

Workers power

INSIDE
Number 168 June 1993

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British section of the League for a Revolutionary Communist International

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OLD - SICK - UNEMPLOYED



YOU! are on Major's hit list

FIFTY BILLION pounds. That's the size of the Tory government's over-draft this year.

When they wanted to privatise British Steel the Tories ran adverts telling us it was losing two million pounds a week. Today the Tories have to borrow nearly *one billion* pounds, every week, just to balance their books.

There are no prizes for guessing who is going to pay for this crisis—working class people. In a spectacular "double whammy" being put together by Chancellor Clarke and Treasury Minister Portillo there will be:

- new tax rises which will hit those on average incomes but hardly touch the rich or the big companies
- massive public spending cuts that signal an all-out at-

tack on the welfare state.

In the process the Tories are breaking one election promise after another. They promised no increases in VAT, then stuck VAT on fuel bills. They promised to keep universal child benefit, but now no Tory minister will rule out the "targeting" of this and many other benefits.

Added to this the 1.5% pay freeze, an effective pay cut imposed on five million public sector workers, is being considered for extension into 1994's pay round.

Hospital charges of up to £30 a night are being considered. Means-testing the dole is being considered. Prescription charges for pensioners

and children are being considered.

The whole system of universal entitlement to benefits is under review. It is the beginning of a return to the "means test" of the 1930s, when our grandparents had to sell their belongings, spend their savings and prove they were destitute before they could claim the dole.

To justify this savagery the Tories talk of the "unfairness" of a system which allows company directors to claim dole, rich people to receive NHS treatment, Maggie Thatcher to have the right to free prescriptions. What hypocrisy!

The odd bankrupt boss who gets a mortgage on his mansion paid by housing benefit is not the real target of the Tory attack. It is the millions of poor people, pensioners and the unemployed who will

suffer the moment benefits are means-tested.

If the Tories are so concerned about the unfair advantages of the rich they should look at the tax system, not benefits.

One of the main causes of the massive shortfall between public spending and taxation is the enormous tax cuts handed out to the bosses in the 1980s. Nigel Lawson slashed personal income tax levels for the rich from 60% to 40%. He slashed corporate tax (tax paid by companies on their profits) and introduced a system of allowances for big firms that has seen a massive reduction in taxes on profits.

Added to that the British ruling class practices tax fiddles on a grand scale. Just two out of the top twenty firms pay the normal rate of tax on

their profits, thanks to elaborate deals worked out by armies of accountants. Billions of pounds worth of shares, land and valuable goods are held in so-called "offshore trusts" and can't be taxed.

The same system which empowers the DSS to search through your bank account and poke around your home to make sure you qualify for dole cannot even calculate the value of "offshore" wealth held by British companies and their bosses, let alone tax it!

The Tories claim cuts are necessary because spending is too high.

If it is too high, why are a million people waiting for hospital treatment?

Why are councils cutting basic services for the elderly, children and the disabled?

Why are the Tories prepared to pour money into

building nuclear submarines?

The truth is capitalism cannot afford to spend money on the things ordinary people need. It cannot afford a decent health service and local services. It cannot pay adequate benefits to the old, the sick and the unemployed. It cannot afford these things, despite the enormous wealth that exists inside and outside the UK, because it is a system dedicated to keeping that wealth in the hands of the bosses.

Only one thing can stop the coming onslaught on what's left of the welfare state. Millions of working class people have to turn their anger into action, force their leaders to fight, and start an anti-Tory revolt that can drive Major, Clarke and Portillo out of office. ■

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WE NEED

United action to smash fascism!

FASCISM IS a mortal enemy of the working class. Its whole reason for being is to smash up working class organisations and terrorise socialists. Its rabid nationalism means that it is also viciously racist.

Today, in Britain, black communities are the main targets of fascist terror. The principal fascist organisation, the British National Party (BNP), has its headquarters in Welling, south-east London. Since the BNP occupied this bunker racist attacks in the area have risen by over 50%.

Murder

Stephen Lawrence, murdered by a racist gang in south-east London, is their latest victim. Whether the thugs that killed him were in the BNP is irrelevant; their campaign of race hate encourages attacks and murders. Their military outfit, C18 (Combat 18—the 1 and the 8 refer to Hitler's initials), is a role model for racist murder gangs everywhere.

Today the British fascist organisations are small. The British bosses are not about to turn to them for salvation in the way the German bosses turned to Hitler. *But they are growing.* The effects of the economic crisis combined with the pathetic inability of the labour movement to organise effective resistance produce favourable conditions for the fascists to grow with their simplistic racist "solutions".

There is no room for complacency. The rise of the far right in Europe shows that fascism can and does grow quickly. Yesterday's cranks can become tomorrow's mass party. The BNP know this. They are aiming to put together a reliable army of streetfighters that can batter the left and impress white youth.

Their recent attempts to smash largely left wing Irish solidarity marches, anti-apartheid public meetings, ANL stalls and anti-fascist campaign meetings are all directed towards this end. Their hard men in C18 might come across as morons on TV screens, but on the streets they can easily come across as heroic warriors to white youth who have been left to rot by the labour movement.

Organisation

Workers' organisations, anti-fascist and anti-racist campaigns, black community organisations and the left need to wake up to this danger. They need to stop bleating about the "dangerous criminals" in C18 and the BNP, and start organising squads that can meet and defeat the fascist thugs every time they show their faces. They need to ensure that there are big mobilisations, linked to the squads, that make the slogan "no platform for fascists" mean what it says—no meetings, no marches, no paper sales, no leafleting; "no platform" by any means necessary.

To do this we need fighting unity. This doesn't mean that all the left and anti-racist groups have to come together in one big organisation and

bury all their differences. But what it does mean is ensuring that every time the fascists try to show their faces in public all of the organisations opposed to them agree to co-ordinate their opposition. All that needs to be agreed is how, where and when to strike at the fascists.

The case for such a united front is self-evident. Only an idiot could disagree with us. Alas, the left is riddled with idiots—or more precisely, with sectarian idiocy.

Look at the response of the left to the tragic murder of Stephen Lawrence. Militant Labour had a demonstration of their front organisation, Youth Against Racism in Europe (YRE) planned for 8 May. Quite rightly they shifted the demonstration from central to south-east London, to protest against the murder and against the BNP HQ. What is more, they invited other organisations, including the Anti-Nazi League (ANL—a front for the Socialist Workers Party) to participate in this march, including having speaking rights and stewarding responsibilities.

Sectarianism

Whatever arguments you have with Militant, this was a creditable move. Approximately 8,000 people thought so too, making the 8 May demo one of the biggest anti-racist, anti-fascist marches for many years. What's more, a section of the march went beyond the usual pathetic pleading to the Tory Bexley Council to close the BNP HQ, and tried to attack it. To their credit, Militant stewards defended the march when the riot police responded by assaulting the march.

But sectarianism still dogged the event. The ANL refused to openly support the march. *Socialist Worker* failed to even mention that it was organised by the YRE. And having rejected Militant's offer of unity, they went ahead with calling their own



Edmonds marshals the troops on 25 April demo

march the very next week.

With this shameless sectarianism the ANL ended up with 1,500 people (and considerably fewer local black people than were on the YRE demo) marching through the woodlands of south-east London, having accepted the police instruction not to go anywhere near the BNP bunker. And their whole project centred on a publicity stunt which involved giving a platform to that well know anti-racist—the Tory mayor of Bexley!

This farce was concocted by the SWP's leadership. It was a sectarian stunt and nothing else. Unlike the Militant march, ANL "stewards" refused to co-operate with any other forces.

Condemned

The SWP/ANL were not alone in disgracing themselves, however. Marc Wadsworth of the Anti-Racist Alliance (ARA—which despite its long list of labour movement sponsors is really a front for a handful of black Labourite and Stalinist careerists), went one step further. Not only did ARA refuse to participate in either demo—preferring to organise a human chain across south-east London the day after the

ANL demo—but Wadsworth condemned the demonstrators for attacking the BNP HQ.

This is scabbing. The riot police targeted black youth on the YRE march. Wadsworth's condemnation of these youth excuses the police. In stark contrast the father of Roland Adams (Roland was a black youth murdered by a white gang in the same area in 1991), refused to condemn the marchers and instead condemned those in the anti-racist movement who sided with the police and helped witch-hunt the left in the bosses' press.

The events revealed the bankruptcy of Wadsworth's (and the ANL's) strategy of relying on the Bexley council to get the BNP out of Welling. Between them the ARA and ANL have showered the council with countless petitions, requests and lobbies. Yet, less than one month after youth decided to attack the HQ, the council has scurried to seek legal advice on how to evict the fascists. Direct action is worth a hundred petitions.

Likewise, calls by ANL leaders for the police to deal with C18, and by ARA leaders to defeat racist attacks through a new law, are worthless. Both measures will hand more power to the racist state which it will use

What To Fight For

- **Make No Platform mean No Platform!** Mass demonstrations, with organised and disciplined stewards' teams against every major fascist march and rally. The aim is to physically smash their organisations.
- **Build a workers' united front against fascism.** We have to win trade unions and community organisations to the task of implementing No Platform and actively involve rank and file workers in this fight.
- **Don't call for or rely on state bans!** The capitalist state cannot and will not fight fascism.
- **No one should be asked to give up their differences in order to join an anti-fascist united front.** There should be full democracy, freedom of debate and criticism, for all those prepared to commit themselves to action.
- **Build anti-fascist co-ordinating committees in every town.** Use these to build trust and unity in action in the fight for a united, working class-based, national anti-fascist united front!■

against the anti-fascist fighting squads. Self-organisation and direct action are the key to defeating the fascist and racist thugs.

The antics of the ANL and ARA should be a source of dismay for every genuine anti-fascist. The answer is not, however, to fight sectarianism with sectarianism. London Anti-Fascist Action (AFA) for a long time had the best record of militant anti-fascism. But it too refused to co-operate with the YRE and increasingly refuses to participate in anything beyond its own events.

Co-ordination

As for the YRE itself, it remains to be seen whether or not its positive action over the last month was anything other than a manoeuvre—hitherto it has been guilty of building itself exclusively as a Militant front.

The answer to all of this sectarianism is to build fighting unity between all anti-fascists to implement no platform. The members of each of the main anti-racist and anti-fascist organisations need to start demanding that their leaders help build such co-ordination, not hinder it as they clearly did in May.■

Defend Shane Ward

ON SATURDAY 6 April the British National Party (BNP) did a paper sale in Birmingham city centre. Up to thirty skinhead Nazis, sporting swastikas, stood in Corporation Street shouting abuse at passing black people.

Shane Ward, a British-born black man, was in the city centre at the same time as the fascists. He saw them and told them where to get off. Without any fuss he told them they were cowards and that they would not be tolerated.

The police turned up . . . and arrested Shane!

For simply telling the fascist scum what he thought of them Shane was nicked. He has been

charged under Section 5(1) of the Public Order Act—"disorderly behaviour likely to cause undue harassment, alarm or distress". Presumably the police believe one black man causes more "undue harassment" than a large gang of fascists.

A Shane Ward Defence Campaign has been established. It has won support from anti-fascist and anti-racist organisations in Birmingham—Anti-Fascist Action, the Anti-Nazi League, the Anti-Racist Alliance, Youth Against Racism in Europe, the Campaign Against Racism and Fascism and other local campaigns. It mobilised 100 people to picket Shane's first court appearance and is mobilising for his next appearance on 17 June.



On trial for opposing fascism

Most importantly it has called a mass demonstration for Saturday 12 June, starting in Handsworth, Birmingham. Workers Power urges all workers' organisations and anti-racist/anti-fascist organisations in the Midlands to support the Shane Ward Defence Campaign and the

12 June demonstration. It is vital to respond to every attack on the black community's right to self-defence against racist attacks and police harassment. It is vital that the police are not allowed to get away with defending the fascists against a black protester.■

Tory crisis: Labour cowardice

JOHN MAJOR has reshuffled the cabinet. But this political card trick was as blatant as it was pathetic.

Chancellor Norman Lamont was sacked on the grounds of "unpopularity". But Lamont's unpopular policies were John Major's policies. Lamont's sidekick Portillo, who survived the cabinet reshuffle, has even promised to "court unpopularity" to push through spending cuts.

Major's reshuffle had only one purpose: to placate the millions of victims of his economic policies without changing these policies one iota.

But the reshuffle also showed the Tories' weakness.

Their parliamentary majority is down to 18. They survived the Maastricht crisis only because, in the end, both Labour and the Liberals supported Maastricht. Every week sees a new climbdown on some aspect of Tory policy because of a threatened back-bench revolt.

Yet to solve the economic crisis in the bosses' interests they will have to carry on attacking sections of their own electoral base: pensioners, rail users, NHS patients, workers in the South East.

The May council election disaster, and their by-election defeat at Newbury, have alerted the Tories to the fact that they are deeply unpopular. So how are they able to launch a renewed attack on our rights and living standards?

Because the leaders of the Labour and trade union movement are on their knees. These leaders managed to squander the anti-Tory revolt sparked by the pit closure crisis. Last October two massive workers' demonstrations—one involving widespread unofficial strike action—created the situation where a TUC-called general strike could have toppled Major's government.

Instead the Labour and trade union leaders—from John Smith to Arthur Scargill—opted for "people power". People power, for these bureaucrats, means subordinating working class action to the task of mobilising anti-government public opinion. Right wing Tories, like Widdecombe and Churchill, were held up as the workers' friends.

But their parliamentary revolt fizzled and the pits are now being closed.

Where action was called it was strictly limited to one day strikes. Railworkers took two days of solid strike action. But union leaders Jimmy Knapp and Derek Fullick soon saw to it that the strikes were called off, with no real victory gained.

The picture is even worse on the political front. Despite massive hatred of the Tories, Labour proved incapable of posing as a clear alternative for millions of workers in the South. They voted Liberal, deserting one open bosses' party for another instead of taking a step towards a working class solution by voting for the party of the trade unions.

Labour is tied to maintaining capitalism and can offer nothing but capitalist "solutions" to the crisis. John Smith told a Labour gathering that Labour could "coast home" to victory in the next election, using the same logic as Kinnock—that voters would get sick of Major and turn to Labour out of the desire for a change.

This ignores the Tories' ability to manipulate the election date and the economy to produce a pre-election boom, or to get rid of their leader and present Major's replacement as the change voters want.

It also leaves Labour echoing every Tory policy, not fighting for a clear working class alternative to the misery. Labour should be raising a revolt over Tory plans to end universal benefits. Instead it has launched its own "review" of the universal benefit system.

Faced with the budget deficit Labour's Gordon Brown can offer only tinkering with the tax system. Labour has learned to fear any mention of raising taxes to pay for adequate services. So we are now in the ludicrous position where the Liberals—who favour income tax rises for the well off—stand to the left of Labour on taxation!

All this is a recipe for disaster. It means that the Liberal vote can grow as the Tories stagger from crisis to crisis. Yet under the present system this can have only one of two reactionary consequences.

Labour can make a systematic pact with the Liberals, guaranteeing a Lib-Lab government. This would seriously undermine the ability of the working class to put pressure on Labour in office. Or it can sit back and see a massive Liberal vote hand the Tories a fifth term in office when the next election comes.

Either way the Labour leaders are digging their own graves.

What is needed, immediately, is a halt to the new realist union leaders' limitation of the industrial struggle to a series of one day gestures and a break from Labour's disastrous strategy.

Only revolutionary socialism offers a consistent alternative and a guide to action in the face of Tory floundering and the betrayal of the Labour and trade union leaders.

The starting point for that alternative is the fight for all out strike action against every attack facing the working class. Not "people power" but workers' power—the power to hit the bosses' profits and bring society to a halt—is the key to stopping the Tories ruining our lives.

To get the kind of action we need we have to take on the union leaders. That means organising the rank and file, it means building cross union strike committees that can call and deliver action in the face of bureaucratic sabotage.

We need a political alternative to John Smith. Every worker who wants to fight should taking up the task of building a new, revolutionary workers' party.

All out strikes, rank and file movements, revolutionary politics—it all seems so radical, so unrealistic to many working class people. But the truth is, without all this we are destined for defeat after defeat, the ruination not just of our living standards but our organisations as they are worn down by anti-union laws, unemployment, privatisation and the rest.

The Labour and union leaders squandered one opportunity to turn round the situation. The Tories' economic crisis, the coming onslaught on public spending, the weakness of the Tory government all mean there will be other opportunities. We cannot afford to miss them!

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workers power

FUND DRIVE

Last month we reached our target of £3,000. A big thank you to everyone who helped us reach the target. And a big please—help us raise another £3,000 by September!

We urgently need the money to help us fulfil our plans to produce an in-depth pamphlet on Britain and a new issue of our journal, *Permanent Revolution*. Together with the regular publication of the best paper on the British left, producing these two publications is an expensive (and non-profit making) business.

Printing costs have risen. Maintaining the equipment we use to produce our paper, let alone upgrading it, costs a small fortune. Financing our work as an active revolutionary organisation—printing anti-fascist leaflets, printing workplace bulletins, organising meetings, helping build demonstrations and pickets—adds to our costs.

This is why we need your money. Help us keep up our good work by sending us a donation.

We kick off the new fund drive with £391 sent in during May. Thanks to readers in Birmingham and London, and to supporters in Sheffield who raised £150 through a second-hand book sale. Keep it coming in.

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MARXIST DISCUSSION GROUPS

Workers Power branches run a regular series of meetings to discuss vital issues facing the working class movement today, both in Britain and overseas.

BIRMINGHAM

Scotland: nationalism or socialism?

8.00pm, Tuesday 22 June
See seller for details

LEICESTER

Fascism: what it is and how to fight it.

7.30pm, Thursday 3 June
See seller for details

LONDON

Ireland: republicanism at the crossroads?

7.30pm, Thursday 10 June
Room S419, LSE,
Houghton St, WC2

SHEFFIELD

South Africa: no sell-out!

7.30pm, Wednesday 9 June
The Grapes, Trippet Lane, near West St

So don't just read the ideas in the paper, come along and discuss our theories and our practice in a lively and informal atmosphere.

TIMEX

All out in Dundee

Timex strikers have called two events for this month. The first is a women's picket of the plant on Wednesday, 9 June from 6.00 am onwards. The second is another mass demonstration outside the factory on Saturday, 19 June, again from 6.00 am.

WE CAME in our thousands from as far away as Cardiff and Kent. We were met by the biggest show of police force in the history of Dundee, with 600-800 Tayside coppers reinforced from Strathclyde. Together they shielded less than 200 scabs from the fury of the 3,000 pickets who had massed outside the gates at Timex.

Monday, 17 May marked a key date in the battle to win the reinstatement of production workers, summarily sacked by Timex boss, Peter Hall. Exactly three months before, Hall had booted out 343 workers, including 17 who had broken the original strike.

After 17 May, Timex could legally pick and choose from the ranks of the sacked workforce. In the event Hall re-hired only seven, all of whom had scabbed on the strike. The strike was called in opposition to the arbitrary imposition of 150 lay offs and the victimisation of AEEU shop stewards. Hall gave a touching example of "loyalty" to his scabs when he sacked a production line of strikebreakers on 20 May.

Victory

The Timex Strike Committee had called for a mass presence outside the factory gates, followed by a march and rally at nearby Camperdown Park, to mark the expiry of the 90 days. Prior to the event strikers distributed 40,000 leaflets around Dundee's workplaces and housing estates.

Hall, in collaboration with Tayside's chief constable, Jack Bowman, sought to ferry in the bulk of the blue collar scabs an hour early. A fierce scum ensued as police kicked and punched a path through the hundreds of pickets who had surged onto the road to halt the double deckers. More than two hours later pickets could claim a



real victory as the police announced they could not guarantee the safety of the plant's supervisory staff, who were supposed to travel through the gates in a motorcade.

By Hall's own admission at least 30 white collar scabs were stopped from entering the plant. AEEU convenor, John Kydd Jr. put the figure at closer to 90. This triumph came at a price, however, as the police arrested 30 pickets and left several others nursing cracked ribs or broken wrists.

BY G R McCOLL

Later in the day the police swooped into the body of the march to snatch a black demonstrator, triggering another clash which led to eight more arrests. By late afternoon sources within the police began spreading rumours in the media that two people were to face charges of attempted murder for trying to ram a police line with their van. The following day's *Scotsman* ran the fabricated story on its front page while BBC Radio Four also carried the accusation.

The police tactics are all too familiar, recalling the 1984-85 Great Strike. Chief constable Bowman has used trumped up charges in an attempt to turn public opinion against the strikers and to intimidate supporters. On Friday, 21 May police raided the home of the chair of Dundee's Timex Support Committee, Sally Lloyd, arresting her and Drew McEwan, who has also been active around the dispute. Both now face an array of charges including incitement of violence against the police.

Violence

Dundee's *Evening Telegraph*, a notoriously anti-union rag, has reported that by late May police overtime payments had eaten up £160,000. When it comes to defending the bosses' strikebreaking schemes, the sky really is the limit.

The events of 17 May highlighted both the potential and the limits of the mass picket on its own. In a dispute with such high stakes violence is inevitable. As deputy convenor, Willie Lesslie, put it, "... the single greatest act of violence in the past three months has been the sacking of more than 300 women and men."

However, Lesslie effectively condemned the behaviour of a "small minority" of those who had come to the mass picket. Timex strikers do not need to apologise for their or their supporters' actions to the media,

politicians or the bureaucrats of the AEEU. Jimmy Airlie, the union's executive member for Scotland, has been conspicuous by his absence from the picket line. Union president, Bill Jordan, marked his first and only visit to the picket line with a call on Arthur Scargill, invited by the strikers themselves, to stay away.

Solidarity

In his speech to the mid-day rally on 17 May, Kydd declared, "we are prepared to use all tactics at our disposal. I have yet to find anyone who thinks there are other ways to achieve a victory."

The mass picket is one such tactic. It is a vital focus for the strikers and their supporters; it is also a thorn in the side of Timex bosses. Strikers need to develop the defence of the picket line against the police through disciplined, organised squads. But against such a determined foe as Hall and his masters in Connecticut the mass picket is unlikely to win on its own. The leafletting of the Dundee dole offices and colleges to persuade the unemployed and students not to scab is another excellent initiative. But more than that is needed.

Initiatives such as the Norwegian trade union campaign against Fred Olsen, Timex's global boss, are great boosts to morale. The apparent cancellation of orders by Creda cookers makes plain the problems Hall faces in training his scab labour force to meet previous production targets. Solidarity boycotts must be spread to every plant Timex supplies and is supplied by.

The Strike Committee's call on the Scottish TUC to organise an all-Scotland shop stewards conference is a step forward. But it is vital that such a conference goes ahead, with or without the blessing of the STUC bureaucrats. Certainly the Strike Committee should swiftly convene a Dundee-wide stewards' conference with the explicit aim of winning solidarity strike action up to and including an

indefinite stoppage across the city.

Such a conference should embrace public sector workers in the council and NHS as well as trade unionists from manufacturing industry. The conference should set a date for the launch of indefinite action and begin planning for the provision of emergency services in the event of an extended strike.

At key local factories such as NCR, discontent is brewing over the mass lay off of temporary workers. At Van Leer textiles there is similar anger at management attacks. The time is ripe to tap into this mood. There is widespread understanding of the implications of the Timex fight for trade unionists generally.

Appeal

As the fight at Timex enters its fifth month the Strike Committee needs to appeal to the Dundee working class to translate the support it has shown on several demonstrations into the kind of solidarity action which would turn up the heat on Hall. A city-wide general strike, in open defiance of the anti-union laws that have been repeatedly used against the strikers, is becoming more and more necessary to win this dispute quickly. As Kydd put it:

"The only way we are going to win is the only way the working class has ever won, by sticking together, fighting together through thick and thin."

In Dundee in 1993 that means pulling out all the stops for a city-wide general strike. ■

SWAN HUNTER

Occupy the Yard!

"INDUSTRIAL GENOCIDE" is how one of the union officials described the impact of the recession on Tyneside.

Swan Hunter, the last shipbuilding yard in the north east, is to close with the loss of 2,200 jobs. Another 4,000 will be sacked in related industries. Unemployment already affects one in four workers in the region. And the Swan Hunter announcement comes just after the closure of Westoe pit throwing 1,000 miners on the dole.

Despite all the Tories' talk of recovery the plain fact is that every week more workers face the nightmare of unemployment.

The campaign that has been launched to save Swan Hunter, led by the unions and the local Labour MP, aims to show what a good bargain the shipyard and its workforce will be for any potential new buyer. Even if there is a buyer they would want to make some of the workforce redundant, drive down wages and worsen conditions. The regional executive member for the AEEU, Jack Crystal, said, "we are heading for another Leyland DAF fiasco with the workforce suffering the most." But the real fiasco is that the union officials continue to lead

workers up the garden path. No amount of going cap-in-hand to the bosses will get us what we need. What we need is a determined fight against unemployment, and that fight can start now at Swan Hunter.

Stewards from shipyards across the country have met and agreed to boycott any work diverted from Swan Hunter. This is a good start. But to save their jobs the Swan's workers need to stage an immediate occupation of the yard.

They should hold the machinery and the frigates being built as ransom against the asset strippers who will move in if the closure goes through. By occupying the yard the workers could become the focus for all those wanting to fight unemployment locally and nationally.

Workers on Tyneside have already shown their willingness to take solidarity action against unemployment with a strike in January this year. Swan Hunter could act as an organising centre, bringing in other private sector workers under threat, public service workers facing cuts and the unemployed.

- No to closure!
- Occupy the yard!

Financial support remains vital to sustain the fight. Donations for the strike committee (and Timex Pickets' Defence Campaign) to: Timex Strike Fund, 2 Union St, Dundee, DD1

Telephone: 0382 22406

FBU

THE UNANIMOUS vote for a strike ballot was greeted with a standing ovation at the Fire Brigades Union (FBU) conference last month.

The ballot is over the government's attempt to impose a 1.5% pay deal. There is no way the firefighters are about to accept a return to the days before they won their pay formula from the Labour government. A nine-week strike in 1977/78 won a formula which linked their pay to the top 25% of male manual workers' earnings. Prior to that many firefighters were having to claim state benefits to make up their wages.

Now the government wants to end this. In his November statement Norman Lamont, then Chancellor of the Exchequer, said, "I have decided that in the coming year, pay settlements in the public sector should be restricted to a maximum of 1.5%."

It would apply, "... without exception whether pay is negotiated, recommended by the pay review bodies or subject to formula calculations."

The Tories are not just tightening up the budget on the pay side. While the number of calls handled by the Fire Brigades has risen by 64% since 1980, the increase in staff over that time has only been 2.5%.

Everywhere the Fire and Civil Defence Authorities, who run the fire service, are looking to make cut-backs. This will mean job losses. It will also mean the closure and downgrading of fire stations and increasing use of obsolete firefighting equipment.

Ken Cameron, general secretary of the FBU, has been making some fighting speeches. He has talked of giving the Tories another bloody nose. But while there is certainly a mood among the rank and file for a strike they will have to watch their leaders.

Already the idea is being mooted of starting any campaign with one-day strikes rather than an all-out strike. This is a favourite of the



Smash the 1.5% limit!

union leaders at the moment. But the trouble with one-dayers is that the enemy always know that the next day you will be back at work. They can sit it out. Worse, a series of one-day actions risks wearing down the members' anger to the point where they become demoralised with the campaign.

Firefighters need to hold their leadership to account, demanding that they launch all-out indefinite action and prepare to spread their action the minute the government calls in the troops to break the strike. Rank and file strike committees need to be built to ensure that the strikers, not the bureaucrats, run the dispute and control the negotiations.

Right now the FBU should get ready for action. It should ensure it has an adequate strike fund and use a levy system if it needs more. It should continue its campaign, holding mass meetings up and down the country, using the strongest sections in favour of strike action to win the argument with the weakest sections and to secure an overwhelming vote for action in the ballot.

Many firefighters know if the formula goes then conditions, jobs and the future of the service itself will be up for grabs. But the chance is there to defeat the Tories. As one of the FBU delegates suggested: "Don't just give this government a bloody nose. Knock them out!"

MSF CONFERENCE

BY A CONFERENCE DELEGATE

My Self First

This year's conference showed the growing strength of the right wing in the Manufacturing, Science and Finance Union (MSF).

The NEC elections had already seen the right wing (MSF for Labour) increase their majority over the old Stalinist-led Left Unity.

Roger Lyons, the general secretary personifies the aims of the right wing bureaucrats, describing members of the union as "customers" purchasing financial services, rather than struggling for their jobs, pay and conditions. His opening address was in the John Smith style of oratory—a bland attack on Tory policies along with a string of platitudes about his commitment to "rebuild" and "renew our union".

For Lyons the major success of the last year was the reduction of the financial deficit of the union by £1 million to £17 million!

The question of union democracy and of conference policy applying to both the leadership and the membership was at the heart of many debates.

There was an important debate on the no-strike, pendulum arbitration, single-union deal signed by the MSF at the Toray Textiles factory in Mansfield. While conference reaffirmed its "total opposition to sweetheart deals" in one resolution, an amendment condemning the Toray Textiles deal was narrowly defeated.

The leadership is happy to pay lip service to this union policy as long as it doesn't have to carry it out in practice. In the heat of the debate, and in a moment of panic, Roger Lyons revealed that the Toray deal was nothing new for MSF as three similar deals had been signed under Ken Gill's leadership!

A similar argument came up in the debate on Timex, where MSF members have been scabbing throughout the dispute. Timex strikers speaking at a fringe meeting confirmed that the MSF scabs were involved in train-

ing the the scab workforce, and in addition were driving in some of the scabs and taking in the mail boycotted by postal workers.

After a deliberately stifled debate, the conference shamefully ended up congratulating the local MSF branch for "securing existing terms and conditions though negotiations" and "re-affirmed the right of MSF members at Timex to determine their own future." A scab's charter!

A resolution calling on MSF members to stop crossing the picket line, in line with union rules, was heavily defeated.

Individual rights were once again put above the collective rights of the union to determine and carry out policies. The placards at the Timex picket line, "MSF—My Self First" describe the leadership's policy perfectly.

These two debates revealed that for all the bureaucrats' talk of the MSF having progressive policies for full employment, maintaining the trade union links with the Labour Party, anti-racism and equal opportunities the leadership have no plans to do anything about any of them. MSF members are told to wait for a Labour government. This is the only solution the right wing can offer.

A resolution moved by a Workers Power supporter on the NHS advocated industrial action as the way to stop the Tory attacks, citing the example of the UCH occupation against ward closures. The resolution was carried almost unanimously but it was the only resolution passed at the conference that even mentioned strike action as the way to save jobs and services and build the union.

The rightward drift of the union must be stopped. But the left is small and isolated. Given this situation we need to co-ordinate our activities through the building of a rank and file movement.

The Network 90 grouping, a loose collection of activists could be the forum to start this. ■

RAIL

Organise the rank and file

BY A RAIL WORKER

rightly attacks the leadership for a catalogue of betrayals over the past two years. The leaflet, produced by honest RMT activists around the fledgling Campaign for a Fighting and Democratic Union (CFDU), is all true. What Knapp cannot stand is that it shows the undemocratic and treacherous nature of our so-called leadership.

Knapp is so sensitive to criticism that he has excluded a resolution from the agenda of the national AGM which was passed at the Signal and Telecommunications/ Permanent Way/Overhead Line grades conference.

This resolution, carried unanimously, questions the leadership's role in accepting the infamous S and T restructuring package. This has left 8,000 rail workers with conditions that make us virtual slaves to management.

But it is not surprising that Knapp is sensitive. There have been other betrayals. These include the acceptance of Organisation for Quality (read organisation for privatisation) plans, the hopeless capitulation on the new machinery of negotiation and the abandonment of the four Manchester guards, union activists that the RMT allowed to be victimised.

Rail workers should not be fooled. By pointing the finger at the CFDU and appealing for "unity and strength

of purpose", as Knapp does in the letter, he is trying to divert attention from his appalling record.

The CFDU must be built to challenge Knapp and the entire bureaucracy. Currently over 40 RMT branches nationally have affiliated to the CFDU. More should do the same.

But as the campaign gains momentum it must take shape not only organisationally but politically. As yet it talks only of "transforming the RMT into a fighting union under the control of its members."

While this may be a sound sentiment the CFDU must begin to trash out what it means for the current struggles of railworkers. This means saying what the rank and file needs to do now in the battle against privatisation. It means saying how rank and file organisation can start to build for action to win a substantial pay increase for rail workers.

We must attempt to create cross-union links with ASLEF members, many of whom will be unhappy with their leadership's acceptance of a recent deal which leaves them at the mercy of future privateers. Here the question of one industrial union for all rail workers must be addressed. We must not shy away from the struggle to transform the union, giving control to the members, with an accountable leadership which puts the interests of rail workers first every time. ■

RMT MEMBERS everywhere must now be asking themselves: "can our situation get any worse?"

The British Railways Board's "Final Offer" on redundancies and contract labour on the railways has been accepted. The so-called referendum vote gave a majority of just 183 to accept the deal in a ballot which saw a turnout of only 58%.

The deal says that BR does not "foresee" the need for compulsory redundancies or a major extension of contract labour on the railways for the next two years. It is useless.

The referendum was not even necessary. RMT members had clearly mandated the union leadership to call strike action and had solidly taken action on 2 and 16 April.

But seven of the RMT council of the executive members would not sanction further action. The new President, Loughlin, seized the opportunity. Using the union's rule book he pointed out that a two-thirds majority was needed on the union's General Grades Committee to endorse further strikes on the railways and the vote was only 12 to 7 in favour. Thus the "magnificent seven", as they have become known, held the union to ransom.

Although the RMT issued a formal statement calling on members to reject BR's offer, as was the case in the original strike ballot in March, the leadership had no intention of organising a serious campaign for a no vote. Knapp and company saw their chance to wriggle out of a dispute they never had any intention of prosecuting.

Now Knapp and his pals are trying to cover their tracks. A letter has been sent out to RMT branches, signed by Knapp, denouncing as libellous a rank and file leaflet which

IF THE union leaders have their way this year's conferences will be bureaucratic backslapping spectacles. Cohse's four day conference contains only two days of business—the rest of the time being taken up with a play, a video, a brass band concert and various karaoke sessions!

The bureaucrats have cause for celebration. While their members are faced with a pay freeze, massive job losses and ever worse working conditions, the bureaucrats have guaranteed their own jobs, pay and conditions through the merger.

But for the rank and file the Unison merger is no cause for celebration.

The whole merger has been sold to the membership on the basis that a bigger union will be stronger and mean unity in action. Yet the bureaucrats have designed the union to prevent unity in action. The new realist philosophy behind the merger could leave public sector workers with a bigger but weaker union, as the officials connive to strip away from each of the member unions all their positive features and extend all the negative ones.

The merged union organisation is designed to protect the bureaucrats' positions, to insulate them from rank and file criticism or opposition. It is designed to make up for declining or stagnant membership figures by rationalising the apparatus instead of addressing the reasons for decline.

At a time when public sector workers are faced by a series of national attacks it is no accident that the shortest section in the Unison rule book is on industrial action.

In contrast the rules go to great length to ensure the existing bureaucrats maintain their positions unchallenged. The first election for the NEC will take place in 1995. Until then it will be made up of nominations from the existing NECs.

Industrial

The Service Groups, set up to run the different industrial sections (health, local government etc), will not be elected until 1995. Service Groups will be allowed an annual conference, but this conference will not be sovereign. It cannot elect the Group's executive and the Service Groups cannot call strike action without the sanction of the NEC.

Nalگو leader Alan Jinkinson, who called in police to protect his palatial

This month the last ever Cohse, Nupe and Nalگو conferences take place. On 1 July the three public sector unions will merge to become Unison, the biggest union in the TUC with over 1.5 million members. Bill Jenkins looks at the implications of the merger for rank and file militants.

Make Unison mean unity in action

offices against the protests of Newham strikers, has already been appointed the first general secretary of the union. There will be no election until 1995.

The leadership aim to ensure that local union branches are compliant and firmly under the control of the executive. So the undemocratic stitch-up at the top has been continued into the branches.

Disputes

Nalگو, Nupe and Cohse were never democratic unions. But they did allow some branch influence over the control of disputes and the calling of strike action.

In Unison this influence will be severely curtailed. As before, branches do not have the right to call strike action. But in addition they can no longer collect local strike funds. There is no provision for branches to call ballots for strike action. If the NEC feels a local branch is not functioning "effectively" an official may be instructed to visit and the branch closed down.

This is the downside of the bureaucratic merger. The positive side lies in the possibility of building effective unity in action within the different sections—health, local government, water etc. That is undoubtedly why the lay officials, the majority of the members and every single left organisation, except Workers Power, swallowed the merger.

But the bureaucrats have thought of this possibility as well. The merger contains many obstacles to the creation of fighting industrial sectors that can unite all the workers facing a single boss into a common struggle.

The former Nalگو, Nupe and Cohse

branches do not have to fuse until 1996. Branches may agree to merge before this date but there is no compulsion to do so. This means that in Kirklees Metropolitan Council for example, there will be six separate Unison branches. Some "unison"!

A major barrier to the fusion of the different branches before the final date is the "honoraria" traditionally paid to Nupe branch secretaries. Nupe lay officials currently receive 11% of branch funds. This honoraria will continue wherever Nupe branches maintain their former existence, a clear incentive for the branch secretaries to obstruct fusion for as long as possible.

At a national level real unity in action will be subordinated to maintaining the unity of the bureaucracy. Imagine (and with the current leaders you will have to imagine) a situation where one section of Unison is faced with breaking the anti-union laws to defend jobs and services. The leaders will wheel out the excuse that such action will jeopardise the funds of 1.5 million workers, many with no direct interest in the dispute.

No doubt they will also develop the trick of paying out lavish strike pay to one section on strike and then using that as an excuse for other sections to be kept out of action.

But Unison must fight, even if it is not designed to do so. The Tories

have made it clear that they must cut public spending if they are to reduce their budget deficit. They will not be stopped by advertising campaigns or parliamentary lobbying. They will take one look at Unison in its present form and see a lumbering giant not a powerful enemy.

Only all out strike action can win against a government determined to destroy public services. If Unison does not fight, if privatisation and cuts become widespread, the largest union in the TUC could quickly become a lot smaller.

In each of its core areas Unison members face a combination of attacks aimed at destroying union organisation as a prelude to compulsory competitive tendering (CCT) and/or privatisation. In the NHS similar attacks are being made as a direct consequence of the internal market.

Dodging

As yet Nalگو, Nupe and Cohse have made it clear they have no intention of fighting these attacks. Nalگو have used the need for an all out strike over public sector pay as a way of scaring members and dodging their responsibility for leading a fight. In spite of the ritual declarations proclaiming the need to end low pay, this year the officials have not even mustered fighting talk in support of the

claim. They have surrendered without firing a shot.

But the national pay freeze pay is not the issue which concerns Unison members most. In the minds of most members it is secondary to the fear of compulsory redundancies, localised wage cuts and privatisation. For most members, hanging on to any job seems a higher priority than breaking the 1.5%.

The officials are well aware of this mood and are preparing another defeat on the grounds that "the members won't fight". Unison militants must resolutely fight against this. A defeat on pay will further undermine the ability of Unison to organise a collective national opposition to Tory attacks.

Unison must immediately take up the gauntlet laid down by the Tories. The coming onslaught on public spending is a strategic attack on the working class, and on Unison's membership in particular. For Unison to mean anything it must become the co-ordinating centre, the general staff, for a united fightback against spending cuts, privatisation and attacks on pay and conditions resulting from it.

With the present structure and leadership Unison is in danger of becoming the opposite—a co-ordinating centre for the retreat. Rank and file militants must organise now to stop this becoming the case. ■

What militants must fight for

UNISON WILL only fight if rank and file militants organise an opposition to the leadership to force them to do so, or if they won't, replace them with a leadership that will. Militants must fight to democratise Unison and turn it into a fighting union which can really represent its' members' interests.

The first task is to carry out the speediest possible merger of all Unison branches. All branches within a particular workplace or employer should merge immediately and unconditionally.

Some militants have argued the need to resolve the question of the honoraria, or the role of stewards' committees first. Others in militant branches will fear being swamped by members or bureaucrats in more conservative branches, especially in the NHS where local Cohse and Nupe branches often operate a political division of labour, with militants grouped in one and less militant workers grouped in another.

Arguments

Now that the national merger has gone through such arguments against local branch fusions do not hold water. The fusions cannot be put off forever. The longer branches are kept separate the more difficult it will become to forge local fighting unity through strong workplace branches. Building fused workplace branches immediately can create a basis for united action, despite the intentions of the national leadership. Even if a political division of labour

is maintained at workplace level it will not be so at national level. Workers who want action will be fighting against the same bureaucracy. They will have to convince workers in the same union in strike ballots, even if those workers are organised in different branches.

Once merged, branches should set up democratic branch committees, which will oversee the spending of branch money, including honoraria. All honoraria should be compulsorily donated to a local strike fund.

Where one small Unison branch refuses to merge, its members should be urged to leave it and join the larger, merged branch.

At a national level the Group Sections, organised as industrial wings of the union, should fight for maximum autonomy from the central bureaucracy. They should have sovereign conferences and recallable national committees with the right to call action on all issues in their industry.

They should have the ability to set up their own strike funds and to use the strike fund of Unison as a whole. They should have a recallable leadership democratically elected annually at conference.

We support the demand for a rules revision conference to amend the rule book foisted on us by the merger talks. As is all too clear, the rule book is designed to keep the officials happy, not to build a fighting union.

We must demand that the officials support the struggles of their members. We should support the

attempt to censure the Nalگو NEC for its betrayal of the Newham strikers. All officials should be subject to regular election and be recallable.

Militants in Unison should organise a united rank and file movement independent of the officials.

This should be built on a cross branch and inter-Group basis. It must aim to force the bureaucrats to take the necessary action to stop the Tory offensive, to take control of the union and completely transform it into a fighting and democratic organisation. It must break from the traditions of the current Broad Lefts.

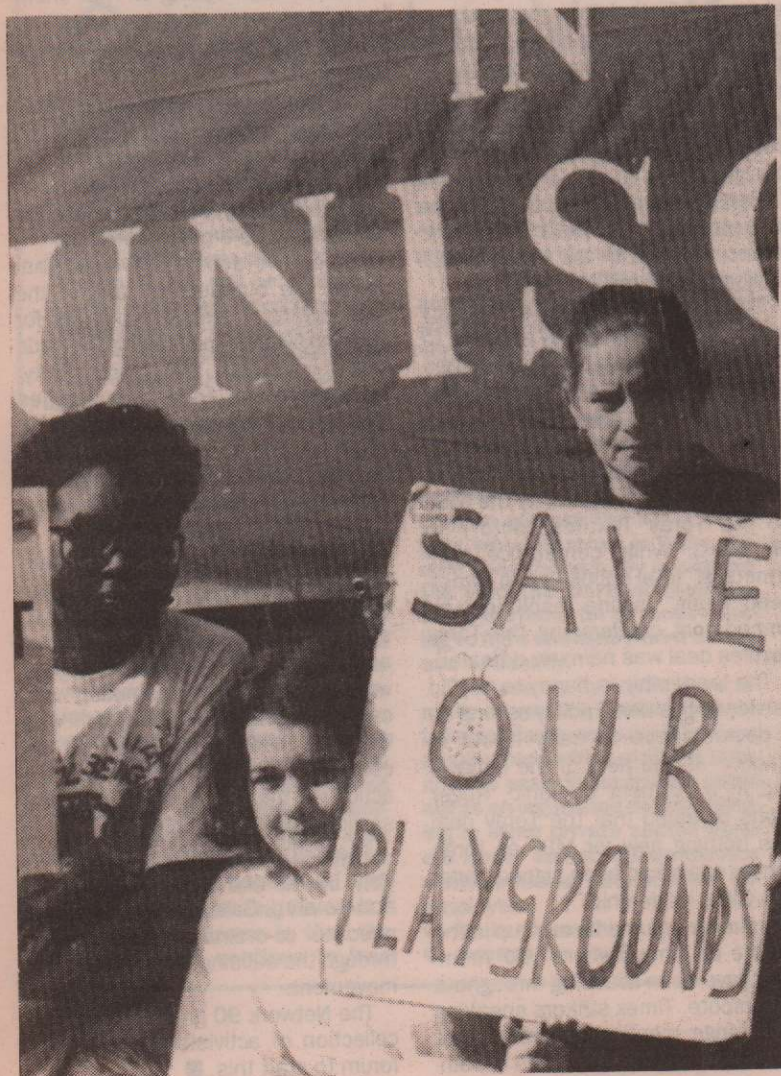
Of the three Broad Lefts, two are tiny and in the stranglehold of Militant. Nalگو's is bigger but in the stranglehold of the SWP, which has used it so much as a party front that some Nalگو members were moved to launch a "Campaign for a Real Broad Left".

Tragedy

The tragedy is that thousands of militants exist in the union with aspirations to make it modern, fighting and democratic. They will compare Unison, with its modern logo and its fortnightly stewards' newspaper to the Cohse conference—whose main social event will be an appearance by Gerry and the Pacemakers!

They will swallow the idea that Unison automatically means progress. Unless the left gets organised to disabuse them of this idea the unelected bureaucracy of the new union will have a free ride all the way to 1996. The three Broad Lefts should merge immediately and launch a concerted drive to implement the measures outlined above.

The sheer size of Unison will not frighten off the bosses. The potential for rank and file unity in action will. Militants in Unison need to seize the opportunities created by the merger, overcome the bureaucratic obstacles and make Unison mean fighting unity in action! ■



DRUGS

Should they be legalised?

LAST MONTH John Grieve, head of Criminal Intelligence at the Metropolitan Police, made a speech about drugs calling for the government to "think the unthinkable".

He wasn't suggesting they took acid or any other mind-bending substance, but that they consider a limited amount of decriminalisation of drugs with a licensing system, similar to the alcohol licensing system. His arguments have been echoed in *The Economist* and several other bosses' journals.

Why are these pillars of law and order suddenly entertaining these ideas? Quite simply because the present policy—cracking down on drugs through tougher policing—is not working. Even the Labour Party, usually so terrified of appearing radical, is talking about the need for a new agenda on drugs.

The use of drugs is widespread. The majority of young people use or have used cannabis. Its use is so widespread that the police are thinking about introducing a cautioning system for possession. Yet it still remains a jailable offence to be caught with any substantial amount.

Drug laws are supposed to be there to protect us from taking harmful substances. But the so-called soft drugs are far less harmful than other substances openly and legally sold. Cannabis does not cause major illnesses and death, whereas alcohol is thought to be responsible for 40,000, and smoking for 110,000, premature deaths in Britain each year.

But that isn't an argument for adding cigarettes and alcohol to the list of banned drugs. Why turn someone into a criminal because they take something that may harm them? They may need support to avoid harmful effects or to give up an addiction, just like drinkers and smokers, but fining them or imprisoning them will not improve their health.

Criminalisation

Those who favour keeping drugs illegal say it makes them more difficult to get, and therefore fewer people will be harmed. This is not true. Even in prison it is easy to buy all kinds of drugs—some say it's easier than when you're outside! Banning drugs does not stop them being used. Does making it illegal for young people to buy alcohol stop them from getting drunk? No. Does making it illegal for under-16 year olds to buy tobacco stop them from smoking? Of course it doesn't.

The way to stop the harmful effects of drugs is through education about their effects, through controlling the quality of drug supply and, most importantly, fighting against the social and economic factors that make people vulnerable to the worst effects of drug misuse.

Criminalising drug use drives the supply, distribution and taking of drugs underground. People cannot talk openly about the effects, and can't ensure the safest conditions for taking drugs.

The arguments about the distribution of clean needles and syringes to prevent the spread of HIV show the ridiculous results of criminalising drugs. Instead of moving to the rapid distribution of clean needles in the mid-1980s there were prolonged arguments about this "promoting" or "condoning" an illegal activity. Meanwhile hundreds of people were probably infected through using dirty needles. Eventually a degree of sense prevailed and needle exchanges were



"Anyone seen the Rizlas?"

set up in Britain, but even now the authorities won't give out needles in prison where many people are still at risk from sharing "works" (syringes).

As long as drugs are illegal, education about their use is inadequate, conditions for safer use are absent, and the control of their supply remains in the hands of exploitative dealers and the state. That is why we are for the legalisation of drug supply and the decriminalisation of drug use.

But what about the difference between "soft" and "hard" drugs? The distinction is supposed to relate to how harmful drugs are. It is meaningless—heroin and cocaine, both "hard" drugs, can be used safely. True, heroin is addictive, but in that respect no more so than alcohol and tobacco, or the valium that millions of people get legally from their doctors.

As for the argument that if you legalised soft drugs then people go onto hard drugs all the evidence points the other way. In Amsterdam 300 cafes are licensed to sell small amounts of cannabis. The level of hard drug use has gone down, especially amongst youth. The average age of users is now 34 and only 2% of hard drug users are under 22.

We don't deny that some drugs can have harmful effects on the body, but it is the social situation in which they are used, including the criminalisation, that lead to the majority of the problems.

Dealers

Heroin is a good example: it is produced and distributed through illegal networks. It gets cut with all sorts of rubbish in order to increase the profits of the dealers. The things that are added are often dangerous themselves, and can cause poisoning. The user doesn't know how strong the drug is and can die of an overdose. Because distribution is illegal, the dealers can add what they like knowing the users have no way of doing anything about it, other than by resorting to retribution and escalating violence.

Finally the prices are controlled by the big dealers (not the small time street dealers who are the usual targets of police swoops), and can be so extortionate that users have to turn to other criminal activities to fund their drugs. Turning to prostitution or petty crime users can get into a hopeless situation of illegality and often end up in prison.

It isn't the drug use itself that causes these problems, it is the

Arguments for decriminalising drugs have found some unexpected backers. Dave Beech explains.

criminalisation of drug use combined with poverty. When working class youth get addicted to drugs they are faced with no escape, no solution, while the children of the rich are sent to the latest rehabilitation centre in plush surroundings.

Violence

One final argument against legalising drug use is that it leads to violence. But then so does alcohol. How many fights do you get at pub closing time? Drugs may make violence worse but they do not cause violence. That already exists in daily lives of people. Besides, getting stoned undoubtedly reduces the appetite for violence... and the ability to inflict it!

Against this argument the authorities point to the association of the drug crack with extreme levels of violence. But with crack the violence is over the buying and selling of the drug as different gangs try to muscle in on the profits to be made. The police use this violence as propaganda so they can continue invading inner-city areas. They use the drug laws when they want to intimidate and harass youth, especially black youth. They use drugs as a cover for smashing any resistance that youth might be offering them.

We do not trust the police to get rid of the drug gangs. They are responsible for much of the violence against youth anyway. It is up to youth, and the working class as a whole, to confront the drug dealers, who terrorise their communities, through democratic defence organisations. They, not the police, must take control of the estates and the streets.

All drugs should be legalised and available under a state monopoly. If drugs are legalised but they are sold by private companies then they would happily push all the most addictive drugs to boost profits. That is why we need workers' control of the production, selling and distribution of all drugs. There should be a licensing system that enables workers and youth to take distribution out of the control of the current dealers and to make sure it is not in the hands of the

government.

Local venues should be licensed for drug distribution. Who is licensed should be decided by local organisations of youth, the labour movement and community. That way there will be democratic control over the distribution and sale of drugs that allows neither the state nor drug dealers to abuse it, or if it is legalised, pharmaceutical companies to make profits out of their use.

There should also be a massive expansion of drug treatment facilities, and an end to the present situation where people have to be legally registered with the Home Office to obtain methadone. Treatment for drug addiction is completely inadequate at the moment, and a programme of research into better methods is needed.

People take drugs for any number of reasons. They can be used purely for pleasure or they can be used to escape from reality. If someone's life has little to offer, drugs can seem to be a way out. Where there are no opportunities, where there is poverty and degradation drugs can be a way of forgetting it for a while.

But however much a drug can make you forget about the harsh realities of your life they never change your situation. Once the effect of the drug wears off you are right back where you started. Worse, the drug can ac-

tually start to take control of how you live. It means a never ending round for users of thinking how they can get their next fix and where they can get the money for it.

That is why we say: if excessive drug use, like excessive drinking, stops young people fighting against the system, removes them from life or means they spend all their time out of their heads then it is helping no one except those who exploit and oppress us.

The black youth in the townships of South Africa understood this well. The apartheid government always allowed a certain amount of illegal drinking to go on. Whenever it looked like resistance was increasing the government would allow extra supplies of alcohol to get through to the drinking dens. They hoped the blurred vision of life under apartheid would not look quite so bad.

The youth knew this would weaken the struggle against the apartheid bosses. They would stop people drinking, smashing up the stocks of alcohol when necessary. They took this action not out of any moral fervour, not because they were temperance fanatics, but because it was the only way they could ensure that the community wasn't completely drunk instead of organising action against the racist oppressors.

Workers Power is not against the recreational use of drugs any more than we are against the recreational use of alcohol. But we don't believe taking drugs changes the world. Having no control over your life can easily make you think that it doesn't matter and that you might as well be "out of your head". This is a waste of life.

Revolution

Instead of not knowing what's going on because they are on drugs, youth need to make sure they know exactly what's going on. Instead of spending all their time incapacitated by drugs, youth need to be changing the world.

There is no better high than a victorious working class struggle. There is no better feeling than being on a well organised picket line, successfully holding off the police from attacking a demonstration or wasting the fascists in open battle.

Don't let drugs take over your life and stop you from fighting for the ultimate high—revolution. ■

Peasants and drug crops

THE PRODUCERS of the drugs in Latin America and Asia face massive repression. Many peasants have found that the only way to make a living is to cultivate crops for the narcotics industry.

In Bolivia peasants cannot make a living producing food crops. Many migrate to the coca growing areas which supply the raw material for cocaine. In 1988, 19% of the value of agricultural produce was from coca.

But those peasants who produce coca in order to survive face ruthless exploitation by the narcotics barons who control the shipping of the coca for processing, usually in Colombia. In addition, the coca growing areas have been militarised through the US-

backed "anti-narcotic" agencies.

Peasants must have the right to cultivate narcotic related drugs on a free and legal basis, and these crops should be purchased by the state at prices fixed by workers' and peasants' price committees. Peasant militias should be built to defend the communities from the pro-imperialist narco-squads and from the exploiting narco-traffickers.

The land and factories of the big narco-traffickers and cartels should be expropriated and taken over by the peasants and agricultural workers. There should be a voluntary crop substitution programme so that peasants can turn to producing other crops without the loss of their livelihoods. ■



17 June 1953: Striking workers march through the Brandenburg Gate

IN JUNE 1953 East Germany was hit by a revolutionary crisis with strikes, demonstrations, the creation of factory strike committees and a general strike. The workers' struggle emerged suddenly from mounting discontent, sparked by the imposition of a general speed-up at work. The leadership of the ruling SED (the Stalinist Socialist Unity Party of Germany) had imposed a "voluntary" increase in work norms of 10%. So voluntary was the increase that workers failing to meet the new norms faced a pay cut of up to a third!

Opposition grew. Discontent gripped factories across Berlin, from machine plants in Lichtenberg through to the electronics and textile industries. At the Progress textile plant the workers passed a proclamation that they were not "voluntarily" agreeing to the new norms but rather they were being imposed on them.

Steelworkers in Fuerstenwalde and the Zwickau miners mounted serious opposition. The new norms also aroused fury from one of the most politically conscious sections of the German working class—workers on the major building sites of Berlin.

Builders on the Friedrichshain and Stalinallee projects included a high proportion of former members of the German Communist Party (KPD), many of whom were now rank and file members of the ruling SED. Unlike their party leaders, these were not corrupt Stalinist bureaucrats or functionaries, but militant workers who had been attracted to the banner of Communism and the October revolution in the 1920s and 1930s.

Far from being unthinking followers of the party line they had been pursuing a long, but so far unsuccessful, campaign against waste, bureaucratic work methods and political oppression. The new work norms came as a severe provocation.

Resolution

On 8 June 1953 the workers on Block 40 of the Stalinallee sent a resolution to "their" government and "their" party calling for the withdrawal of the increase. They received no reply from their leaders Pieck and Grotewohl.

On 15 June a group of about 60 workers on the Friedrichshain hospital site stopped work and sent a resolution to Grotewohl demanding the scrapping of the norm increases. They also lambasted the government's recent economic U-turn, which they insisted was treating private capitalists more favourably than the workers!

The next day, despite mounting pressure to scrap the norms, the official trade union newspaper *Tribune* ran an article vigorously defending them. On the same day two of the organisers of the partial strike at Friedrichshain were arrested by the "People's Police". The Friedrichshain workers immediately sent a delegation to the Stalinallee

site. They agreed that unity was their best weapon against victimisation and repression and decided to march together on the government offices in protest.

The workers of the Stalinallee Block 40 and Friedrichshain projects toured other building sites where workers immediately downed tools and joined the march. Between 6,000 and 10,000 workers marched—past the locked offices of the trade union in Wallstrasse, and on to the seat of government.

Demonstration

Their ranks were swelled by other workers, housewives and youth from across Berlin. One observer was Robert Havemann. He later described in his book, *The Alienated Man*, how he was first alerted to the events by a strange noise coming from the direction of the Stalinallee:

"... this was not the noise of cranes or the screeching of building lifts, no sort of technical noise. It was human voices. I went to the window and saw how a small procession of building workers had formed behind a crudely painted banner on the square and had just begun to move. I read 'Down with the 10 per cent rise in the norms!' It was a moving sight, for the small procession grew in a moment into a huge demonstration.

They came running from all sides in their working clothes attracted like iron filings to a magnet... many young people who were not wearing working clothes were to be seen in it. They had enthusiastically joined the protest march. They shouted in chorus: 'We are workers and not slaves! Put an end to the extortionist norms. We want free elections!'

A vast crowd finally gathered in front of the House of Ministries, to be addressed by a succession of party representatives, but never by Pieck and Grotewohl themselves despite the clamour of the crowd. The only ministers to appear were Rau and Selbmann, the latter a former worker who retained a great deal of popular respect. They were dragged to one side by a worker who pressed the following demands on them:

- immediate reduction of the norms by 10%
- immediate price cut of 40% for essential goods
- sacking of functionaries who have made grave mistakes
- democratisation of the party and the unions from below
- the initiative for German reunification should not be left to the Bonn government, the GDR government should tear down existing barriers
- unite the country through free elections by secret ballot and fight to win a victory for the workers in the election.

The Secretary of the Berlin SED climbed onto the impromptu platform

and announced the cancellation of the 10% rise in the norms. But it was too little, too late. Already the mass movement of workers had gone beyond economic demands to embrace calls for political change: free elections and national unity.

As the ministers attempted to disperse them workers chanted back at Rau and Selbmann, "we are the real communists, not you!" Finally one worker stood up and announced a general strike for the following day.

The SED leadership sent out agitators in loudspeaker vans to explain that the hated norms had been cancelled, and to convince the masses that there was no further cause for discontent. The vans were seized by angry workers and used to spread the strike call.

The call was answered. On 17 June 300,000 workers struck from all over the GDR, including metalworkers from Henningsdorf, employees of the Reichsbahn-Bau-Union, and workers from across the industrial heart of mid-Germany. In Berlin alone around 150,000 struck on the Underground

German

Forty years ago this month the workers of East Germany struck and an uprising. They were fighting for decent living conditions, a general strike and an uprising. This article describes the events of these June days and considers the role of the workers' revolutionary leadership. The Stalinists said the uprising was a rejection of socialism; but the real reasons for the uprising were the bureaucratic rule of the Stalinists.

"We are not slaves"

railway, the trams, the rail, the building sites. Workers at Osram, Plania-Siemens and AEG at Treptow joined the action.

At a mass meeting on the morning of the 17th the slogans of the Berlin workers were even more radical than before. Calls were made for the overthrow of the government, and the replacement of the "Workers' and Peasants' Government" of the SED bureaucrats with a government really under the control of the workers.

Across the GDR the revolt was spreading, with workers sacking party offices, burning files, freeing political prisoners, occupying town halls and administrative buildings and even storming into police stations. In Halle and Erfurt there were bloody street

battles with the police. Strikes and demonstrations in each case emanated from former centres of proletarian militancy during the revolutionary years after the First World War: Bitterfeld, Halle, Leipzig, Merseburg and Magdeburg. Strikes gripped the Neptun-Werft in Rostock, the Zeiss factories in Jena, Lova in Goerlitz, the locomotive factories of Babelsberg and steelworks in Fuerstenwalde and Brandenburg. At Halle railway station a huge banner was hung up, visible to passengers on trains to and from the West:

"Räumt Euren Mist in Bonn jetzt aus,

In Pankow säubern wir das Haus!"
(Clear out the crap in Bonn, we are spring cleaning in Pankow!).



SED General Secretary Walter Ulbricht; the epitome of a Stalinist bureaucrat

Bureaucratic

THE STALINISTS and the West German capitalists both had their own explanations of the workers' uprising, neither of which address the real roots of the crisis.

The Stalinists tried to present the rising as co-ordinated by fascists and anti-socialist elements. This was nonsense. The only evidence of any fascist involvement was a raid from the Western part of Berlin by the fascist BDJ group.

Unlike the strikers, who displayed admirable working class discipline, the fascists rioted and ransacked the area around the Potsdamer Platz. Whilst the strikers had only removed the hated emblems of the regime from the buildings and streets, the BDJ tore down the red flag from the Brandenburger Tor.

The West German capitalists and their media tried to claim the rising was a sign that the workers were anti-socialist and wanted the capitalist system back. They presented themselves as the strikers' friends, even making 17 June a national holiday and naming a West Berlin avenue after the events. They ignored the workers' obvious hatred of both governments, East and West.

Their "solidarity" with the strikers did not extend to any practical assistance. The Western radio station, RIAS (Broadcasting in the American Sector) refused to let the building workers appeal for solidarity strikes with their comrades in the GDR. All mention of the words "general strike" was carefully avoided!

The real causes of the general strike and rising of 17 June go deeper than the superficial and lying explanations of the capitalists and Stalinists alike. They are to be found in the deep seated contradictions facing the Stalinist regime in East Germany in the aftermath of World War Two. The division of Germany into two major zones, East and West,

reflected the balance of power after the war. Once the Soviet Union was defeated, thanks to the Soviet working class, the time alliance with the West was degenerated work tactical compromise once again to trying the Soviet Union.

Within Europe the West was allowing the Soviet Union to dominate in those areas of the war—including France nor Britain—because of a lesser interest in the mobilisations of workers who were dependent on these potential revolutions.

For its part, the West pursued a policy of construction in the occupied zones. But it was not easy to build a capitalist economy and the bosses were Nazis.

To ensure that the West was not further into a revolution the Red Army backed, took many areas of land into workers any control over the economy. In 1947—the Stalinists stroying capitalism—preventing workers from taking control.

But the balance of power between the USA started to tip in favour of the West—through the

June 1953

...y launched a mass struggle that ended in a general...
...ng standards and democratic rights. **Richard Brenner**...
...ders the problems resulting from the absence of a...
...g was the work of fascists; the capitalists that it was...
...ising lie in the contradictions of post war Germany and

workers slaves"

West German travellers on the Auto-
bahn between Helmstedt and
Magdeburg erected a poster showing
SED General Secretary Walter Ulbricht
with West German leader Adenauer.
They were at the gallows, above a
slogan reading: Unity is strength!

Contrary to western propaganda
during and after the rising, this was
not simply an amorphous "people's
revolt", it was thoroughly working class.
The backbone of the uprising were
workers in heavy industry and raw
materials production.

The calling of mass workplace meet-
ings were the first steps towards inde-
pendent workers' organisations. They
were often called using the official
trade union structures, but went on to
elect independent strike committees.

...c "socialism"

...ce of forces at the end of
...e Axis powers had been
...the massive sacrifices of
...class, the USA turned to a
...the post war order. The war-
...the Soviet Union was not
...of US hostility to the
...ers' state, it was merely a
...e. Now the USA turned
...to reduce the influence of

...ere was no alternative to
...Union to maintain its influ-
...it occupied at the end of
...East Germany. Neither
...were in a position to chal-
...nce, and the growing
...kers meant that the Allies
...the Red Army to crush
...olutions.

...Soviet Union was pursuing
...ing democratic capitalist
...ed areas, with Communist
...t of these governments.
...to re-build normal capital-
...governments. Many of the
...r Nazi collaborators whose
...n seized by the workers
...defeated.

...this did not develop any
...lutionary workers' move-
...y, and the governments it
...of the factories and whole
...state hands, denying the
...L. At this point—1945 to
...had no intention of de-
...Their minds were set on
...revolution.

...of forces changed as the
...and use its economic
...the Marshall Plan—to con-

In many cases the SED's own
workplace cells were dissolved and
supplanted by the new forms of or-
ganisation. The strike committees re-
moved the factory directors, secured
the factories against sabotage and
organised emergency services where
necessary.

Demands

In the "Walter Ulbricht" Leuna works
20,000 workers demanded an end to
the norm increases, removal of the
works' management, disarming of the
SED's factory militia, resignation of
the government, and last but not least
a name change for the factory! The
factory committee organised its own
radio station and sent 1,500 delegates

...solidate influence throughout Europe at the
expense of the Soviet Union. Stalin was forced
onto the defensive. The coalition governments
that had been set up, with local Communist
Parties in alliance with social democratic and
liberal parties, would be torn apart and re-
placed by governments tied to the imperial-
ists if the USA got its way.

The Soviet bureaucracy and their Stalinist
servants in the Eastern European coalition
governments acted to prevent this happening
in the only way they could: they expropriated
domestic capital. The SED did this in East
Germany between 1949 and 1951. Capital-
ism was replaced by bureaucratic planning
modelled on the Soviet Union.

This was carried through safe in the knowl-
edge that any semblance of independent work-
ing class organisation had been destroyed by
the forcible merger of the social-democratic
and communist parties into the SED, the in-
corporation of the unions by the state, and the
establishment of a police dictatorship.

Far from being a revolutionary means of
spreading anti-capitalist revolt, the expropria-
tion of the capitalists in the GDR was just a
means of preserving peaceful co-existence.
The Stalinists, mortally hostile to the workers'
revolution and genuine working class democ-
racy and control, had only two methods of
dealing with the antagonism between their
system and the system of world capitalism.

One method was market reforms, negotia-
tions, compromise, and the preservation of
capitalism on the basis of a non-aggression
pact. But the USA was not prepared to toler-
ate non-aggression for very long, so the
Stalinists took the only other option open to
them: total bureaucratic control and a planned
economy which excluded the workers from
any say in running production and society.■

to Berlin to agitate for spreading the
general strike.

In the industrial triangle of Halle,
Bitterfeld and Merseburg—the so-
called "red heart of Germany"—the
most distinctively revolutionary organi-
sation of the workers emerged. In
Halle, all of the plant level strike lead-
erships assembled in the city centre
and elected a committee which repre-
sented not only all of the main large
factories but also students, white col-
lar staff and shopkeepers. In Bitterfeld
the central strike committee embraced
students' and housewives' representa-
tives.

In Merseburg the Buna and Leuna
workers gathered in a public square to
elect an inter-factory committee. In
each of these towns the management
of gas, electricity, radio and printing,
public and emergency services were
organised by the democratically elected
workers' organisations. Their tasks
also included organising teams to clean
the official SED slogans from the walls!
In Bitterfeld the strike committee or-
ganised its own fighting detachments
which secured the town centre. Local
police units were neutralised and po-
litical prisoners released.

But what was missing throughout
was the establishment of a national
leadership, across the GDR, that could
unite the workers' committees into an
alternative centre of power to the SED
regime. Such an alternative leader-
ship would have had to move swiftly to
the overthrow of the government, the
dismantling of its repressive appara-
tus and the establishment of the demo-
cratic rule of the workers. This would
have meant an armed insurrection
across the GDR.

What was also missing was a politi-
cal party with the clear established
goal of the political revolutionary over-
throw of the Stalinist regime. A revolu-
tionary party would have championed
the democratic aspirations of the work-
ers, directing them against the entire
bureaucracy, promoting working class
democratic forms of organisation and
the overthrow of the regime at the
hands of democratic workers' coun-
cils.

It would have been able to advance
by example the need for an elected
national leadership for the rising, the
formation of full-blown workers' coun-
cils from the strike committees and
for an armed insurrection. It could
have directed the movement towards
a political revolution—the overthrow
of the bureaucracy, the seizure of the
planning apparatus and placing it un-
der the control of the workers. But
circumstances did not allow time for
the creation of such a party.

Resistance

On the 17 June over 25,000 Soviet
troops and hundreds of tanks moved
into Berlin and martial law was de-
clared. With makeshift weapons the
workers resisted, but the odds were
stacked against them. The core of the
resistance was crushed by brute force:
scores were shot on the streets, six
strikers were executed, four impris-
oned for life and tens of thousands
arrested and tried.

Discontent continued for weeks, with
the Leuna workers being addressed
by Ulbricht on 24 June at a meeting at
which only 1,300 were present out of
a workforce of 28,000! Not even half
of the SED members in the plant could
bring themselves to attend the meet-
ing. Half of the strikers were still out
on the 18th, and in militant workplaces
like the Kablewerke in Köpenick and
Block 40 on the Stalinallee, the strike
went on until the 21st.

But the rising itself had been
crushed, and for the time being the
SED's dictatorship over the working
class was secured. The battle was
over: but the deep social contradic-
tions that gave rise to it were not. They
were to continue and deepen, finally
leading to the destruction of Stalinism
and the GDR itself in the events of
1989.■

For a united Germany

THE 1953 events showed the
continuing significance of the
question of national unity. De-
spite the theory of the German peo-
ple's "collective guilt" for the crimes
of Nazism, common among German
leftists, there is nothing inherently
reactionary about the German nation.
National unity was a legitimate de-
mand against the insanity of a sys-
tem that can divide and tear whole
nations asunder.

As the persistent demonstrations
of solidarity and the hostility of work-
ers to the regimes of both East and
West displayed, the demand for revo-
lutionary reunification had to be cham-
pioned by socialists. It was a way of
undermining support for both regimes,
of building workers' unity, and of dis-
pelling the illusion that socialism could
be built in half a country.

The danger of the left ignoring demo-

cratic and national demands was dem-
onstrated in 1989. Then, forgetting
entirely the lessons of 1953, much of
the left, including so-called Trotskyists,
refused to call for revolutionary
reunification or to relate to the demo-
cratic aspirations of the masses.

Thus the road was opened, after
nearly forty years in which the masses
were ever more disillusioned with "so-
cialism", for the right wing in the form
of the Christian Democrats, to offer
the most "radical" solution of all:
national unity, and the destruction of
the GDR itself.

The demand for unification, which
could have been an integral part of a
fight for working class power in the
whole of Germany, was used to rally
the masses behind the restoration of
capitalism. That is how history re-
wards those who refuse to heed its
lessons.■

Stalinism after Stalin

THE UPRISING of East German
workers shocked the Stalinists
across the USSR and Eastern
Europe. It had occurred at a point
when the balance of power achieved
in the aftermath of the second world
war had been upset by the death of
Stalin in March 1953. The SED lead-
ers, along with their counterparts in
the CPSU, were struggling to estab-
lish their rule in the "post-Stalin" era.

Under Stalin the objectives of the
East German regime had been clear—
to concentrate on heavy industry and
large scale engineering in order to
contribute to the rebuilding of Soviet
and East German industry. This was
the intention of the SED leadership in
1952 with its announcement that
the watchword for the coming years
would be "The Building of Social-
ism".

Investments

Huge investments in projects, like
the construction of a new steel works
at the aptly named Stalinstadt, had a
knock on effect in driving down living
standards. The needs of the people
for consumer goods and even food
were subordinate to this objective. In
1950 the real wages of East German
workers were less than half their
1936 value, and the SED policy was
doing nothing to improve their living
standards!

Immediately after Stalin's death
Walter Ulbricht, general secretary of
the SED, continued with this policy.
But then new orders came through
from Moscow. In the aftermath of
Stalin's death, Beria and Malenkov
intended to renew an offer to the
West designed to secure the with-
drawal of American troops. It involved
a peace treaty, a united neutral Ger-
many, and free elections. This de-
manded a retreat from the current
economic policies, to convince the
US that they were genuinely willing
to sacrifice the GDR degenerate work-
ers' state to capitalism for the sake
of a more comfortable detente with
imperialism.

Suddenly the SED's policy of "The
Building of Socialism" was riddled
with officially-recognised "mistakes".
A "New Course" was proclaimed on 9
June 1953 which made serious con-
cessions to private capital, as well as
to farmers, the Church and the intel-
ligentsia. Those who had fled the
GDR were told that if they returned
all would be forgiven and they could

have their property back. Price in-
creases were withdrawn. Teachers
would not have to adhere to Stalinised
"Marxism-Leninism". Political prison-
ers would be released.

But the "New Course" left the in-
creased work norms for industrial
workers intact. The policy change
treated the capitalists and intelligentsia
with kid gloves while the workers
paid the price. Their anger grew at a
time that the SED leadership was
unstable, officially recognised as be-
ing capable of error, riddled with dis-
sent, and with one faction prepared
to countenance a capitalist
reunification of Germany on the
Kremlin's terms.

All the conditions for a revolution-
ary crisis were present. The masses
did not want to go on in the old way,
and the bureaucrats were divided
among themselves, unable to go for-
ward. So when the workers by their
direct action entered the stage of
German history once again, they did
so not merely in defence of their
immediate living conditions, but
around general political slogans: an
end to the dictatorship, free elec-
tions, and national unity.

The uprising of June 1953 cut
across all of the bureaucrats' ma-
noeuvres. Beria and Malenkov's will-
ingness to sell out the GDR to capi-
talism was reversed and they were
removed from power in the USSR,
with Khrushchev citing this as part of
his justification for replacing these
"enemies of socialism".

The faction in the SED which had
favoured this course of action was
expelled and removed from the party
at its subsequent Congress. The
threat of workers' revolt that the
"New Course" had opened up terri-
fied the Stalinists more than any-
thing else.

Aspirations

The democratic aspirations of the
workers, their hatred for petty bu-
reaucracy and tyranny at every level,
from the SED leadership to the fac-
tory administration, were plainly dem-
onstrated by the 1953 events. Such
aspirations were intimately linked to
the economic demands of the work-
ers. They wanted not only decent pay
and working hours, but the right to
speak their minds, to really control
their lives and their work free from
bureaucratic inefficiency and
repression.■

NICARAGUA

Sandinistas save Chamorro

A LONG running crisis in the UNO coalition finally caused it to fall apart at the end of last year. In the middle of the year the right wing launched a political offensive against what they saw as a series of compromises with the defeated Sandinista FSLN.

On coming to power in 1990 Chamorro had signed a "Transition Protocol" on behalf of the UNO government. This protocol agreed to respect various laws passed by the Sandinista government, especially the redistribution of expropriated land to the peasants, much of it belonging to the former dictator Somoza and his supporters.

Sandinista officials and civil servants were not to be dismissed or victimised. The army and police were to remain headed by Sandinista officers and the FSLN's Humberto Ortega was to remain armed forces Commander-in-Chief until 1997. Workers in the state-owned sector were to be given a 25% shareholding if any enterprise they worked in was privatised.

Chamorro's neo-liberal government had no intention of sticking to these agreements. Immediately it got into power it proceeded to attack public spending, sack thousands of civil servants and put up for sale many enterprises, refusing to give any commitments to the workers on ownership.

These attacks, combined with other draconian austerity measures such as ending subsidies on basic foods and raising taxes, were pulled up short by general strikes in May and July 1990.

Chamorro did not have a reliable state apparatus at her disposal and was forced to retreat. The police watched as the workers built barricades, the army was never deployed.

It was the Sandinistas who saved Chamorro. Far from throwing their weight behind the strike action they immediately entered into negotiations with Chamorro agreeing to a "social pact". The government would give certain guarantees to abide by the earlier accord and in return the Sandinistas would persuade the trade union leaders to lift the strikes and allow a period of "social peace".

Since then Chamorro's wing of the UNO have used a different tactic. They have tried to erode the gains made by the workers and peasants in the 1979 revolution bit by bit. They have avoided generalised confrontations, picking off different groups of

April saw the third anniversary of the inauguration of President Violeta Chamorro of Nicaragua. Much has changed since the heady days when the National Opposition Union (UNO) was dancing in the streets celebrating its victory over the Sandinistas in the 1990 election. In February the citizens of Managua saw 15,000 to 20,000 supporters of the UNO not dancing but demonstrating in the streets, calling for the resignation of Chamorro. John McKee explains why things have changed.

workers and making concessions where workers and peasants mobilise and occupy farms or factories. But all the time they relied on their tacit bloc with the Sandinistas to stay in power and proceed with major elements of their programme.

Many demobilised Sandinista army personnel and ex-Contras were granted land from the expropriated estates owned by the state. The government declared that peasants who had been granted plots under the Sandinistas could rest assured that they would not be handed back to the old owners. Instead some of the old owners would now receive compensation. But the National Development Bank simultaneously suspended financing to 75% of the country's farmers forcing many to sell the plots they had just been granted.

The same tactics were used against the workers. The government has proceeded apace with its privatisation programme. Of the 331 enterprises in state hands when UNO came to power 233 had been privatised or wound up by the end of 1992.

The government tried to flout the shareholding agreement on privatised enterprises resulting in a wave of strikes for wage increases, against redundancies and for the workers' share.

Despite the militancy of these struggles the fight for a 25% share, in what are often underinvested and loss making enterprises, is a retreat from the demand to keep these industries state owned. It avoids the struggle to defend the state enterprises and put them under the control of the workers. In the context of growing unemployment and underemployment, estimated at 60% in the urban areas, these struggles in individual enterprises offer little possibility of uniting workers against the government.

All this was not enough for the right wing. Early last year the right wing parties in UNO which controlled the National Assembly tried to pass laws revoking land and property distribution measures.

They also demanded a full scale purge in the army and police force of

all those connected with the FSLN and the resignation of Humberto Ortega. This was fully supported by the right wing Republicans in the US Congress.

Senator Jesse Helms produced a report denouncing continued "human rights abuses" by the police and army and attacking the Chamorro government for failing to purge the Sandinistas and return expropriated property, much of which belonged to "US citizens". Most of these "US citizens" were members of Somoza's counter-revolutionary inner circle, the hated National Guard, and leading Contras responsible for the murderous armed intervention paid for by Washington.

Helms succeeded in getting aid to the Chamorro government suspended last May and the right stepped up its offensive. Chamorro made a series of moves to placate Uncle Sam. In June a number of enterprises were quickly returned to US ownership including the Rosario Gold Mines, seized in 1980, and the Coca Cola and Pepsi Cola distributorships.

In September, just days after a visit to Nicaragua by John Maisto from the US State Department, Chamorro announced a major purge of the police, retiring twelve high ranking officials with connections to the Sandinistas.

Having drawn blood the right wingers, Godoy and Alfredo Cesar, attempted to push through the National Assembly (made inoperative by the withdrawal of the Sandinista deputies and the centre group which supports Chamorro) a series of laws aimed at restoring expropriated property. Their actions were declared illegal by the Nicaraguan Supreme Court and the victory of the Democrats in the US pulled the rug from underneath them.

On 26 December Chamorro closed the Assembly, surrounding it with armed police. When it re-opened in January it was the right's turn to boycott as the Sandinista deputies had formed a de facto coalition with the UNO centre, supporters of Chamorro, giving the President a stable majority. As a reward the

Sandinistas were given two minor ministries in the Government. FSLN leader, Daniel Ortega quickly called on the Sandinistas to drop their opposition to Chamorro in the interests of "national unity and a viable economic programme".

Last month the US administration restored its aid package, stalled for a

year. In return Chamorro announced that Humberto Ortega would be stepping down as Chief of the Armed forces two years early and that machinery would be put in place for the prompt resolution of disputes involving "US citizens' property rights."

The end of the governmental crisis marks a further step in the consolidation of the democratic counter-revolution. Chamorro will continue to erode the gains of the revolution at the same time as gradually removing any elements of Sandinista influence in the state apparatus. When the army and the police are firmly under the government's control she will quickly dispense with her Sandinista allies. They will have served their purpose. ■

SOUTH AFRICA

Dirty dealing continues

BY LESLIE DAY

SOUTH AFRICA'S multi-party talks are continuing against the background of a massive crackdown on the Pan Africanist Congress (PAC). Even if official talks are suspended at some point in the next period, the Mandela leadership of the ANC has made clear that "Nothing should be allowed to disrupt the progress thus far in the negotiation process".

The ANC leadership is so desperate for a settlement that allows them access to government that they are standing by while the police, with the backing of Law and Order Minister, Herman Kriels, continue their operation against PAC militants.

Members of the negotiating team on both the government and the ANC side claim to know nothing about the dawn raids carried out in May. De Klerk claims he had not been told in advance of the round-up of leaders:

"I was just told that there would be fairly widespread arrests as a result of long investigations."

Seventy seven were arrested including one wheelchair-bound PAC leader who had just been released from hospital! Whatever the extent of connivance of the president's office, the crackdown shows how the police and the military can continue to act alongside a negotiated settlement. Either the ANC is powerless to prevent this, or it is complicit in it.

The extreme right wing forces organised in the Conservative Party and around the new Committee of Generals are a constant pressure on the ruling National Party to crack down on black militancy and force more concessions from the ANC in the talks. They are scoring a number of successes.

At the same time, the ANC leaders know that they must deliver elections soon. After the upsurge of anger following Chris Hani's assassination, including two massive general strikes, the leadership is under pressure from their supporters in the townships.

The ANC has abandoned first its commitment to majority rule and now to a constituent assembly. The ANC and De Klerk have struck a deal over power-sharing that has been sold to other parties in the talks.

Most of the participants, including the PAC leaders, were happy as long as they had a place reserved at the table themselves. They are pre-

pared to allow a veto for the old white parties and their allies in a power-sharing deal which will last until the end of the century.

Now there are proposals to abandon the plans for elections to a constituent assembly, the body that decides the new constitution. Once again the ANC leadership is ignoring its former commitments and conference decisions. The black majority is being shut out from the decision making process. Some sort of interim government will preside over the transition—then a government will take over in which the ANC and the other black leaders join the old politicians in a partnership.

All of the events are a clear warning of what is to come. Despite the release of some PAC leaders, and the re-entry of the PAC into the talks, there will be further crackdowns. Some, perhaps, will be directed against the right wing to stop them rocking the boat but most designed to crush any militant challenge to this betrayal.

The ANC leadership's position is the inevitable consequence of their policy of building a "democratic" capitalist South Africa. In order to maintain capitalism and protect the bosses against the just demands of the black masses, the ANC will preside over more and more undemocratic measures.

It is ever more urgent that those in opposition to the leaders of both the ANC and the PAC break from them and demand an end to their betrayals. Working class organisations—stewards committees, unions, community organisations—must re-forge links, call the leaders to account and demand an end to talks. They must demand the immediate calling of a sovereign constituent assembly and convene it themselves, with their own organisations of struggle.

While the ruling class controls the state machine and the media there can be no free and fair elections. The working class needs to be organised and armed, not only to supervise elections but to break the power of the bosses who maintain oppression and exploitation, leaving millions in poverty. Only socialist revolution can guarantee real democratic rights and only revolution can break the power of the oppressors. ■



Chamorro has cause to celebrate

GERMAN STEEL STRIKE

Class struggle at a turning point

THE EAST German steel strike is over. The settlement that ended the fourteen day strike by engineers and steelworkers marks a change in the balance of class forces in the united Germany. The workers scored a victory, but at the cost of potentially dangerous compromises.

In February, the engineering employers' organisation Gesamtmetall gave notice that it would rip up an existing agreement to bring eastern wages to western levels by 1994. That meant refusing to pay a 26% increase on 1 April this year. Naturally Gesamtmetall pleaded that its decision was forced by economic difficulties, arguing that unit labour costs in the former German Democratic Republic (GDR) are already 70% higher than in western Germany.

But behind the provocation lay a calculated attempt to break the power of Germany's strongest union, IG Metall, not only in the east where it has recruited 750,000 new members, but also in the west. The longer term target is to get rid of the industry-based system of wage bargaining which allows the strength of the unions in major companies to establish the going rate for all plants. What the bosses want is company or, better still, local plant, bargaining, which will allow them to set workers against each other in the different firms and regions.

It is against this background that the new deal in the east has to be judged. Its main points are:

- a series of wage increases this year until the agreed 26% is reached
- a further set of staged increases to reach 84% of Western levels by June 1994
- 94% by June 1995 and, finally, equal pay by June 1996.

On the face of it, forcing Gesamtmetall to write into the deal a commitment to equal pay with the west is a resounding victory for the union. However, the extension of the time allowed for equalisation from 1994 to 1996 is only the first of several concessions made by the union. The second is that the timescale can be extended by a further six months if economic conditions are bad.

The most dangerous concession, however, lies in the acceptance, for the very first time, of a clause allowing employers to opt out of the whole deal.



"Solidarity between east and west" reads the IG Metall banner

This "hardship clause" can be invoked by firms who can convince a commission, made up of union and employers' representatives, that compliance with the scheme would create serious economic difficulties.

Given the recent OECD report which predicted a 1.1% drop in German production this year, and the continuing difficulty of attracting investment into the ex-GDR, such a condition might not be difficult to satisfy. More importantly this deal could establish a precedent for wage negotiations in western Germany.

Nevertheless, the strike that forced Gesamtmetall to retreat from its original plan has clearly altered the balance of class forces in Germany. Although there have been important local strikes and even occupations against the massive wave of closures that have resulted from the collapse of the GDR economy, this is the first widespread and concerted all-out strike in the eastern region since unification.

As such it represents a milestone in the reconstruction of the east German working class movement.

Although fourteen days of solid strike action was more than

BY PETER MAIN

Gesamtmetall had bargained for, it was not all that they got. Every passing day brought more support and more delegations to the engineers' and steelworkers' picket lines. The experience of solidarity against the common enemy that has put 40% of the workforce on the dole will have done much to restore the morale of all workers in the east.

Almost as significant as the strike itself was the support it received from workers in the west, who understood its significance for their own futures. The crowning point of the solidarity movement, and the factor that probably brought the bosses back to the negotiating table, was a strike by more than 30,000 engineers in the Mercedes-Benz plants in Stuttgart on 12 May.

On balance, the IG Metall strike has to be reckoned a success in that it did repulse a serious attack and force the employers to abandon their immediate plans.

However, in doing so, the union gave away important ground and allowed Gesamtmetall to retreat in relatively good order. There can be no doubt whatsoever that the re-

prieve will be used to mount further attacks and to exploit the weaknesses that the union's tactics revealed.

Germany's workers must also learn the lessons of the strike, above all, that the interests of "Ossies" and "Wessies" (slang for former east and west German citizens) are not counterposed but combined.

They have to learn that negotiated settlements are only temporary truces that have to be backed up by determined collective action. They have to learn that union negotiators who accept the same economic priorities as the bosses cannot be relied upon to lead strike action to victory but will always run for a compromise.

If a further extension of the equalisation agreement is to be avoided and if the "hardship clause" is not to become an excuse for every employer to renege on the whole deal, IG Metall members throughout Germany will have to build a new leadership: a leadership that is willing to mobilise the vast potential of the biggest union in the world in the interests of its members and of all the working class, not in the interests of the capitalist system. ■

ASYLUM LAWS

Smash Fortress Europe!

LAST MONTH, amid massive protests, the German parliament voted to change the country's constitution, abolishing Article 16 which guaranteed the right of asylum.

Now those arriving in Germany from a "safe third country"—Poland or former Czechoslovakia—will be summarily turned away. Others will face far more stringent criteria for asylum, and face being returned to endure torture, hunger or repression in their country of origin.

German anti-racist protesters built a mock Berlin wall to symbolise the new repressive barriers erected by united German imperialism. But the wall is not just going up around Germany. After the ratification of Maastricht the EC bosses are preparing new tougher immigration controls throughout the whole of Europe.

EC foreign ministers were due to meet at Copenhagen to outline the new controls early in June. The anti-immigration offensive is being co-ordinated by the so-called "Expulsion Sub Group of the Ad Hoc Group on Immigration"—a fine example of European democracy in practice, since nobody had heard of it until one of its documents was leaked last month!

The leaked document reveals the EC bosses are developing a full range of repressive measures modelled on Britain's anti-asylum laws and the racist immigration purges of the British and French police.

There will be a computerised list of undesirable immigrants common to all EC countries. Refugees are allowed only one chance to claim asylum, at their point of entry into the EC, to prevent them taking advantage of individual countries' laws and governments. As in Britain, and now in Germany, refugees arriving from "safe third countries" will be summarily ejected.

Britain's system of fines for airlines carrying asylum seekers will become the norm throughout Europe. The document also outlines plans for a new system of internal checks throughout Europe, targeted at the millions of black and ethnic minority workers who make up the 5% "non-European" population of the EC.

It is up to the workers' movement in every EC country to wage a united fight against these measures and to open Europe's borders to all who want to live and work here. ■

CHINA

Strikes signal growing anger

poverty to work long hours in horrendous conditions.

The most widely reported example concerns a textile plant in Shipai which employed 135 women workers, working on average 15 hours per day, with one day off per month. In their barrack-like accommodation, directly above the factory, there were two bathrooms for the entire workforce. At night this dormitory was locked and barred. On 30 May 1990, the entire building, including the dormitory, went up in flames. Only fifty people survived the fire, most with serious injuries sustained when they jumped from the fourth floor dormi-

BY ALAN JOHNSON

tory which had no fire escape and remained locked. Nor is this an isolated case. According to the Guangdong government's own statistics there were 1,700 factory fires in 1990. Twenty-six of these were characterised as "disasters" which, "cost hundreds of lives".

Since the middle of last year the plight of the workers has been steadily worsened by rising inflation, which even official figures put at 20%. This led to an important wave of strike activity in the widely separated regions of Yunan, Kunming, Beijing and

Guangdong in April and May this year.

In Zhuhai, a city on the Pearl River near Hong Kong, a strike at the Canon plant spread to three other foreign-owned plants and involved 6,000 workers.

Their main demands were against the erosion of wages by inflation and for better housing conditions. The strikers reportedly elected their own representatives but these, of course, were not recognised by the state-backed General Union.

Although the strikes lasted for several weeks they were, eventually, defeated after local authorities ruled all solidarity action illegal.

The significance of these strikes, however, lies in the fact that they took place at all.

After the bloody suppression of the Democracy Movement in 1989, there were general strikes in many cities of China. These were brought to an end by a combination of repression and concessions on wages and jobs.

That workers are, once again, organising themselves and prepared to take strike action suggests that the post-1989 period of political paralysis is coming to an end. The Stalinist bureaucrats and foreign investors alike may yet find their optimism misplaced. ■

Just four years after the massacre in Tiananmen Square, China is being hailed as the "economic miracle of the Nineties". Its average annual growth rate in recent years has been over 12%.

In the Special Economic Zones (SEZ), where foreign capital is allowed an almost completely free hand, economic development is even more spectacular: 19% growth in Guangdong, the province closest to Hong Kong, in the last year.

These growth rates are fuelled by more than just government tax concessions.

The privatisation reforms in the Chinese countryside have created a pool of 100 million unemployed in the interior provinces and many of the workers in the SEZ are forced by

SERBIA AND Croatia have effectively partitioned the republic of Bosnia-Herzegovina. The West, which encouraged Bosnia's secession from former Yugoslavia, has decided to do nothing about it.

In October 1992 the imperialists gathered in London to outline a "just" peace settlement. It was to be forced upon the Muslim, Serb and Croat militias in Bosnia. They drew up the "Vance-Owen plan", which divided Bosnia into ten ethnically based provinces to maintain the fiction of a single Bosnian state.

There was nothing just or progressive about the plan. It was a green light for ethnic cleansing, recognising in advance the expulsion of minorities within the ten areas. It leaves the capital of the Croat area, Mostar, with an enormous Muslim population with no rights. Last month the Croats ironed out this anomaly by beginning the mass deportation of the Muslims.

The imperialists allocated the Muslims large areas of Eastern Bosnia, then stood back as Serb militias captured these areas, herded thousands of refugees into tiny enclaves (Cerska, Srebrenica) and systematically besieged and captured these enclaves.

After browbeating the Croat and Muslim leaders to accept this unjust plan the imperialists were jubilant when, under threat of air strikes, the Serb leadership signed it too—at last month's Athens conference.

But the Bosnian Serbs—in their parliament and in a referendum—refused to accept the plan. The vast majority of Bosnian Muslims reject the plan too.

Implement

Faced with a plan they could only implement by a massive deployment of armed force the imperialists retreated. There was no big diplomatic conference, no token participation of the UN or the Yugoslav politicians—only a sleazy midnight "communiqué" issued from Washington by the foreign ministers of Britain, France, Spain, Russia and the USA.

In essence the new plan involves:

- recognition of Croatian and Serbian annexations
- recognition of the population transfers caused by ethnic cleansing
- the provision of six "safe areas" and a rump Muslim state in central

BOSNIA

Muslim communities condemned to death

BY PAUL MORRIS

Bosnia for the country's 44% Muslim population.

The plan maintains the fiction of the London and Athens conference decisions, with sanctions against Serbia and the no-fly zone still in place, but in reality they are a dead letter. The whole thrust of the new imperialist settlement is contained in the words: "We will co-operate closely to contain the conflict".

Containment involves recognising Serbia's repressive police regime in Kosovo, where the 90% Albanian population is deprived of basic rights, like access to government jobs and education. It draws a line along the Serbian-Macedonian border, behind which the imperialists will contain the conflict, subordinating the national rights of both Bosnian Muslims and ethnic Albanians to the prevention of a potential regional war involving Greece, Bulgaria, Turkey and Albania.

The "safe areas" are little more than enlarged prison camps for tens of thousands of refugees. A UN worker described life in Srebrenica, one of the largest "safe areas":

"There is nothing to do. There is little to eat. The Serbs do not allow any materials that could aid in long-term reconstruction to enter the town. There is no seed and they already missed the planting season anyway. There is no future in such a situation"

The deputy mayor of Srebrenica described it as "a death camp with a peaceful air about it".

Confirms

The new imperialist deal confirms to the letter what Workers Power has argued since the conception of the Vance-Owen plan:

- that the plan was a recipe for ethnic cleansing and could not save or recreate a multi-ethnic Bosnia-Herzegovina



- that imperialism never intervenes to protect the lives and rights of ordinary people, only its own strategic interests and profit sources

- that the Bosnian Muslims' reliance on and illusions in imperialist intervention was suicidal

- that the presence of UN troops (as opposed to humanitarian aid) would not stop ethnic cleansing but only lead to its international supervision.

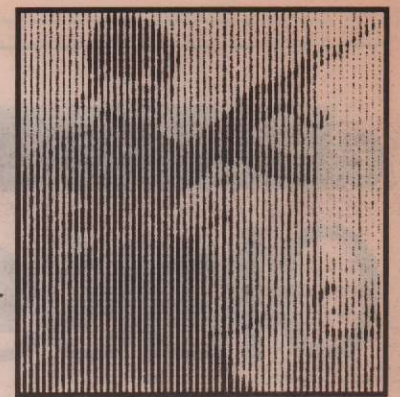
The deal reeks of imperialist hypocrisy. German imperialism egged on the Bosnian Muslims and Croats in last year's independence referendum, assuring them of quick international recognition. Clinton blustered about military intervention. But in the end fear of plunging their armies into an endless war, dragging the region's big military powers along with them, left the imperialists with no choice but to ratify the status quo.

Splits

Not least, this was caused by the splits within the imperialist camp. It was no minor squabble which led to the divergence of European and US policy on the Balkans, but the opening of a strategic fault line in imperialist diplomacy.

If Europe wants to be a unified economic super power it must take on the political responsibility of maintaining imperialist order in its own back yard, said the USA. It was manifestly not willing to do this. It was burdened by crisis-racked governments, discredited political leaders, constitutions forbidding aggressive militarism and conscript armies unsuitable for the job of policing a European equivalent of Vietnam.

In turn the USA, which after the Gulf War has developed a taste for winnable wars with few casualties on its own side, could not face the prospect of sending ground troops to Bosnia. In the Gulf they could impose imperialist order with air strikes and hi-tech armoured forces. Against the



armed masses of the Balkans they would have to get out of their vehicles to impose imperialist order, exposing themselves to the same treatment they meted out to Iraqi conscripts in Kuwait.

The new world order pronounced after the Gulf War, in which international co-operation would lead to imperialist peace settlements in all the troubled regions of the world, was already in disarray. The imperialists sacrificed the Kurds and Shias of Iraq so that Saddam's Iraq could survive to play a role in the new imperialist order. That should have served as a warning to those stupid enough to believe Bush and Major's lies. The new world order always meant sacrificing the interests of ordinary people to a balance of power maintained by their dictatorial rulers.

The USA's surrender to divided European imperialism, and thus, in effect, to the conquests of the Croat and Serb militias, is the death knell of the "new world order". It means they have decided to entrust imperialist order in the region to a greater Serbia headed by Slobodan Milosevic.

Destruction

Is Bosnia now to become a sealed off killing field, destined for further destruction and starvation? Only the working class can prevent that. It is now becoming clear to millions that imperialism has no progressive solution.

Workers Power resolutely opposed any western military intervention. We did so not out of callousness or indifference to the plight of the Bosnian Muslims. We opposed imperialist intervention because it would inevitably have reactionary consequences, both in the short term and the long term. We have been proved right.

At the same time Workers Power resisted the pressure of the Stalinist left and its 'Trotskyist' cheerleaders to immediately back Serbia. We said: if and when Serbia becomes the object of an imperialist military onslaught to impose its power in the region the character of the conflict will change. In that circumstance revolutionaries would have to fight to defend Serbia and defeat imperialism. But we warned against mistaking the liberal hand-wringing of the *Guardian* and *Independent* for the policy of British imperialism. Again we were proved right.

In Britain we need a fight to get the troops out of the Balkans now. They are effectively the jailers of the Bosnian Muslim people. We should demand the lifting of all sanctions against Serbia and the lifting of the arms embargo which effectively prevents the Bosnian Muslims from defending themselves.

We should demand an end to the charade of imperialist war crimes tribunals: the biggest war criminals in the Balkans cannot match imperialism's complicity in the genocide against the Bosnian Muslims. It is for the workers and peasants of ex-Yugoslavia to decide who are war criminals and deal with them accordingly.

In Bosnia, despite the equally reactionary nationalist politics of the Muslim, Serb and Croat leaders, the war is not simply a reactionary war on all sides. Since the Croat and Serbian states began the systematic partition of Bosnia and the systematic denial of the Muslims' national rights, the Muslims' struggle to defend themselves has been a legitimate struggle deserving the support of workers the world over. ■



Srebrenica: no food, no work, no crops, no ammunition—and imperialist troops are there to make it stick

IT SEEMS like every imperialist politician has an answer for the Bosnian crisis. Thatcher and part of the Labour left wanted to arm the Muslims. The Labour leadership wanted air strikes while Bill Clinton threatened direct military intervention. The British government wanted the Vance-Owen plan and has now settled for "safe havens".

Whatever else can be said about these imperialist solutions the one thing that unites them is their concreteness. They are practical answers to a perceived "problem" by the world's most powerful capitalist rulers.

Compare this practicality to the position advanced by the Socialist Workers' Party (SWP). In the May edition of *Socialist Review* Chris Bambery outlined the SWP's alternative to the imperialist solutions on offer. It is both vacuous and wrong.

Bambery correctly warned against the dominant British media view of Serbian Stalinist aggressors versus poor innocent Muslim and Croat democrats. He pointed out that:

"Far from being a clear cut war it is a multi-sided conflict over which ex-Stalinist gangsters preside—Milosevic of Serbia, Tudjman of Croatia and Kucar of the Bosnian Muslim state."

However, while this means we shouldn't accept the "clear cut" imperialist solution of military intervention it doesn't mean there is no class line to be drawn in Bosnia.

Revolutionary socialists, faced with a complex situation in another country, have a duty to address the concrete issues involved for the working class of that country and offer answers to it. That is the essence of internationalism. If we want to transform the progressive voices of opposition to the three gangster governments into a revolutionary working class opposition we have to outline the programme and tactics that would unite that opposition.

Three interviews accompanying Bambery's article indicate that those voices are dominated by pacifism and in some cases reliance on the "progressive" role of the imperialist UN. But pacifism is never able to give a lead to workers in an actual war, because it provides no concrete answers. It expresses the workers' progressive wish that the war will go away but fails to identify the causes of war and the working class answer to it.

Pious

Meanwhile the workers' sons are called up, their towns bombed, women are raped, communities are pogromed. Workers will look not to pious pacifist declarations against war but to those who can provide immediate armed solutions to these problems.

Workers Power recognises that, at the outset, the Bosnian civil war was reactionary on all sides. But the reactionary character of the leadership does not mean we have to abandon working class communities to the pacifist answer of sitting back and getting killed, or running away. We said, at the outset of the war, that every working class community had the right to defend itself against pogroms and ethnic cleansing.

A revolutionary socialist in a Muslim, Serb or Croat community under the threat of ethnic cleansing would have every right and duty to help organise the defence of that community, if necessary in alliance with sectarian and reactionary-led militias, but maintaining class independence and with the overt aim of making contact with workers of other communities and forming multi-ethnic militias. The whole history of the war, and events even now, show that while this is an uphill struggle, it is nevertheless possible.

Socialist Worker never confronted that task. It rested content to de-

SWP AND ARMS EMBARGO



R Socialist Review

"Watching the slaughter around the Bosnian town of Srebrenica many people, including readers of this Review, will feel something must be done. Yet pouring more arms into the region can only escalate the conflict."

Chris Bambery—*Socialist Review* May 1993

"Ending the arms embargo on the Bosnian Muslims might prolong and extend the conflict and imperil the humanitarian effort"

Douglas Hurd—19 April 1993

Echoing pacifists and Tories

BY COLIN LLOYD

nounce the far away Bosnian war as senseless on all sides. It gave no concrete answer to working class communities subject to ethnic cleansing and left them only with their illusions in imperialist politicians like Clinton and Thatcher (on the Muslim/Croat side) and expansionist ex-Stalinists like Milosevic (on the Serbian side).

This error has been deepened as the war's character changed. In October 1992, the imperialists' London Conference began the process of formulating the Vance-Owen plan to divide up the Bosnian state, effectively partitioning the majority of it between Serbia and Croatia. At this point the Croats broke their alliance with the Muslim dominated Bosnian government and turned against the Muslim militias. Meanwhile the two gangsters, Tudjman and Milosevic, sent emissaries to each other, engaged in secret meetings, re-opened the main highway between Serbia and Croatia and set about making the partition of Bosnia a reality through military force.

The inevitable by-product of this change of strategy was the destruction of the Bosnian Muslim community. The most recent fighting, for example, has seen Serb militias systematically attacking and over-running Muslim towns in eastern Bosnia (Cerska, Srebrenica, Zepa), and the Croats fighting to impose control over Muslim areas they have been allo-

cated by Vance-Owen (Vitez, Mostar). From the moment Tudjman and Milosevic concluded their alliance, with the tacit backing of the Vance Owen plan, the class line in the war changed.

Without for one moment supporting the war aims of the Izetbegovic government, revolutionary socialists had to make an alliance with the Bosnian Muslim forces to prevent mass slaughter and deportation.

Bambery says that the imperialist media has encouraged us "to view the war as one between a clear aggressor—Serbia—on the one side and clear victims on the other". However, in this case the imperialist media has not accurately reflected developing imperialist policy. The summation of imperialist policy came in May 1993 when the midnight deal between the NATO powers and Russia effectively backed Serb territorial conquests and buried the Vance-Owen plan.

Victims

The "clear victims" at present are the Bosnian Muslims, of whom over a million have been displaced with no imperialist backing for their re-settlement. They are the victims of an imperialist-Serbian-Croatian alliance of convenience to restore "order" in

the region and prevent the escalation of conflict. The price they are being made to pay for imperialist order is the smashing of their legitimate desire for self determination, the destruction of their communities.

None of this is to deny that Muslim forces have been involved in atrocities or ethnic cleansing. But if a class line is drawn, and the defence of the Muslims is legitimate, revolutionaries have to offer concrete solutions.

Here *Socialist Worker* Review fails completely. Bambery writes:

"Watching the slaughter around the Bosnian town of Srebrenica many people, including readers of this Review, will feel something must be done. Yet pouring more arms into the region can only escalate the conflict."

As a consequence Bambery not only rejects the imperialist arming of the Muslims but also the lifting of the embargo. He is prepared to see an imperialist arms embargo maintained to prevent the "escalation of conflict".

By these arguments Bambery seeks to offer a socialist alternative to the imperialist policy of intervention advocated by Thatcher. In the process he manages to equate the revolutionary position with the *actual* position of the leading faction of European and US imperialism! The very words could have come from the mouth of Douglas Hurd.

More pertinently, they could have come from the mouths of some of the pacifists Bambery interviews.

Bambery writes: "Western arms supplies to the Bosnian Muslims would not simply be used to defend their communities. They would inevitably be used in a vicious three sided war to partition Bosnia. It would also require massive Western intervention to ensure their delivery along Croat and Serb controlled roads and to train Bosnian Muslims in their use. Full scale sanctions against Serbia would give the green light to Croatia to launch an all out

war to win territory."

First of all, there is no need to call on the "West" to arm the Muslims. If workers, seeing the injustice and slaughter, actually rallied to the defence of the Muslims, the workers' organisations should themselves attempt to provide aid, including arms.

The idea that the Muslims can only get arms if the imperialists intervene is a confusion of military-technical questions with political questions. They could fly them in, for example, if the Bosnian militia was able to take control of Sarajevo airport. At present it is controlled by imperialist troops (the French Foreign Legion) on behalf of the Serbs.

Preferable

Most important, the argument that the weapons might be used for reactionary purposes is a complete red-herring. Arms sent to the Sandinistas might have been used to repress Trotskyists. Should we have refrained from solidarity with the Sandinistas? In the Spanish Civil War the Trotskyists argued that, while it was preferable to arm the leftist militias, it was necessary to demand arms for the anti-fascist, but nevertheless bourgeois, Republican government. That government received very few arms, but it used some of them to crush the workers' revolt in Barcelona in May 1937. Was it wrong to arm the Spanish anti-fascist forces?

As for the argument that sanctions against Serbia aid imperialism and the Croat gangsters, we fully agree. We are for the lifting of all imperialist sanctions against all states in Yugoslavia. We are for the lifting of the arms embargo, something the SWP refuses to demand.

The secret arming of Croatia by Germany, and Serbia's ability to arm itself, means that the "impartial" arms embargo is really an embargo against the Muslims with the objective of ensuring, initially, the success of the reactionary Vance-Owen settlement, and now of its pro-Serb replacement.

Socialist Worker is absolutely correct to oppose Western military intervention, to oppose blockading Serbia, and to refuse to call on the imperialists to "arm the Muslims".

But it has no practical solution of its own to replace that with, because it refuses to see revolutionary strategy as a concrete task. Many workers, viewing the complexity of the Bosnia war, say: "it's a mess, we can't do anything". *Socialist Worker* merely echoes them.

Strategy

Such a strategy is wrong but relatively harmless when operated far away in Britain. But operated in Bosnia it would leave revolutionaries with no answer to the life and death plight of millions. It would leave them echoing the pacifists, lighting candles, monitoring the media and calling for "demilitarising the Balkans".

A glance at the interviews carried alongside Bambery's article demonstrates the practical implications of such politics: Vaska Pesic of the Belgrade Anti-War Action Centre supports the Vance-Owen plan; Sidika Musajadic from the Sarajevo International Peace Centre "hoped for a peaceful solution", but faced with bombs falling now supports either western military intervention or arming the Muslims; Vesna Treselic from the Croatian Anti-War Campaign thinks military intervention could have had a progressive effect before the ethnic cleansing began.

These interviews are testimony not just to the bankruptcy of pacifism faced with a war, but to the bankruptcy of the SWP's centrism as well. Bambery offers no practical, socialist alternative to pacifism that can win genuine opponents of the gangsters away from the pro-imperialist conclusions they have begun to draw. ■



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CAMBODIA

Elections solve nothing

IN 1975 THE imperialists were thrown out of Cambodia by the Stalinist Khmer Rouge guerrilla army, led by Pol Pot. The Khmer Rouge regime of "Democratic Kampuchea" (DK) embarked on a reign of terror to fulfil their goal of "socialism in one country". Although the wild claims of two million executions under Pol Pot do not stand up to even a cursory study, hundreds of thousands did die through starvation, torture and execution.

Capitalist explanations for the terror of the "Zero Years" paint the Cambodian peasantry as easily manipulated, too backward and too stupid to run their own affairs. The source of all the problems was, quite simply, Pol Pot and his henchmen.

Without detracting from the real barbarism of the Pol Pot regime the reality was very different from this imperialist explanation. A glance at the history of Cambodia shows that imperialism itself was heavily responsible for the tragedy that engulfed the country.

By the late 1960s the US was feeling the squeeze in Vietnam. The puppet Republic of Vietnam regime in the South, and the US military, desperately needed to secure the western flank of the conflict—Cambodia. The US response was to launch B52 bombers against Cambodia. The first missions took place in complete secrecy.

In the five year "sideshow", as the war in Cambodia was described by the Pentagon, 45 kilos of explosives were dropped for every man, woman and child in Cambodia.

Approximately 600,000 were killed and another 600,000 injured, a total that matches and perhaps even surpasses the numbers killed under Pol Pot.

Horrific

Just as horrific was the damage done to agricultural land. The total workable farmland was reduced to one fifth of its pre-1970 level. It was the devastation of the B52s that created the conditions for the famines of the Pol Pot years.

The resistance to US imperialism and its puppet regime in Cambodia was spearheaded by the anti-urban and anti-Vietnamese Pol Pot clique in the Communist Party—the Khmer Rouge. Their policies were based on reactionary ideas of an economically independent, peasant-based utopia. The building of industry was inconceivable, they reasoned, without first achieving agricultural self-sufficiency.

After the victory of April 1975 the DK government set about the destruction not only of the bourgeois and capitalist property relations but also of the cities, industry and the working class. The tiny (less than 10% of the population) urban and rural working class were the key force for socialist construction. But Pol Pot saw them as enemies, tainted by city life and foreign influence.

The cities were evacuated, their inhabitants forced onto collective farms to work in the paddy-fields and on irrigation projects. Private property, right down to cooking pots, was abolished, along with money itself. The focus of the terror was not only the bourgeoisie and the old regime. Anything associated with the cities was destroyed. No section of society escaped the waves of executions and torture.

This regime soon came into conflict with its Vietnamese neighbour, whose own revolution had also become a victim of Stalinism. The extent to which both workers' states had degenerated became evident when they went to war with each other. There were clashes between Vietnamese and Kampuchean forces over disputed border areas as early as 1975.

Vietnam wanted a reliable, and preferably subordinate, ally between its Southern border and Thailand. DK

Under the auspices of the United Nations one of the world's key "trouble spots", Cambodia, has just witnessed elections designed to end the civil war. Chris Bryant looks at the background to these elections and explains why none of the alternatives on offer can bring a progressive solution to the conflict any nearer.



Sihanouk's fighters—fed by the UN, armed by China and the US

wanted to reclaim the territories of the ancient Angkor empire which included a large slice of the fertile rice growing area of Vietnam's Mekong Basin. Border skirmishes escalated to full scale war by December 1978.

With the support of a faction of Kampuchean Stalinist dissidents the Vietnamese invasion drove out Pol Pot and established the People's Republic of Kampuchea (PRK). It was no more democratic than the regime it replaced. But Vietnam gained a reliable ally.

Despite having condemned the DK regime in the past, the USA—seeing Vietnam as its main enemy—now recognised it as the only legitimate government of Cambodia, blocking PRK representation at the UN.

The USA insisted that millions of dollars in aid should be channelled through the refugee camps on the Thai border that were under the control of anti-PRK forces—Pol Pot's Khmer Rouge, the petty bourgeois nationalist Khmer People's National Liberation Front (KPNLF) and Norodom Sihanouk's royalist resistance. Only one quarter of the aid agencies channelled any aid through the PRK despite it controlling the areas in which

the overwhelming majority of the Cambodian population lived.

To increase the pressure on the PRK government the US pressured its three opponents into an unholy alliance. Basing themselves on the displaced population in the refugee camps, fed by Western aid and armed by the West and China, this alliance, within which the Khmer Rouge was the strongest military force, waged a low intensity war from 1979. Even today large areas remain under Khmer Rouge control allowing Thai capitalists and the Khmer Rouge themselves to exploit the gemstones and timber resources of the north-west of the country.

Pressure

The isolation of the PRK regime placed it under enormous economic pressure. And this pressure pushed it towards accepting a deal with its opponents. In the late 1980s, following Eastern Europe and Vietnam, the PRK retreated even further from any rhetoric about socialist planning. They marked their policy turn by renaming the country the State of Cambodia (SOC).

In 1989, under pressure from Moscow, the imperialist embargo and the economic crisis at home, Vietnamese forces withdrew from Kampuchea, leaving the 50,000 government forces and the quarter million strong militia to face the anti-government forces alone. Civil war continued to wreck the lives of thousands of Cambodians. But it was clear that the regime was prepared to settle on imperialism's terms.

After a series of stop-go talks, the four principal forces finally reached agreement on terms for a settlement in October 1991—the Paris Accords.

China was bullied into stopping its arms supplies to the Khmer Rouge and the hawks in the Pentagon, still fighting the Vietnam War, came to realise that they had created a Frankenstein's monster in the regenerated Khmer Rouge. The push towards a pro-imperialist peace settlement gathered pace.

The agreement was based on UN-controlled free elections in May 1993 with disarmament of all non-government forces. Government forces were to be restricted to a purely defensive role. The 16,000 troops, 5,000 civilian personnel and the \$2.5 billion bill

of UNTAC—the United Nations Transitional Authority in Cambodia—were the result of this agreement.

All UN forces are to be withdrawn by September. In the meantime the Supreme National Council, set up in 1990, headed by Norodom Sihanouk and comprised of members from each of the four factions, would oversee the moves towards democracy.

Son Sann's KPNLF feared complete eradication in the elections, as they had no serious base inside the country. The Sihanoukists, while fearing an SOC majority hoped to rely on the mystique of Sihanouk himself, generated in the relatively calm and prosperous days of the early to mid-1960s.

The Khmer Rouge, which has long ceased to maintain even a formal commitment to any sort of "socialism", became the main opponents of the deal, fearing that a victory for the forces of the SOC would leave them once again totally isolated.

Their main objective was to grab as much land as possible in order to place themselves in a strong position after the elections. By these means they hoped to be able to mount a renewed challenge to the new government. They eventually withdrew from the elections, denouncing them as a sham. They refused to hand over their arms.

Despite their threats at disruption of the elections over one thousand Khmer Rouge guerrillas, including Pol Pot's brother, turned out to vote. Presumably they voted for Sihanouk's FUNCINCEP, on the grounds that he had promised the Khmer Rouge a place in any new government; a promise that he has since retracted. Sihanouk's son, Prince Norodom Ranariddh, has not retracted his promise to give his father executive power as head of state if they win the elections!

Turnout

Having seen the impressive turnout for the elections, over 90% of the 4.7 million registered voters, the Khmer Rouge relented and decided widespread electoral disruption would be counter-productive. But this does not mean that they have ceased to be a force to be reckoned with. They have a battle-hardened, well armed guerrilla army of 16,000 and are able to operate in about one third of the country.

The SOC forces have themselves been involved in disruption and intimidation during the campaign. It may have been less violent than expected but it was still a bloody campaign. Whatever the outcome of the elections, the war will not stop.

The UN operation has nothing to do with the democratic rights of the Cambodian people. It is all about building a new world order in which the imperialists can gain untrammelled access to the gems, the timber and the rubber of Indochina. It is a plan that must not be allowed to succeed.

Boycott

Nevertheless it would have been wrong for socialists to boycott the elections. The whole process should have been torn out of the hands of the imperialists and the anti-working class cliques in the Supreme National Council. Local committees of peasants and workers needed to put forward their own slates for the elections and defend the electoral process by refusing to hand over their arms.

In place of the sham constitutional elections, socialists would have fought for a democratic constituent assembly, convened and defended from below by armed workers and peasants. There should have been no collaboration with UNTAC forces and a campaign, military if necessary, is needed to drive them out immediately. ■

Even today large areas remain under Khmer Rouge control allowing Thai capitalists and the Khmer Rouge themselves to exploit the gemstones and timber resources of the north-west of the country

Democracy and South Africa

Dear Workers Power,
Leslie Day's article on South Africa in the last issue unfortunately fails to explain in all its complexities the balance of class forces. The article is abstract in its description of the strength of the South African working class.

It is true to say that this class has the potential to overthrow apartheid but only if it is organised at least around a democratic programme. However, it is also possible that imperialist pressure brought to bear on the bourgeoisie amidst the threat of a revolutionary uprising, could force them to formally sweep away at least one of the main bastions of apartheid, the denial of universal suffrage.

In failing to analyse the relationship between the South African bourgeoisie and imperialism the article also fails to foresee this possible outcome.

The article gives a very partial explanation of the "strategy of permanent revolution", restricting it to the "struggle for democracy" seen as the establishment of "untrammeled universal suffrage".

Trotsky's genius lies in his understanding that the bourgeois democratic revolution was incapable of resolving all the democratic tasks facing the peasantry and the working class. For example, the agrarian and national questions and the tasks of the anti-colonial or anti-imperialist struggle could only be resolved in the interests of these oppressed classes by the socialist revolution.

This holds true today for South Africa and all the other African states where national liberation struggles have failed to wipe out oppression of the peasantry and the working class, and merely supplanted the colonial ruling class by the new ruling class of the national bourgeoisie of those states.

The task that therefore faces every socialist in South Africa is the struggle for a programme that places at the forefront more democratic demands than just the question of suffrage, demands which the black petit bourgeois leaders are unable to meet. Furthermore, if the main demand is only for universal suffrage it is also possible that the bourgeoisie will grant this right so long as they are confident of the ANC's guarantees to protect capitalism.

Lastly, Leslie Day correctly places the demand for the Constituent Assembly but adds a further one for "immediate elections to a truly representative body". What is this body? Is it not the task of the Constituent Assembly to determine the nature of the governing body?

Communist greetings,
S Roper
North London

DEFEND CUBA!

Dear Comrades,

In the March issue of Workers Power there is an article entitled, "Cuban Elections—Stalinist Farce". Nowhere in this article is there a call for the defence of the Cuban revolution or how we who live outside of Cuba can best defend Cuba.

In fact, on page 11 of the same issue there is a call for the defence of Bosnia. The regime in Bosnia is bourgeois, nevertheless I believe you are correct in calling for military aid to the Bosnian government.

Cuba is entitled to our full defence and solidarity, despite the presence of Fidel Castro and his caste. Although Cuba does not face a genocidal shooting war like Bosnia, the United States' economic blockade of Cuba may very well lead to the same ultimate result.

Castro's methods, borrowed from Stalinism, undermine the defence of the Cuban revolution. We cannot afford to be professional critics. A revolutionary newspaper, such as yours, is supposed to be an organising tool. If it remains on the sidelines, commenting on the mistakes of other revolutions, such as in your article on Cuba, it scarcely can be



Castro on the election trail

called a revolutionary newspaper.

We have to be the best defenders of the Cuban revolution, better than Castro and

his groupies, who don't dare criticise their glorious leader.

Yours fraternally,
Earl Gilman
San Francisco

Nationalism and imperialism

Dear Comrades,

During the Gulf War we had the campaign for the liberation of Kuwait, and subsequently the Kurds (only those in Iraq!) and now demands are being made for the liberation of the Bosnian Muslims. In every country calls are made for a US intervention in Yugoslavia. The 1968 generation of middle class student radicals and petit bourgeois "intellectuals" has come full circle and is now lined up behind the USA's New World Order.

For many years now there has been a dramatic deepening of the economic crisis. For imperialism to survive it must radically overthrow all the revolutionary conquests of the ex-Stalinist East and impose on the planet an Orwellian nightmare of a dictatorship. The Vance-Owen plan for Yugoslavia is a blueprint for a neo-colonial dictatorship. UN presence will increase from 25,000 to 75,000 to...? And for how long?

Those on the "left" who see the cause of bloodshed as being due to the outbreak of "nationalisms" or to inter-imperialist antagonisms, are in contradiction to reality, and worse. They cover up the truth and disorientate the working class. Imperialism is intervening with all the means available to dissolve the old Yugoslavia into ten tiny statelets. For this reason the demands for a Macedonian state encompassing land from Bulgaria and Greece gains such strategic importance and why the Clinton administration has been sending UN "peacekeepers" by the hundreds.

Today the use of the term "Yugoslav" is banned in all the republics that declared "independence". Autonomy (and counter-revolution) or federation: that is the question. Those on the "left" who have prematurely declared the

death of the Yugoslav Federation tail end the imperialist "death of communism" refrain. They are once more confronted with the reality of living social forces resisting dissolution and disintegration. One only needs to look at Milosevic's attempts to impose the Vance-Owen Plan and its rejection by the people.

Fraternally,
V N Gelis

Dear Workers Power,
Last month's article on the carnage in Bosnia-Herzegovina did a good job in exposing the true role of imperialism in the region as well as showing how laughable the positions of some groups on the left are, who insist that the immediate aim of imperi-

alism is to destroy the Serbian degenerate workers' state.

In the past you have made it clear that you did not support the reactionary aims of the Muslim nationalists, who would be only too ready themselves to carry out a similar policy of ethnic cleansing as the Serbs and Croats.

But your last article did not say this anywhere. By baldly stating you were in favour of the victory of the Bosnian Muslims without explaining that you are roundly opposed to the expansionary aims of some Bosnian nationalists, you were in danger of making an adaptation to Bosnian nationalism.

Yours in comradeship,
Joan Dark

MENTAL HEALTH

Dear Workers Power,

Further to the letter in your May issue about disability, I also find it surprising that you have never had an article on the subject of mental health.

According to a pamphlet recently published by the Mental Health Foundation, which every socialist should read, one in four of the UK population are mentally ill at one time or another (over three million severely).

A study taking place in London shows that of 1,518 homeless people in London most have had multiple short-term admissions to psychiatric hospitals.

The mentally ill are frequently sectioned by the police and then held down and forcibly injected with drugs without being told what they are being given or why.

The current government emphasis is on community care and the closure of psychiatric hospitals. But the govern-

ment has stated that, "community care in itself creates no new category of entitlement to housing" and that "there is no evidence to suggest that there will be immediate changes or a need for a new range of housing options."

Individuals I know have had difficulty getting into hospital for short-term care and my experience is that no one chooses to go into hospital unless they are really ill.

It is estimated that only 10% of the money needed for mental health care is being spent.

I haven't come across any studies on discrimination at work, although 16% more working days are lost through mental illness than through strikes. I've met people who have either never worked or only had temporary jobs.

Since one in four potential members are obviously suffering I hope WP takes this issue more seriously in the future.

Chris Goodwin

WHERE WE STAND

WORKERS POWER is a revolutionary communist organisation. We base our programme and policies on the works of Marx, Engels, Lenin and Trotsky, on the documents of the first four congresses of the Third (Communist) International and on the Transitional Programme of the Fourth International.

Capitalism is an anarchic and crisis-ridden economic system based on production for profit. We are for the expropriation of the capitalist class and the abolition of capitalism. We are for its replacement by socialist production planned to satisfy human need.

Only the socialist revolution and the smashing of the capitalist state can achieve this goal. Only the working class, led by a revolutionary vanguard party and organised into workers' councils and workers' militia can lead such a revolution to victory and establish the dictatorship of the proletariat. There is no peaceful, parliamentary road to socialism.

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

In the trade unions we fight for a rank and file movement to oust the reformist bureaucrats, to democratise the unions and win them to a revolutionary action programme based on a system of transitional demands which serve as a bridge between today's struggles and the socialist revolution. Central to this is the fight for workers' control of production.

We are for the building of fighting organisations of the working class—factory committees, industrial unions, councils of action, and workers' defence organisations.

The first victorious working class revolution, the October 1917 Revolution in Russia, established a workers' state. But Stalin and the bureaucracy destroyed workers' democracy and set about the reactionary and utopian project of building "socialism in one country".

In the USSR, and the other degenerate workers' states that were established from above, capitalism was destroyed but the bureaucracy excluded the working class from power, blocking the road to democratic planning and socialism. The corrupt, parasitic bureaucratic caste has led these states to crisis and destruction. We are for the smashing of bureaucratic tyranny through proletarian political revolution and the establishment of workers' democracy. We oppose the restoration of capitalism and recognise that only workers' revolution can defend the post-

capitalist property relations. In times of war we unconditionally defend workers' states against imperialism.

Internationally Stalinist Communist Parties have consistently betrayed the working class. Their strategy of alliances with the bourgeoisie (popular fronts) and their stages theory of revolution have inflicted terrible defeats on the working class world-wide. These parties are reformist and their influence in the workers' movement must be defeated.

We fight against the oppression that capitalist society inflicts on people because of their race, age, sex, or sexual orientation. We are for the liberation of women and for the building of a working class women's movement, not an "all class" autonomous movement. We are for the liberation of all of the oppressed. We fight racism and fascism. We oppose all immigration controls. We fight for labour movement support for black self-defence against racist and state attacks. We are for no platform for fascists and for driving them out of the unions.

We support the struggles of oppressed nationalities or countries against imperialism. We unconditionally support the Irish Republicans fighting to drive British troops out of Ireland. We politically oppose the nationalists (bourgeois and petit bourgeois) who lead the struggles of the oppressed nations. To their strategy we counterpose the strategy of permanent revolution, that is the leadership of the anti-imperialist struggle by the working class with a programme of socialist revolution and internationalism.

In conflicts between imperialist countries and semi-colonial countries, we are for the defeat of "our own" army and the victory of the country oppressed and exploited by imperialism. We are for the immediate and unconditional withdrawal of British troops from Ireland. We fight imperialist war not with pacifist pleas but with militant class struggle methods including the forcible disarmament of "our own" bosses.

Workers Power is the British Section of the League for a Revolutionary Communist International. The last revolutionary International (Fourth) collapsed in the years 1948-51.

The LRCI is pledged to fight the centrism of the degenerate fragments of the Fourth International and to refound a Leninist Trotskyist International and build a new world party of socialist revolution. We combine the struggle for a re-elaborated transitional programme with active involvement in the struggles of the working class—fighting for revolutionary leadership.

If you are a class conscious fighter against capitalism; if you are an internationalist—join us!

Workers power

★ **BOSNIA:**
No imperialist solutions!

Turn to pages
12 & 13

British section of the League for a Revolutionary Communist International

RACIST ATTACKS

"I HAVE lost count of the number of times my windows were smashed. We must keep our children inside all the time. I only go out when I must. It is like being in prison." These are the words of Shinaz Mohamed, a Somali refugee living on Sheffield's Manor housing estate.

Last month, after suffering a brutal campaign of stoning, beating, excrement smearing and racial abuse, the Manor's entire Somali community were offered rehousing at their own request.

It was a victory for racism; chilling evidence that the rising tide of racist attacks is bringing Britain its own form of "ethnic cleansing".

In the same month the Tory right, spearheaded by Winston Churchill, launched its own campaign of racist propaganda. Churchill demanded an end to immigration painting a lurid picture of northern cities overrun with "well over 50% immigrants", and the Muslim call to prayer drowning out Christian church bells.

Even his pals in the mainstream Tory Party were forced to concede that Churchill is "extremely foolish and profoundly ignorant". In West Yorkshire, ethnic minorities make up only 8% of the population.

The mainstream Tories claim that immigration laws foster "extremely good" race relations. Churchill is not alone in being an ignorant fool.

The immigration laws target black people as "aliens" to be kept from "swamping" white communities. The same idea is in the heads of the white racists when they attack black people and drive them from their homes.

From the official racism of immigration laws, through far-right chauvinists like Churchill, through the organised fascists, right down to the habitual racism black people experience day in, day out at work, in pubs and clubs, racism is a poison which runs through capitalist society.

It causes misery, discrimination, abuse, harassment and, increasingly, injury or death.

In April Stephen Lawrence became the fourth black youth to be murdered in South East



We fight back!

London when a gang of white youths racially abused him and stabbed him to death.

In March two white youths were arrested for the abduction and murder of London taxi driver, Fiaz Mizra, after boasting in public about "killing a Paki".

These were just the latest in a growing list of racist murders.

What is the answer?

The politicians claim the law can protect black people from racist attack. Metropolitan police chief Paul Condon has ordered his force to be "totally intolerant of those who indulge in racial abuse".

But the police force itself is riddled with racists. In the last twenty years, 80 black people have died at their hands. Time and again police

refuse to recognise the racist motivation of attacks. The law they uphold is a law that criminalises black people who defend themselves against racist attack.

This month four Bengali youths from London's Drummond Street go on trial for GBH and violent disorder after they fought back against a gang of white youths who had invaded their community. Charges against the white youths have been dropped.

This is no isolated case. The police repeatedly nick the black people who defend themselves and try to get them banged away. It has happened in leafy Norwich and inner city Newham. It is not a case of the odd bad apple. Racism is built into the British police force.

The Somali families on the Manor estate had panic buttons linked to the police station, nightly tours by social workers and a ten-strong police squad on patrol around the clock. All this did not stop them being driven from their homes.

The most effective way to combat racist attacks is organised self defence.

In 1981, when Bradford's black communities came under sustained racist attack, the youth organised self defence and armed themselves with makeshift weapons. Twelve were charged with conspiracy, but acquitted after a jury recognised their right to act in self defence.

Since then there have been many more examples of organised self defence, involv-

ing both black and white youth, against the racist onslaught. Many have ended up tried and convicted.

Today it is an urgent task to create open, well organised community defence organisations, accountable to community and working class organisations, prepared to

take on and defeat the racist attackers. The Labour Party and the trade unions should recognise black people's right to self defence and campaign for the dropping of all charges against those arrested for resisting attack.

But self defence is only the beginning of the fight to roll back the racist tide.

What drives white working class people to take out their anger and frustration on black people is the fact that no establishment political party has an answer to poverty and unemployment. Labour, Tories and Liberals alike can only wring their hands and express mock concern at the slum housing, poverty, crime and unemployment that haunt many working class communities.

Beneath the official anti-racism of the politicians is the whispered racism which blames immigration for unemployment, black youth for rising crime and black cultures for "poor race relations".

Meanwhile the fascists and far right racists are only too happy to peddle their quick solutions to the problems facing working people: repatriation, hang the "muggers", "rights for whites" and all the other moronic rubbish their newspapers and stickers proclaim.

The Labour and union leaders are determined not to fight back against the Tory attacks that cause poverty and unemployment. They rest content with the idea that they can win an election in four years time, they build bigger and flashier union bureaucracies. But by refusing to offer a working class answer to the economic crisis they leave a growing number of white workers prey to a racist, bosses' answer.

The result is measured in the corpses of black youth and the smashed windows of refugee families.

Every worker, black or white, sickened by the growth of racism should join the fight now, not only for organised self defence but for a fightback across the board against the bosses' system that breeds racism.■

DEMONSTRATE!
Remember
Ruhalla Aramesh
Saturday 12 June 11.30am
Norbury Park, Croydon
Called by ARA