were 90% of the nation's doctors, teachers, engineers and senior civil servants, and over 115,000 Hmong, who moved into refugee camps in Thailand from which they continued their military activities against the Pathet Lao.

Since 1975, Laos has tilted towards what used to be called the Soviet bloc, and in particular, Vietnam, which has supplied it with economic and political support and provided a counterbalance to the activities of China and Thailand.

The collapse of the USSR and increasing pressure on Vietnam, has in turn produced major shifts in Laos' as the government in Vientiane, mindful of the fate of their former allies, has sought to head off any chance of a similar demise for themselves.

*"Foreign military personnel also left a huge legacy of prostitution and drug addiction. In Vientiane alone there were an estimated 15,000 orphans after the war."*

## Relations

Relations with China have improved enormously. Laos, previously criticised by Beijing for its support of the Vietnamese invasion of Cambodia in 1979, has recently received large amounts of Chinese aid. Trade between the two nations is also increasing.

Most significantly, Laos has been trying to move closer to Thailand. Along with the US, Thailand was key ally of the pre-1975 royalist government.

The end of the war found at least 20,000 Thai "volunteers" fighting in Laos. Thailand was also the main outlet for Lao goods to the world market. Over the period 1973-75, Thailand absorbed 65% of all Lao exports and accounted for nearly 95% of Laos' imports.

After 1975, Thailand's military government instigated a complete economic blockade of Laos, and trained and financed remnants of the Hmong secret army to fight the new government in Vientiane. In return Laos provided weapons to the Communist Party of Thailand operating in the poor north-east provinces of Thailand bordering Laos.

Relations between the two governments improved slightly in October 1977, when a military coup in Thailand brought

to power a government more reconciliatory to Vientiane. The economic blockade was lifted, and in return for Thai pledges to scale back assistance to Hmong rebels, the LPRP terminated all support to the CPT."

On another level, the result of this conflict within the LPRP has merely been a kind of political schizophrenia: economic liberalisation combined with pronouncements of a political tightening up. The best example of the latter was provided in a speech to LPRP members in the southern province of Savannakhet last July by Kayson Phomvihane, the Prime Minister of Laos since the 1975 takeover. In this he warned that enemies were waging a policy of "peaceful converting warfare" against the LPRP's rule through TV, religion and the foreign press.

Such suspicions are hardly surprising. Throughout the sixties and early seventies, groups such as the US Agency for International Development were used as fronts for CIA counter-insurgency activities against the Pathet Lao.

Many Lao also have a genuine fear that Thailand is looking to make their country an economic colony. At the same time, such pronouncements are also expressions of how insecure large sections within the LPRP are becoming.

The real portent of the future is the hundreds of Chinese economic, technical and political advisers who have replaced the Soviets. With their help the Lao government is hoping to pull off a "Chinese solution" to the country's problems. This will most likely involve the LPRP doing a deal with the growing middle class and wealthy returnees, in which they will swap economic liberalisation for continued political control by the party. As in the past, the success or failure of this won't be decided in Laos, but in the balance of political forces in the wider region.



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# End of Swedish Dream

We reprint below this report from Swedish bus worker Sven Olof

**T**he Swedish Social Democratic model, based on high taxes and adequate social provision - pensions, health and child care, social security and education - is now being dismembered by the ruling Social Democratic Party (the Swedish equivalent of the British Labour Party).

## Pressure

There has always been pressure from Swedish bosses to dump the Swedish system where those that could afford to pay - the rich - were made to pay high taxes for services which were universally available. In the 1980's the Social Democratic party made an about turn. When it was in government it pursued policies that increased the disparities and injustices in society, increased the concentration of power in society to benefit the big companies, carried out a tax reform between two elections which meant jettisoning tax solidarity, and in the course of just a few years redistributed hundreds of thousands of crowns from society; the wage earners, to the owners of capital; the big companies, the banks and the insurance companies.

The Social Democratic government worsened the health insurance scheme, broke its election pledges, abolished currency regulation and set the market i.e. capitalism free, involving for instance the removal from the country in less than two years of 100,000 million crowns (about £10 billion) in order to buy up property abroad. London was a favourite target.

To cap it all, the Social Democrats proposed a law against the right to strike. The tax reform reduced taxes substantially for the well-off, while everybody else had to face big rent increases, rising prices and a deteriorating social security system.

It was a total acceptance of the capitalist market society. Eleven billion crowns were clawed back from the local authorities which were responsible for the health service, schools, the care of old people, etc.

## Privatisation

Right-wing councils started selling off the publicly owned pre-school centres,

privatising the health service, facilities for the old and so on, making huge cuts involving the ejection of mentally ill people from homes and leaving them to fend for themselves as best they could.

More and more pensioners are grubbing around in litter bins at night. Special highly qualified teaching resources for children who need extra help at school have been slashed by half in large parts of the country. At day care centres, the kids are packed in like sardines in violation of the statutory ratios of adults to children (it's called 'compaction').

## Benefits

In the summer of 1992, a heart patient died in Malmo in southern Sweden, because there was no room for him in the heart ward. The politician and council leader responsible, had previously declared that this would be likely to happen.

Sickness benefits have been reduced, which has meant that many people can no longer afford to stay home from work when they are ill.

Workplace injuries will get lower compensation and those injured will get substantially less benefits than before and be told they have themselves to blame for getting injured in the first place!

## Unemployment

Unemployment has been deliberately boosted by sackings of tens of thousands in the public sector. This involves a lowering of standards and even greater unemployment. Sweden now has a situation where fewer and fewer people are being forced to work harder and harder, while more and more are being cast out into unemployment.

When unemployment insurance benefits run out (after less than a year), you only have social security benefits to fall back on. In 1992, the cost of social security benefits rose by 25%, and it is estimated they will rise by the same amount in 1993. Some local authorities have responded by reducing the benefits to below what is stipulated by law, often in defiance of court rulings constraining the authorities to obey the regulations.

# ITALIAN MINERS' OCCUPATION

As the struggle in Britain to save the pits continues miners in Italy have been forced to fight the same battle. Eight mines have been occupied recently. This is the story of two of them.

"They woke me up the night of 4th January to inform me that the comrades had decided to occupy the mine", said a steward from the Sant Antioco mine in Sulcis - Iglesias, Italy.

On 8th December the owner of the mine informed the 156 workers by telegram that they were sacked as the mine was closing, on 5th January. Eight workers, owed two months wages and the traditional "13th month" salary and, sick of broken promises, chained themselves to one of the machines.



Italian miners in one of the eight pits occupied in protest at closures. The pits occupied were: S. Giovanni, Campo Pisano, S. Benedetto, Suzzururu, Nebida, Acquaresi, Nuraxi Figus & S. Antioco

In Nuraxi Figus, another mine in the same town, nine workers went 430 metres down the pit and chained themselves to the pit supports to save their jobs. 46 days later they emerged with a guarantee of employment from the mine owners. This promise was not kept and they have since reoccupied the mine.

For some of them this was their third experience of occupation. In the last few years there have been successively more radical struggles amongst the miners of Sulcis Iglesias who are permanently threatened by pit closures. The trade unions at a national and local level have not supported the workers, ignoring the miners call for a general strike to defend jobs. The governor of the region has ordered the removal of dynamite from the mines terrified of miners angry enough to use it.