

Workers power

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Number 186 February 1995

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CLAUSE FOUR:



**RICH
BOSSSES**



**STRIKING
WORKERS**

Which side are you on?

BLAIR IS doing a nationwide tour. That's Blair the Labour leader, not Blur the pop group. But Tony's gigs are ticket-only too. The tour is timely. Anger at the Tories is deep. Workers everywhere are looking to Labour to provide a challenge to years of attacks on their jobs, their living standards, their civil liberties and their communities. A rousing message of opposition to the crisis ridden, but vicious, Major government will be widely welcomed.

Unfortunately this is not the message Blair is bringing. Instead he is whipping up support for his campaign to get rid of Clause 4 of Labour's constitution—the one that states that Labour has as an objective, "the common ownership of the means of production".

This is a massive diversion. It takes us all off the anti-Tory high road into the backstreets of internal Labour wrangling.

But it is more than just a diversion. The campaign against Clause 4, the nationwide series of rallies, the attendant press and television coverage, the ridiculing of the left of the party and the winning of support from the big trade union bosses—these are all Blair's way of proving that bosses' Britain will be safe with new Labour.

Labour's working class supporters don't get a single hard promise. No money for the health service; no re-nationalisation of water, gas, electricity or rail; no repeal of anti-union laws. Not one definite job creation scheme will figure in Blair's speeches.

All he offers is a new empty constitutional turn of phrase that

will dilute Labour's already watery commitment to act in workers' interests.

That is why it is important for workers to join the fight to stop Blair.

Organise now to demand that he starts offering policies that will actually benefit workers. Stop him from getting rid of Clause 4.

The more success we have now the better placed we will be to stop the sell outs he will try to stage once he gets into office.

We can rally the forces of resistance to a future Blair government by mobilising Labour supporters and trade unionists everywhere against Blair now. ■

Why Labour must re-nationalise—pages 8&9

Post office workers defy Tory laws — page 4

JUST BEFORE Christmas Shiji Lapite left his house in Clapton, East London, to get a take-away. He never came back. His wife and two children were told by the police the next morning that Shiji was dead, his neck broken.

They should know, they killed him. Shiji, a 34 year old Nigerian, was the sixth victim since 1971 to die while in the tender care of Stoke Newington police. No police officer has ever been brought to book for any of these deaths. This time, despite a 300 strong protest outside the police station, the police decided that there was no need for an independent investigation into Shiji's death.

It is because the police look after their own that working class people have to do the same. The vast majority of the victims of police brutality are working class. The working class should take the fight for justice into its own hands. The investigation of crimes such as police assault should become the subject of our own inquiries: workers' inquiries.

Many people may balk at this idea: isn't detection and investigation the preserve of properly trained professionals? Shouldn't it take place in a proper court? Isn't the state a neutral arbiter, despite occasional miscarriages of justice?

There is no shortage of evidence that "proper" justice isn't working. The racists who battered Qudus Ali have escaped punishment. So have the Bristol fairground workers who left Marlon Thomas in a coma. While the Mark Harris Campaign won an open verdict at the coroner's inquest, the police, who almost certainly murdered him, are still walking free.

Even when public pressure is built up to such a degree that some measure of justice is achieved, the guilty are still protected. In 1993, for example, the Cardiff Three were freed when it was established that Steven Miller's confession was made under duress. There was the clearest evidence that the three had been fitted up by the South Wales Police. Yet no action whatsoever was taken against the police—they even had the nerve to go on television clearly hinting that the three were still guilty.

As a result, three innocent men remain stigmatised. Their families and communities are left feeling bitter and impotent. All too often this impotence leads working class people to conclude that struggle is futile.

We are not utopian. In demanding a workers' inquiry we recognise that we can't take the administration of justice out of the hands of the state. Under stable conditions working class communities will not be able to match the police and courts for their facilities of detection, assessment of evidence and certainly we can't carry out sentencing.

But a workers' inquiry has positive virtues. Those most affected by injustice form its core—a workers' inquiry should, in the first place, be made up by the families of victims and representatives of the local working class community. In addition the enquiry can and should draw in representatives of the wider working class, from the workplaces and the unions.

This working class composition is vital, for it means that the interests of those who have suffered injustice do not get lost in the normal legal ping-pong games that lawyers play. And it gives the families of a victim a network of support and solidarity from their community.

Such an enquiry can keep the spotlight on the police, making them think carefully before smothering evidence, or re-writing notes supposedly taken at the time of the offence. A big ongoing campaign could force the police to back off from intimidating witnesses.

In addition, given the racist character of the police, a workers' inquiry can help pressure the police to investigate racist attacks properly. Too often the police deny the obvious and

DEATHS IN CUSTODY

The truth and nothing but!

THE CASE FOR THE WORKERS' INQUIRY

cover up evidence that points to an organised and political motive in an attack.

The workers' inquiry, first and foremost, will need to collect evidence: a time-consuming and possibly costly exercise. This is where we need to call on the resources of the organised labour movement. Most trade unions will have passed resolutions against racism; all have full-time officials and possibly an anti-racism officer.

How often, however, will these unions take an active role in investigat-

ing the deaths of black people in police custody? This is precisely the role we believe they should play: forming the administrative heart of the inquiry, working alongside the families and communities of the victims.

The workers' inquiry, however, should not be a bureaucratic exercise. Every effort should be made to draw all those affected into an active role. Those charged with collecting evidence should hold regular forums at which the findings can be discussed and new evidence brought forward. These forums can act as the

springboard for active resistance: organising the picketing of police stations, for example, or quick response networks to racist and fascist attacks.

Labour councillors and MPs should be called upon to play a role in the workers' inquiry: to provide resources, attend meetings and act upon its recommendations. If the inquiry leads to better local government practice or parliamentary legislation benefiting working class people, all well and good.

At the very least, the findings of the

workers' inquiry can be published and distributed, again making use of the resources of trade unions and Labour councils. This evidence can be an important weapon in the class struggle, counteracting the barrage of false statistics behind which government bureaucrats love to hide.

Short of overthrowing the whole apparatus of repression and cover-up it is principally through the legal system that we can actually get financial compensation, or see the police locked away for murder.

Private prosecutions against the police and official public inquiries may be the route to securing these. However, how many working-class people can afford private prosecutions, and how many succeed?

How often do public inquiries lead to the necessary action? A workers' inquiry, conducted with the aid of sympathetic legal advisers can help get the right result.

Most importantly, the workers' inquiry gives us a glimpse of what true justice can be like: transparent, accountable, free from legal or bureaucratic disguise. It helps working class communities to be self-reliant, watchful and critical of the whole apparatus of "justice".

It might prevent a seventh death at Stoke Newington police station, it might help get the whole place shut down. ■

CHILD SUPPORT AGENCY

One law for the rich...

IF ANYONE feared that the Tories were immune to mass protest then they must have been heartened by events in January. The government, in the person of Peter (blame-single-mums-for-everything) Lilley, made a big climb down over the Child Support Agency after a sustained campaign of demonstrations, lobbies and letter writing.

The press welcomed this as a victory for "common sense". But just what do the changes amount to, and how come the Tories were willing to back off over this when they have been so immune to other campaigns against social injustice?

The great "victory" is that men will be better off. This is excellent for tens of thousands of working class men who were penalised by the CSA. No-one will have to pay more than 30% of their income in maintenance, the CSA will now be able to take into account the cost of travelling to see children. "Clean break" arrangements, where a lone parent has been "given" the house as part of the settlement, will be recognised.

One of the main concessions is that "non-benefit" cases from before 1993 are to be deferred indefinitely. Sounds good. But hang on a minute—why only "non-benefit" cases? Well, these are cases where any money raised through the CSA would go directly to the lone parent, usually the mother.

If you thought that was the whole point of the CSA, you'd be wrong. The point was to raise money for the Treasury, which is why they will continue to pursue cases from before 1993 where benefit is involved. If successful the money raised doesn't go to the mother but to the state.

To show that the Tories are not mean to women, they also announced that women would get £5 a week from the money raised. Fine. But this won't start until 1997, and the women won't actually get it until they find a job. In other words, the

CSA will act as a sort of piggy bank, saving up a bit of money as a reward for when you stop claiming benefits.

This led Sue Slipman of the National Council for One Parent Families to note that "those lone parents who cannot get out to work... will not benefit from the changes at all."

Never mind that it is precisely single mothers on benefits who need the extra money, and often can't get a job because there is no child care available. Never mind that millions of children are therefore brought up in poverty, dogged by poor health.

These changes will make life easier for one particular group. Middle class, middle income men who have left their partners and children. What a surprise! The CSA angered these men, many of whom were Tory voters.

Since the Tories can ill-afford to alienate any of its potential supporters at the moment, out came the concessions. They don't need to make concessions to single mothers, because they know that they are not stupid enough to vote Tory whatever carrots are waved in front

of them.

We need to carry on campaigning for the total abolition of the CSA. The Labour Party must be committed to getting rid of it and providing decent benefits for all lone parents without means testing and without assuming any dependency on previous relationships.

Demonstrations, letter writing and lobbies have worked for the Dad's Army. A stepped up campaign of even more militant action will be needed for the rest of us to be satisfied. ■

"Longest hours in Europe"

FIGURES PUBLISHED last month show how the Tories are ruining our lives. A survey of working hours throughout Europe showed that Britain comes top of the table with the longest working hours, an average of 43.4 hours per week.

Britain is the only country in the European Union where working hours have increased. Everywhere else the trend has been towards shorter working hours. Worst affected are British women, whose hours are increasing fastest of all.

We are constantly told by the bosses that we have to work harder so Britain can "compete".

Well Britain's is certainly winning the competition to be the most exploitative state in Europe.

One of the reasons for the long hours is the high level of overtime. At least a third of British workers rely on overtime as part of their wages. Manual workers put in an average nine hours of overtime per week.

Commenting on the high level of overtime the bosses' paper, The Financial Times wrote:

"It provides an obvious and relatively easy method for many hourly paid workers to boost their basic pay



rates." They should try working an extra two hours, on top of every normal working day and see how "relatively easy" they find it!

The vast majority of workers don't do overtime because they like work better than home. They do it because they are forced to by low wages, and because managers bully them into it.

The bosses know that if they keep wages down then they will be able to get their workers to do overtime when they need them to.

This way they avoid taking on extra workers and get greater flexibility.

This explains why the Tories are so

determined to avoid having a legal minimum wage. They abolished the Wages Councils so that the bosses can continue to force down the wages of the lowest paid.

The difference between the highest and the lowest paid in Britain has never been greater, it has been increasing since the day the Tories came into office in 1979. The top ten percent have seen their incomes rise by 62%, while the bottom 10% have seen their income cut by 14%.

It is a scandal that, alongside a workforce with the longest working hours in Europe, there are two and a half million unemployed, according to the official figures (much more given those figures are fiddled).

That's one in ten of the workforce. That means that if hours were cut by only 10%—from 43.4 to 39 hours a week average—everybody could have a job.

The maths may be crude, and the details more complicated, but the fact remains: cutting the hours, not the jobs, with no loss of pay, could reduce unemployment dramatically. If only the union leaders and the Labour politicians had the guts to fight for it. ■

EDITORIAL

Animal rights and wrongs

THE PROTESTS against the veal trade at Shoreham and Brightlingsea have been hailed as the "new politics of the nineties". According to surveys, three quarters of all teenagers think animal rights is the most important issue of the day. They are wrong. If you are going to get cracked over the head by a police baton for demonstrating then you should do it for something worthwhile.

Socialists defend the right to demonstrate, and side with the protesters in their battles with the police. But we don't support the aims of the demonstrators. Why not? Are we so hard headed that we support cruelty to animals?

No, we think that unnecessary cruelty to animals, generally resulting from the needs of the bosses for greater profits, is degrading to humanity itself. It is brutalising. Where laws are in place to outlaw such cruelty we support them so long as they do not conflict with the rights and living standards of workers themselves.

Our main argument with the protesters is that they are engaged in a diversion from the fight against a far more important issue: the systematic cruelty to humans that goes under the name of capitalism. And we fundamentally disagree with those protesters who insist that animals have rights. That is not only diversionary, it is also reactionary.

There are four major reasons why these protests are useless.

Firstly, calls for an end to exporting calves don't solve any problem. The protesters do not say what should be done with these male calves. The veal trade is intimately bound up with the milk industry—male calves are a by-product. Some animal rights activists would be prepared to ban the milk industry as well, but they cannot offer any alternative use for cows. The result: farmers would not breed cattle and there would be widespread slaughter of cattle and considerable unemployment amongst agricultural workers.

Secondly, the protests fail to address underlying problems, either of human suffering or of the system that leads to animal cruelty. The cause of much animal cruelty is profit. So long as capitalism exists, and most animal rights activists have no intention of abolishing it, farmers will want to make the maximum possible profit.

Intensive farming, factory farming, live exporting are all the result of a drive for profits. But most animal rights activists do not recognise this basic reality. The rag bag of Tories, who have flocked to the south coast pickets, do not give tuppence for the working class human beings who are the main victims of the profit system.

Thirdly, protesters who believe that animals have rights are confused. The notion of "rights" is a human concept. It goes hand in hand with the idea of "duty". Rights only make sense for human beings. Animal rights activists don't tell us what duties animals have to carry out as a complement to their rights.

Instead, animal rights activists believe that humans have to protect the rights of the animals, since they can't act to defend themselves. One of the things human's must do is to stop using animals in the pursuit of our own, human, needs.

We are told that we must not use animals in experiments to develop new drugs or other products. This is reactionary. Unfortunately the only alternative to using animals for such experiments is to use humans, which we totally oppose. Without using animals in this way human progress, and the alleviation of much human suffering through the development of medicines, for example, would be massively set back.

Finally, animal rights politics are the politics of pessimism. Young people who have grown up under Tory rule, and who want to fight for a better world, have had little inspiration from the only force that can really change the world, the working class.

They have seen workers struggle to keep their factories and pits open, their hospitals open. But in too many cases they have seen them fail. They have seen a trade union movement shrink from 12 to six million members; they have seen Stalinism collapse and, accepting the big lie that Stalinism was socialism, rejected socialism as the answer to the world's injustices.

Many youth are cynical about politics, programmes and ideology, fundamentally pessimistic about the possibility of progressive collective improvement of human society. If you give up on humans as essentially a selfish bunch then what's left except to protect the innocent animals from harm?

The conservative right-wing are happy to encourage this

kind of thinking among young people. Working class youth wrapped up in these campaigns should think hard about some of the praise that is being heaped upon them, and who its coming from.

The *Times* proclaimed "The end of ideology, defend animal rights!" in smug recognition that these protests do not challenge the real centres of power and wealth.

Worse, the campaigns have attracted the support of right-wing Tory anti-Europeans. These Tory bigots cry crocodile tears for the animals while fighting tooth and nail to stop the EU bringing in minimum welfare and labour protection for British workers. They bleat about cruelty to animals while voting for life-threatening hospital closures.

Many involved in the protests haven't given up hope. But they spend their time worrying about the fate of calves rather than the plight of whole populations, in Rwanda and Bosnia for example, facing ethnic cleansing and genocidal war. To those people we say: change course, change priorities. If you want to see a world in which animals are not simply subject to commercial whim, if you want animals not to be subject to unnecessary human cruelty, then direct your energies to changing humans.

Capitalism distorts and twists humans, it reduces millions to the role of slaves to powerful machines. It creates poverty on a scale that forces humans to act with animal savagery to fellow human beings. But capitalism also creates the force for putting an end to all of this—the working class.

Allying with its progressive struggles against injustice, poverty and oppression should be the new politics of the 1990s. By abolishing its own exploitation the working class liberates humanity from class society once and for all. When that happens, then we will have time enough to improve the lot of animals. ■

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workers power

MEETINGS

BIRMINGHAM

Open meeting
Monday 27 February 7.30pm
Do animals have rights?
Venue: Union Club, 723
Pershore Road, Selly Park,

LONDON

Open meeting
Thursday 9 Feb 8pm
*Russia 1905—from
massacre to insurrection*
Room A157, London School
of Economics, Clare Market,
Off Aldwych, London WC2
Nearest tube, Holborn

Public meeting

Thursday 2 March 1995,
7.30pm Room S300, London
School of Economics, Clare
Market, Off Aldwych, WC2
Nearest tube, Holborn
*"Ten years since the Bolivian
General Strike"*
José Villa will recall the
events and discuss lessons
for revolutionaries today.

MANCHESTER

Public Meeting
Tuesday 14 February, 7.30
Hands Off Chechnya!
See seller for venue

SHEFFIELD

Open meeting
Wednesday 1 February
*Voluntary workers—help or
hindrance?*
&
Bolshevik Women Meeting
Tuesday 7 Feb
What is Queer Politics?
see seller for details

Trotskyist International

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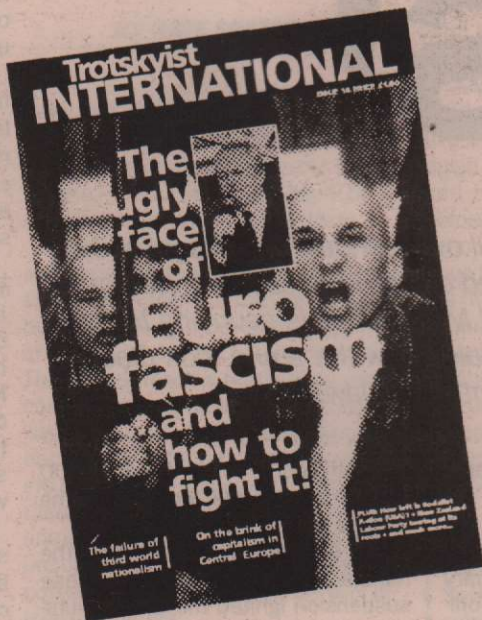
The new-look Trotskyist International (TI) combines the second-to-none international coverage of the class struggle and the left of the old TI, with the in depth coverage of Marxist theory formerly available in *Permanent Revolution*. The two journals are now combined into the newly designed TI.

Issue 16 contains a special, three article feature on fascist front parties in Europe. Their growth and electoral success in recent years is a danger and a challenge to the European workers' movements. TI16 explains some key transformations in the character

of post-war fascism and writes up case histories of two of them: Le Pen's FN and Fini's MSI.

Also in this issue Dave Stockton continues his series on the modern national question with a study of the failures of Third World nationalist movements to create stable nation states in the semi-colonial world. Keith Harvey examines the experience of capitalist restoration in Central Europe through the prism of Marxist economic theory. In addition, Mark Harrison critically examines the politics of Socialist Action, a key component of the US left; Leo Brown looks at the impact of the 1980s New Zealand Labour Party government on its working class support. The new-look TI also introduces a new permanent feature—six pages of book reviews.

Subscriptions to TI now cost £8 for three issues, but, for a limited period until 1 May we are offering a joint subscription to TI and *Workers Power* for an unbeatable £10!★



£3000 FUND £1693!

In the three weeks since the last issue of *Workers Power*, our £3,000 new technology Fund has grown by £330, mainly due to a donation from a comrade in Manchester.

Thanks to this and the continued generosity of standing order payers, we have been able to buy some of the computer and scanning equipment we need in order to improve the production of *Workers Power* and *Trotskyist International*.

Some of the results are apparent in the current issue of the paper. *Workers Power* is now produced on a Macintosh Performa 630, using an Agfa Studio Scan II scanner, as well as the old, neolithic, Macs our writers and sub editors have to use. However we still need over £1,000 to complete the job.

We want to purchase some high quality laser printing equipment, and a faster modem so our comrades around the world can write up to date reports for us.

Please keep the money coming in. The target date for the fund's completion is March, after which we hope to present you with a new look *Workers Power*, with more features and a wider range of national and international reports. ■

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LONDON POST STRIKE

The day 15,000 said...

THE simmering anger of workers in postal sorting and delivery offices across the capital finally boiled over late on Thursday, 19 January. After staging an official, hour-long protest strike, workers returned to the morning shift to find management at the North West District Office (NWDO), in Camden, demanding their signatures to no-strike and "obedience" clauses.

Nearly 150 refused to consent, triggering a management decision to suspend them. Virtually all five hundred workers on the shift walked out in support of their colleagues. Delegations of strikers from NWDO had little problem persuading fellow workers to walk out. Before Thursday evening union members at West End Central, Paddington, Nine Elms in south west London, and Europe's biggest sorting office, Mount Pleasant, were on the picket lines.

By Friday afternoon, all pillar boxes in London were sealed and the Royal Mail paralysed as some 15,000 workers took totally illegal solidarity action with their suspended brothers and sisters at NWDO.

Management's provocation marked a significant escalation in the guerrilla war between workers and bosses in the Post Office over the introduction of the Computerised-Assisted Delivery Revision (CADR) system.

CADR is a classic example of the bosses using new technology to make workers work harder, alter job descriptions and axe permanent workers. In its current form, CADR monitors almost all aspects of workers' work—from the sorting room through to the emptying of collection boxes.

At NWDO members of the UCW, the postal workers' union, have staged repeated walkouts, both official and spontaneous, over the implementation of CADR and the terms surrounding the merger of their office with a nearby facility in Islington. On 9 December, sorting office workers across south west London held a one-day stoppage in opposition to CADR.

Throughout the past year postal workers from Liverpool to Milton Keynes, as well as in Scotland and Wales, have fought a sustained, though fragmented, campaign against a whole series of management attacks. The scope and determination of this resistance undoubtedly persuaded the Tory cabinet to postpone Post Office privatisation. The UCW represents a section of well organised workers who, unlike many, have not suffered a decisive defeat at the hands of the Tories.

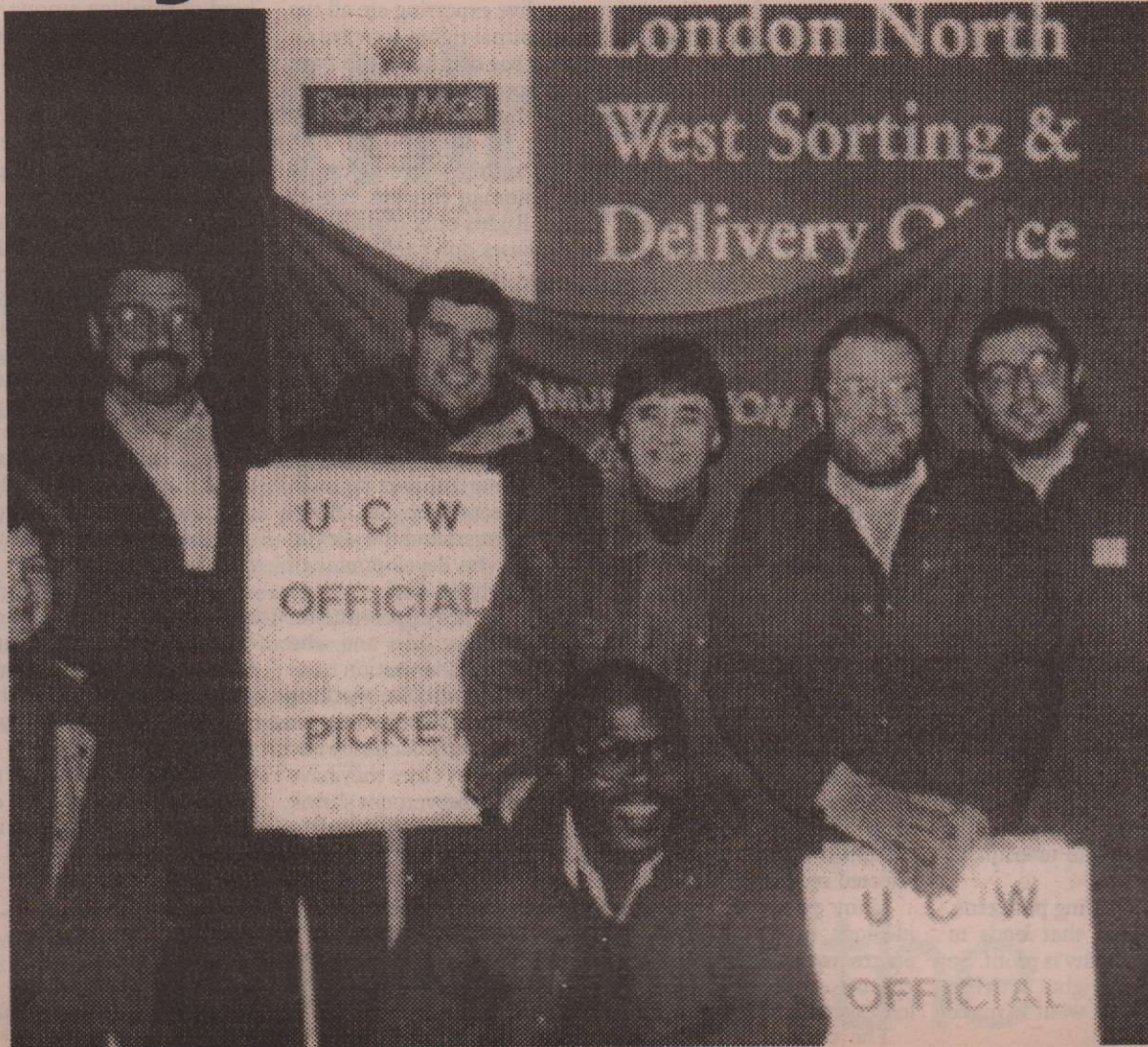
In London and nationally, Royal Mail management has been licking its wounds in the aftermath of the withdrawal of Michael Heseltine's proposals for privatisation.

One of their New Year's resolutions for 1995 was clearly to stamp out industrial action, especially of the wildcat variety.

In south west London six branch officers suspected of organising a strike on 9 December have faced suspension. Elsewhere, if the UCW bureaucracy was either unwilling or unable to keep its members on a tight lead, then Royal Mail showed no hesitation in seeking "legal remedies".

After unofficial action by 650 workers over the suspension of a colleague at NWDO in the first week of 1995, the local management sought and obtained an injunction against the union branch on 3 January.

This court order effectively barred workers within the NWDO from taking solidarity action with other sections of the workforce within their own of-



Stuff the anti-union laws!

As thousands of postal workers from sorting offices all over London took illegal strike action on Friday 20 January, their union officials worked overtime to cobble together a "peace deal". They were desperate to stop the Royal Mail's bosses scurrying to the courts to claim the union's assets. Sheila Phillips explains how the strike took place in defiance of the Tories' arsenal of anti-union laws.

ice. The strike on the morning shift on 19 January was in flagrant breach of the earlier injunction. Royal Mail bosses upped the stakes by demanding that the UCW be declared in contempt of court. That explains why union officials acted so hastily to engineer a swift return to work. They hoped that Royal Mail bosses would retreat from moves that could have

ended with a firm of City accountants administering the UCW's funds.

Few of the pickets outside the Rathbone Place office in London's West End at 11pm on 20 January were surprised to hear that their officials had struck a back-to-work deal with management. UCW national and regional officials spent the rest of the weekend telling those members who

had come out in solidarity with NWDO to return to normal working as the dispute was resolved.

The final deal may have won the reinstatement of the workers whose suspension ignited the initial Thursday morning walkout, but it did nothing to settle the underlying grievances caused by the CADR system and the general management offensive. ■

Rank and file: take control!

The strike ended with a truce that cannot last. Management have made it plain that they will use the battery of anti-union laws the Tories have put at their disposal. That is why it is urgent that activists in the UCW move swiftly to learn the lessons of the London-wide strike.

They need to maintain and develop the links which emerged over the course of the solidarity strike, with the objective of establishing a rank-and-file postal workers' organisation. The goals of such an organisation would include a root and branch democratisation of the union and the co-ordination of strike action by elected, accountable committees.

The UCW membership across Britain has repeatedly shown its willingness to fight. At the same time, an unashamedly right-wing bureaucracy has long presided over the union's apparatus. The £70,000 a year General Secretary, Alan Johnson, has complied with key elements of management's restructuring package including the growing use of non-union casual workers.

The entrenched bureaucracy has conveniently ignored the drastic tightening of disciplinary procedures, embodied in the Personnel Framework code. It also rammed a miserly 2.8% pay rise (with productivity strings attached) down members' throats.

Given that the UCW's national bureaucracy have no intention of leading any effective resistance, since they will always insist on staying within the law, militants in the sorting offices, Post Office Counters (threatened with closures and privatisation) and Parcel Force must prepare to mount a real challenge to both the bosses and the union leadership.

In the first place, that means absolute determination to break the laws against secondary action. It means defending the right to take strike votes at mass meetings, a right denied by the Tories' complex secret ballot requirements. It also means being honest with members about the implications of defying the law.

The union bureaucrats are telling the truth when they say that taking on the law can mean the loss of the union's assets.

While militants cannot walk away from the possibility of sequestration, which became a reality for the miners in 1984, the miners' experience also showed that there are ways of circumventing the seizure of assets.

More importantly UCW activists must stress that the Tory laws are a shackle on the whole of the organised working class. In the face of a management such as Royal Mail, prepared to resort to the courts, the answer to any use of the anti-union laws must be solidarity strike action from the whole of the UCW.

If the bosses seize control of any single union's assets the issue becomes one for the whole working class. The fight becomes one for a general strike in solidarity with the union under the hammer; a general strike to smash all of the Tories' anti-union laws. ■

BECKTON

BNP battle-bus stalls

ANTI-FASCIST activists have cause for celebration after a sharp setback for the Nazis of the British National Party (BNP) in the South ward council by-election in the east London borough of Newham.

The BNP, which came within 64 votes of capturing a council seat in a neighbouring ward in May 1994, slumped to third behind the Tories, gaining only 360 votes (12.9% of the poll). Labour held onto the seat with ease, gaining 51.5% of the vote.

The BNP's weak showing came in the wake of an intensive campaign of anti-fascist leafleting, co-ordinated by Newham Monitoring Project (NMP), a black community organisation.

Workers Power comrades were centrally involved with NMP's efforts, along with Militant Labour supporters, many non-aligned activists and UNISON members from Council Workers Against the Nazis. Trade union representatives from local workplaces, including the nearby Tate & Lyle refinery, signed a broad anti-racist statement.

Meanwhile, the SWP-controlled Anti-Nazi League pointedly refused NMP's offer of a joint campaign. The SWP, despite its large membership on paper, mobilised no more than 35 people for the 200-strong demonstration outside the by-election count.

The SWP's flippant attitude towards security and stewarding placed their own comrades in grave danger. On election day a young black SWP member was confronted outside the polling station at Brampton Manor school by a Nazi activist who had attacked her six weeks before. She and a lone Asian comrade had been stationed at the school—despite the fact that a 16-year-old Asian student had been viciously attacked there three days before by five whites shouting BNP slogans—a fact well known to the SWP. Fortunately, two surveillance teams and a van load of NMP activists arrived moments before Derek Beackon and co.

Later in the evening, two SWP members stood outside a polling station surrounded by 15 BNPs, including



East Enders see off Nazis again

deputy führer, Richard Edmunds, and the notorious thug, Tony Lecomber. Fortunately they too were spotted by activists from the NMP campaign who faced down the Nazis and some local racist youth until four van loads of police intervened.

In addition to the BNP's electoral defeat, the demonstration outside the count proved a useful exercise, with the crowd of anti-fascists re-

maining angry and vibrant despite being wrapped in bone-chilling damp. A group of stewards peeled away from the main picket after the BNP's battle bus arrived at East Ham Town Hall to deposit its contents of vermin for the count. Though unable to stop the fascists entering under police

guard, the team intercepted the van and left it and senior BNP goon, Ian Dell, somewhat the worse for wear.

Some ninety minutes later the Nazis underwent the humiliation of leaving the premises in a police van, while the cops raised the temperature by arresting a young Asian man for shouting abuse at the departing BNPs. After a protest at Forest Gate police station, he was released with-

The BNP is standing yet again in an East London by-election in Weaver's Ward in Tower Hamlets on 16 February. Another by-election in the borough is likely before spring as another Labour councillor has resigned in Lansbury Ward, scene of Derek Beackon's December 1994 defeat.

out charge. However gratifying the result, it indicates the BNP is building a significant base in the area. The election of yet another Labour councillor in Newham does nothing to solve the abysmal social conditions which persuaded the BNP to target the Beckton area in the first place. Male unemployment in the area stands at 17%; public transport links are poor and the housing stock is a mixture of Wimpey starter homes, countless purpose-built cul-de-sacs and windswept tower blocks. The area has long lacked a secondary school, despite being home to hundreds of teenagers.

The Labour council, justly accused of ignoring Beckton, shows no signs of changing course and is currently railroading through another £6 million cuts package. For the moment, a healthy campaign has seen off the BNP, but they most definitely have not gone away. ■

Council budgets slashed

THIS YEAR'S round of Council cuts packages represent a major threat to local services. Whilst the cuts are mainly caused by central government, both Liberal Democrat and Labour councillors seem quite prepared to do the Tories' dirty work. The next few months are likely to see bitter battles in many areas as council workers and

service users attempt to resist the cuts.

Since the Liberal Democrats got their hands on Lambeth Council in London they have lost no time in attacking jobs and services. On Wednesday 25 January, Lambeth councillors voted for a package of cuts of between £25 and £28 million: a 6% slashing of the previous

year's council budget. If the cuts go through they will lead to the loss of roughly 700 jobs from April onwards.

Liberal Democrats are currently the ruling group on the council, with 24 councillors, against Labour's 22. Rather than make specific proposals as to what is to be cut, the Lib Dems proposed a "general budget". They then gave council officers ten days to work out how the cuts will be made. In this way they hoped to forestall protest, since no council workers or service users would know for sure who is going to suffer. However, it is already clear that £12 million is to be cut from education and £4.5 million from social services. This is on top of the £2.5 million already cut this year through the closure of three day nurseries and an old people's home.

The Lib Dems were anxious to blame Labour for the cuts, claiming the previous Labour council had overspent by £29 million. Keeping nurseries open obviously constitutes gross financial irresponsibility as far as the Lib Dems are concerned. Unfortunately, rather than lead an effective fight against the cuts, Labour leader Jim Dickson agreed that mismanagement had taken place but they couldn't be held responsible for the lot!

The cuts in the education budget could well spell the total destruction of community education in Lambeth. Community education, which serves the needs of the young, the unemployed, pensioners and others outside the formal education service, can never be a profitable concern; the fact that it is being farmed out to market-oriented Lambeth College is ominous.

Resistance to the cuts, led by

Unison and the NUT, has largely taken the form of lobbies of the council. Council workers are now to be balloted for a possible one-day strike on 28 February. It is important that this strike succeeds but it is still short of the action necessary to save jobs and services.

In Birmingham, meanwhile, no one can have any illusion that voting for a Labour Council is any safeguard against cuts. The Labour-led council announced cuts late last year of £48 million in the 1995-96 budget. They are now trying to claim there will be no compulsory redundancies—despite 1,400 jobs being slashed. The council claims that voluntary redundancies and unfulfilled vacancies will account for the job cuts.

Clearly, like Lambeth, they are hoping to forestall protest, and there is some evidence they are succeeding—with the help of a number of UNISON branch officials opposed to any form of strike action. Two of the city's six branches, however, are now calling for a ballot for a one-day strike on 22 March.

It is important that council workers co-ordinate action to fight the cuts. Birmingham's strike has been planned to coincide with action being taken by UNISON in the Northern region.

But one day strikes around the country will not be enough to defeat these cuts. All out action will be needed if jobs and vital local services are to be defended. The cuts are being directed by the Tories nationally—even if they are being carried out by their errand boys—Liberals and Labour. We need a national campaign to fight the cuts and to fight for local budgets which meet the needs of the working class in places like Lambeth and Birmingham, not ones dictated by the needs of the bosses. ■

Testing time for teachers

FOUR HUNDRED teachers met in London on 25 January to discuss the way forward in the fight against SATs—the national curriculum tests devised by the Tories. The teachers, who thus far have boycotted the tests up to now, were shocked by the results of an NUT ballot showing a clear majority against continuing this tactic. Given the militant mood in many staff rooms around the country, no-one could quite believe the numbers voting to call off the boycott.

Many teachers blamed the way in which the question on the ballot paper had been put. It seemed that the National Executive (along with the Electoral Reform Society who have to agree the wording of all ballots) were determined to confuse the members. If you only read half the lengthy question, you might have been tempted to vote yes, since it only referred to whether you thought you should be consulted. The few words relating to calling off the action were hidden

BY KATE FOSTER

away at the very end.

Others pointed to the fact that many members did not even receive ballot papers. The turnout was only 40%—remarkably low for this key issue.

Whilst these things obviously had an impact on the result they cannot explain the scale of the defeat. The ballot showed a three-to-one majority in favour of calling off the boycott. This was surely the result of an over-complacent attitude amongst activists on the left. Having won the original argument for a boycott, supporters allowed the campaign to dwindle. Clearly some teachers, particularly in primary schools, felt isolated and, unsure of success, they saw the opportunity for negotiation as a way of avoiding defeat.

The 25 January meeting recognised the necessity to re-establish a campaign. There was some discussion about whether the boycott could be

continued. Fourteen schools from across London represented at the meeting had already met and agreed to do this. One school in Waltham Forest reported that their governors had issued a statement supporting the continuation of the boycott and refusing to discipline any of the teachers. Such initiatives won over the more wary elements at the meeting and there was a unanimous vote that, where possible, the boycott should be maintained unofficially.

The meeting proved to be a positive starting point for the new campaign against the tests. It is important that such meetings take place across the country. We need as many schools as possible to vote to continue the boycott. Rank and file teachers from those schools which vote to continue should ensure that they visit other schools to build the boycott. In addition, schools need to organise meetings with students and parents to win their support: this will be crucial in ensuring that we get rid of these futile tests once and for all. ■

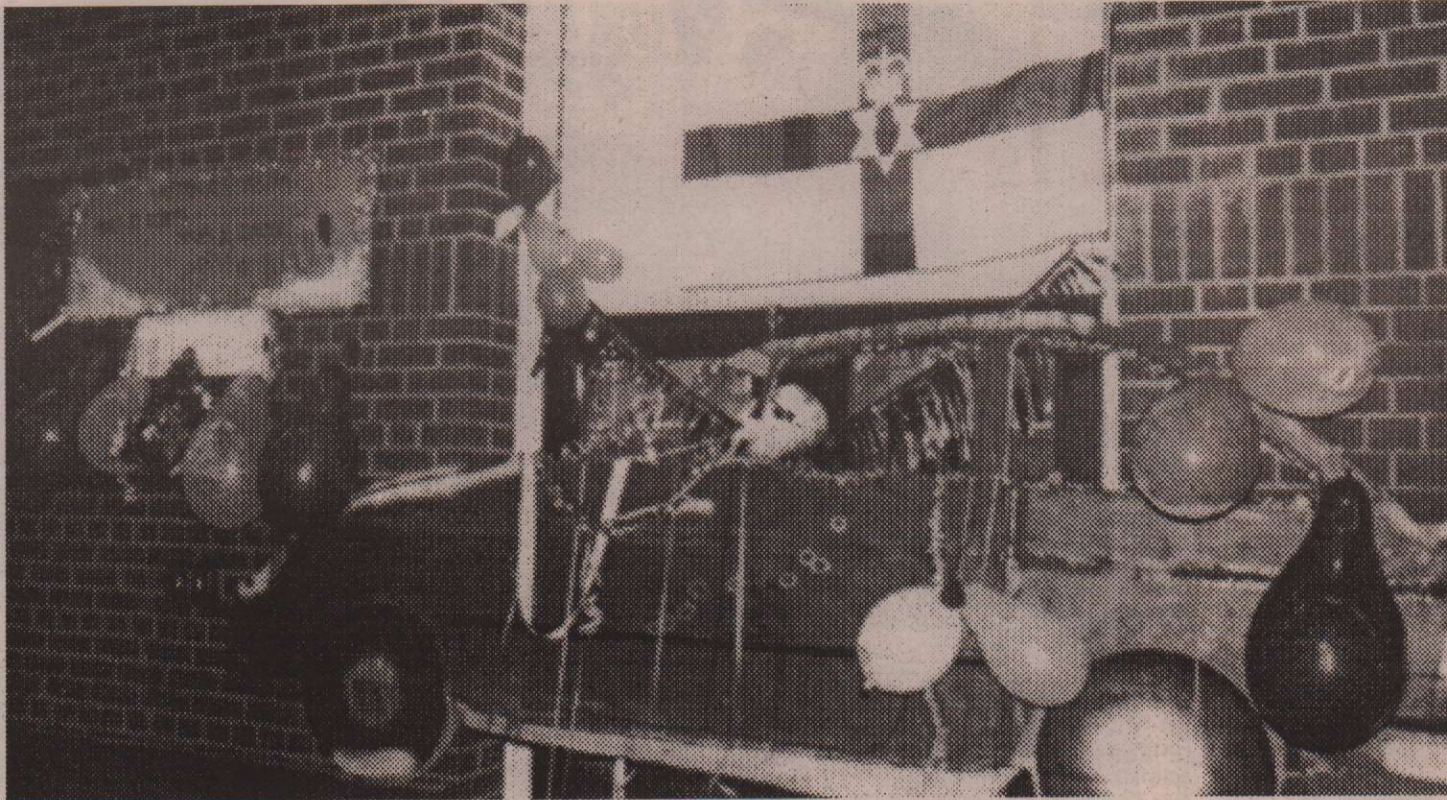
For more information contact the National Anti-SATS campaign c/o East London NUT Professional Development Centre English Street London E1 4TA

LEE CLEGG

Sick reality of British rule

This was the Christmas decoration in the barracks of A Company, the 3rd Battalion of the Parachute Regiment, stationed in Belfast in 1992. It shows the dead passengers of a Vauxhall Astra murdered by members of A Company.

Private Lee Clegg was convicted of murder for this shooting. Now the whole of the British press wants to free him. **Jon Burke** explains why Lee Clegg should rot in jail.



THE DAILY MAIL, that champion of "law and order", has collected a million signatures demanding the release of a murderer. But Lee Clegg is no ordinary murderer. He is a murderer employed by the British Army.

Clegg was convicted in 1993 for shooting dead 18-year-old Karen Reilly in West Belfast. Karen was a back-seat passenger in a stolen Vauxhall Astra driven by 17-year-old Martin Peake, who was also killed as nineteen bullets struck the car. The bullets were fired by an army patrol sent out to intercept joyriders.

Markievitz Gorman, the only occupant of the car to survive, insists that the car was stationary when Karen and Martin were killed. She and Karen were then pulled from the car and repeatedly kicked by the frenzied soldiers. This story was corroborated by numerous eyewitnesses.

Clegg and his fellow thugs tried to lie their way out of it all. They failed. Clegg's conviction was upheld in the Appeal Court and finally confirmed by the House of Lords. He was only the second soldier to be convicted of murder since the start of the occupation of the Northern Ireland by British troops. During that time an estimated 350 people have been killed by the security forces.

Two convictions were two too many for sections of the British establishment. Frustrated by the unwillingness of the courts to overturn such a sound legal decision, army top brass turned to the media. The *Daily Mail*, which in the 1930s supported Mosley's

blackshirts, was a guaranteed ally.

The vigour of their Free Clegg Campaign inspired the *Daily Express* to similar heroics—with everybody from the *Telegraph* to the Richard and Judy Show helping out. In the course of two weeks the campaign had become a seemingly unstoppable juggernaut, aboard which Prince Charles, as well as Tory, Labour and Lib Dem MPs had climbed.

The same people who would have happily seen innocent victims of British justice, like the Birmingham Six and the Guildford Four, hang and who tried Winston Silcott on their front pages before he had been near a court, have suddenly discovered their

very own martyr. Despite Clegg's obvious guilt the press will stop at nothing to get him out of prison.

His release would demonstrate that "it is okay for a paratrooper to kill an Irish citizen".

The paras certainly share that view. Despite the media's attempts to portray Clegg as a contrite innocent, praying regularly in his prison cell, the actions of his mates are more revealing.

Their 1992 Christmas decoration was a bullet-ridden Astra mock-up, under the red hand of Ulster, beside a sign saying "Built by robots, driven by joyriders, stopped by A Company". This sickening slogan reveals the true

contempt with which the British "peacekeepers" regard Irish Catholic lives.

There must be no question of Clegg being traded-off against Republican prisoners. Around a thousand Republicans currently languish in jail.

They must be released immediately, and unconditionally. It is estimated that between 20,000 and 60,000 nationalists have been held in custody at some time during the British army's occupation.

Many were not involved in the armed struggle against the British state at all. Others are serving life sentences for murder. But the only other soldier convicted of that crime, Private Ian Thain, was released after two years.

The final insult of the Clegg affair is that his release was being considered at the time of the anniversary of Bloody Sunday: it was Clegg's fore-runners in the Parachute Regiment in 1972 who shot to death thirteen unarmed civilians. No charges were ever brought against those soldiers.

Nor were charges brought against eight other Paras implicated in the killing of Karen Reilly and Martin Peake, even though witnesses claimed that the entire patrol had opened fire on the stolen car.

If Clegg was a scapegoat, as the media would have us believe, it was not in the cause of furthering the peace process, but to save the necks of the others. Only Private Barry Aindow was convicted alongside Clegg, for attempted murder. He is already free.

The Clegg affair demonstrates that divisions exist within the British establishment over Ireland.

No doubt some ultra-Unionists see this as a chance to bounce the discontented brigades of the IRA into breaking the ceasefire. The fact that Clegg's conviction was upheld shows, however, that most of the establishment has been behind the Major government's plans.

No sympathy should be shown to Clegg or any of his fellow Paras. As professional soldiers their job was to terrorise the nationalist community in Ireland and crush or contain the justified resistance of the anti-unionists to British rule.

Far from Clegg being released, the only just outcome of this affair would be if the nine other Paras involved in the incident were retried and locked up beside him. ■

TORY REBEL MANIFESTO

More Tory Euro-bible

AT THE end of January there was a fresh security scare in the Channel Tunnel. *The Observer* revealed that it was "vulnerable to a terrorist threat". They had in mind the usual Middle Eastern groups, out to undermine the British government.

In fact, the real danger facing the government may be closer at hand: Teddy Taylor, Tory MP, and his small tightly-knit band of Europhobe fundamentalist fanatics.

On 19 January they emerged to issue their latest manifesto—one thousand words of anti-Euro bile. It is their contribution to the ongoing debate inside the Tory Party over what demands to make at the inter-governmental conference of EU member states in 1996.

The Gang of Eight would dearly like Britain to withdraw from the EU, close down the Chunnel, deport Eric Cantona and ban croissants from British bakeries.

But they have to approach their full programme by stealth. So they want to make a start with getting rid of the Common Agricultural and Fisheries Policies and the European Parliament. They insist that Major puts a stop

to the European Court telling us what to do and tell the EU to keep its nose out of Britain's foreign and defence policies. They want the EU budget cut back, and an end to the goal of economic and monetary union.

They are determined to save everything British from the clutches of Europe: point 4 of their manifesto demands that British sheep are saved from having to travel abroad.

The skirmishes on the Tory backbenches are divisive enough, but the real battle in the run up to the inter-governmental conference will be played out within the Cabinet.

Officially, they are all united behind Major's line: no backtracking on the present degree of economic integration, and defence of Britain's right to pay its workers far less for working more hours than anyone else. As to a Central Bank for Europe and future monetary union, let's wait and see, the Tory leaders say.

This fudge covers up big differences within the cabinet. They are at each other's throats.

Chancellor Clarke, like the bulk of British business, wants a single currency. It will reduce business costs.

But if a small group go ahead without the UK that will increase business costs for British bosses. Moreover, under capitalism a single currency is the best anti-inflationary policy there is, which is all the Treasury cares about. Foreign Secretary Hurd agrees.

But Michael Portillo would rather drown in a EU wine lake than give up the pound sterling. He knows that once control over currency is surrendered the British government would lose much of the ability to control its finances. Further measures of political integration would quickly follow. He and his supporters are plotting now, according to Edward Heath, to unseat Hurd and replace him with Portillo before 1996.

In an attempt to paper over these differences all kinds of compromises are mooted. Major, for example, floats the possibility of a referendum on further changes to keep the rebels onside. A "war on corruption" in the European Commission is promised. Waldegrave promises to fight for better treatment for calves.

The Europhobes are not important in themselves. No section of the bosses supports their programme.

But given present parliamentary arithmetic they are an irritant. They may force Major to rely more on the Ulster Unionists, granting them concessions to secure their support for the passage of legislation.

Major cannot smash the rebels in an all-out assault because their flank is protected by the Eurosceptics in the Cabinet. And he can't take on Portillo without producing a real split in the Party and alienating thousands of outraged nationalist bigots in the constituencies. For the moment Major has to continue his balancing act.

The Euro-rebels are a reflection of the chauvinism, racism and narrow mindedness that festers within the ranks of the Tory Party. But the real drama is yet to come. The 1996 conference cannot be postponed and hard choices will have to be made. Major will have to decide just what it means for British capitalism "to be at the heart of Europe". Those choices could split the Tories down the middle.

Meanwhile, Teddy Taylor is canvassing the sheep for their views on a single currency. ■

AS MORE and more is revealed about the "machinery of death" the Nazis deployed in the concentration camps, you could be forgiven for thinking that the only problems they encountered here were caused by their own bureaucracy. But even inside the camps the spirit of anti-fascist resistance was not completely quenched. "Combat Groups" were established in the camps themselves, to carry on the fight despite conditions of unimaginable brutality, fear and pain.

Hermann Langbein was a leader of the Combat Group Auschwitz. In this book Langbein refutes the Nazi lie that millions of victims went to their death "like sheep", without a fight. They fought against impossible odds, against all hope, and sometimes won.

The combat organisations were able to establish links with the outside world through the use of illegal radios - in some limited circumstances even broadcasting information about the camps to the Allies. They also smuggled out plans and documents giving a detailed description of events in the camps.

The Combat Group Auschwitz managed to pass on a detailed map of the gas chambers, railway lines and a local ball bearing factory to the Polish resistance, which was subsequently passed on to the Allied High Command.

Combat Group Auschwitz urged the Allies to bomb all three targets irrespective of the cost. But only the factory was targeted.

The core of the anti-fascist resistance organisations was made up of the members of the various Communist Parties imprisoned in the camps. By 1938 when Langbein begins his account, these parties had been thoroughly transformed into Stalinist parties. But the subjective commitment of their members to communism and anti-fascist activity meant that their rank and file were able to fight even in the conditions of the camps.

Resistance

Langbein quotes the German Communist Harry Kuhn:

"On the very day of my arrival (in Buchenwald) I established contact with the party in the camp. It was accomplished by comrade Albert Kuntz, who knew me well from our years of work in the party and its youth organisation. Around 700 communists arrived within a few days... this marked the beginning of a tightly organised branch of the German Communist Party."

Through these already existing links, international co-ordinating committees were set up to ensure that all the communist cadres of different nationalities were organised for united anti-fascist activity.

The German Communist Party (KPD) was at the centre of most of the resistance activities undertaken in the camps. They were able to use a vital advantage not given to the comrades from the Spanish or Soviet parties who also had substantial numbers of prisoners. The Nazi discrimination in favour of "Aryans", in particular Germans and Austrians, meant that they were able to use positions within the camp administration to organise resistance activities.

KPD members volunteered for administrative roles within the camp apparatus, the medical blocks, and as block overseers. They did so in order to oust the criminal or "green" prisoners (from the colour of their badges) used by the SS to terrorise the camp population.

The greens were responsible for many of the casual beatings and murders which were a daily experience of camp inmates. Many of them were corrupt psychopaths granted absolute power over the prisoners' life and death.

Through removing the greens from the camp administration some relief in the daily torture experienced by the

AGAINST ALL ODDS...

They did fight back!



Fifty years ago the Nazi death camps were liberated. Amidst today's commemorations a book has appeared that nails the lie that the Jews and other victims of the Holocaust did not fight back. Hermann Langbein, tells the story of those who fought back in the face of certain death.

inmates could be obtained. But this fight, which included volunteering for the post of block overseers—Kapo's—and the camp police meant that the German communists had to pay a high price, they were inevitably implicated in the running of the camps themselves.

The role of the "reds" within the camp administration also allowed them to protect party members through the substitution of dead prisoners for those on the SS execution lists, and by ensuring that party members were not on the hardest work details - work described by Himmler as "extermination through labour".

But just as the Stalinists were able to protect their own members so they were able to rid themselves of their enemies. Langbein writes:

"Anyone acquainted with the fanatical hatred with which communist parties pursued the Trotskyites, or those who were regarded as such, will not be surprised to learn that KPD members in power in Buchenwald immediately shipped the French Trotskyites off to Dora."

Dora was an extermination labour

Bill Johnson
reviews
*Against All Hope Resistance in the
Nazi Concentration Camps
1938-1945*
by Hermann Langbein
Constable 1994, £19.95, 502pp

camp which meant certain death for anyone dispatched there. Although Langbein does show there were some exceptions to this rule, the actions of the Stalinist-led resistance organisations in betraying Trotskyists should remind us again of the price borne by the vanguard of the working class which fought to maintain revolutionary socialism in the 1930s and 1940s against the overwhelming power of Stalinism.

Courage

Escapes by prisoners, desperate to flee the certain death of the camps and to tell the world about Hitler's "final solution", were widespread and usually supported by the various re-

sistance organisations. In 1943 there were 44 escapees from Mauthausen, 388 escapees from Dachau and 310 from Auschwitz. Russian prisoners of war, often singled out for the most brutal treatment by the Nazis, were particularly frequent escapees.

Langbein tells how in April 1942, seventeen Russian prisoners of war, under orders to bury men who had been shot in a nearby forest, killed seven SS guards with their spades and fled. Only two were recaptured. This was in spite of the consequences for the remaining camp members: widespread torture, wholesale execution and the danger of informers denouncing the resistance organisations.

But the success of these escapes depended not only on the preparation of the resistance groups. The sympathy of the local population was equally important. Many Jewish prisoners who escaped from Treblinka in Poland were denounced to the Nazi authorities by the extremely anti-Semitic local population. In some cases Jewish escapees were killed by Polish partisans.

It is the mass actions of prisoners

themselves which provide the clearest example of the will to fight. The Russian prisoners of war in particular showed immense courage in organising and carrying out such actions. Battle hardened troops, they were amongst the worst treated of the camp prisoners: derided as both communists and Slavs. The Nazis saw them, like the Jews, as only fit for extermination.

Towards the end of the war as the Soviet Armed Forces continued to advance the Nazis systematically speeded up the rate of extermination. Of 4,700 prisoners who arrived in Mauthausen in late 1944, just 570 were left alive by February 1945.

Senior Soviet officers decided to carry out an escape no matter what the cost. A few days before the breakout an informer betrayed their plans. The SS executed 25 of the fittest prisoners, including the leaders of the escape organisers, Vlasov, Isupov and Chubchenko. The plan was not abandoned. Two days after the execution the break-out began.

Mobilisation

First the block inmate was killed. The escapees were addressed by an officer and armed themselves with stones, coal, soap and fire extinguishers. They stormed the watchtowers at 1.00 am. Prisoners short-circuited the electric fence with their bodies, others climbed over them. The guards were overpowered. Of the 500 prisoners involved in the break out 419 escaped.

The entire surrounding population was mobilised. The Nazis issued the order "No one is to be captured, everyone is to be killed immediately". The slush in the streets turned red with blood. On the first day 300 were captured. Only 17 escaped. The courage involved in undertaking such actions should be etched in the heart of every anti-fascist.

It was the end of the war which saw the combat groups undertake their most successful actions. The collapse of the Nazi regime enabled the combat groups to take advantage of the disorganisation and desperation of their guards. They prepared uprisings to liberate the camps should the Nazis attempt to enact their plans to eliminate all the prisoners before the allies overran them.

It became clear to the combat groups that they could not wait for the allies or partisan forces to release them, as the Nazis undertook forced evacuations - in fact death marches - from the camps as the allies continued to advance. In Treblinka the combat group was led by a Russian officer called Pecherskii. He told them: "Our work won't be done for us by others".

A co-ordinating committee, including all the nationalities present in the camp, drew up a plan of resistance. Knives, axes and some guns were distributed to the Combat Group. On 14 October the uprising took place. Fourteen SS guards were killed before the authorities realised anything was wrong. Then an SS guard began shooting. Pecherskii ordered: "Comrades forward!". Six hundred prisoners charged into heavy machine gun fire. Three hundred escaped.

Langbein's book is an example to every anti-fascist. Even in the most adverse conditions imaginable - enduring torture, beatings, starvation, forced labour and mass murder - anti-fascists were able to organise and fight back. We should celebrate their struggle and ensure it never needs repeating. ■

— REVOLUTIONARY HISTORY —

"No successful defence of the revolution, whether internal or external, is possible without a strong and centralised power."

These words were written by Victor Serge, a revolutionary often portrayed as critical of the Bolsheviks and sympathetic to various libertarian ideas. *Revolutionary History* in publishing some of his essays (many for the first time) has put that myth to rest. It has rescued texts which are in their own right important documents of the revolutionary socialist movement.

The opening essay is Serge's analysis of the Bolsheviks during 1917 and the role of Lenin in guiding them to lead the working class to power.

Serge expounds two connected ideas; that of the scientific character of Marxism as a guide to revolutionary action and Lenin as the most ablest exponent of this method.

The essay shows Lenin's changing attitude to the need for insurrection before and after the famous July Days, when the Petrograd workers tried to take power too early. It follows the development of Lenin's plans for the insurrection, and is a useful antidote to all those who have tried to claim Serge as the ultimate revolutionary anti-Leninist.

The second major document, *The Class Struggle in the Chinese Revolution* was written in 1927 when

Serge was a member of the Left Opposition. Within it we find the tensions in the thought of the Left Opposition as they developed their ideas about the relationship between the democratic tasks of the revolution and the struggle for socialism. These tensions were to be resolved by Trotsky's later work on the theory of permanent revolution, but in Serge's article we get a fascinating glimpse of the Left Opposition struggling to rescue the lessons of the 1917 revolution from oblivion.

Another major text by Serge reproduced here concerns the nature of the planned economy and the role of democratic workers' control. Written in 1947, it is an excellent restatement of the conviction that individual freedom is not incompatible with socialism.

Revolutionary History has done us all a favour in reprinting these texts, passionate and instructive as they are. While they may have faults they are the ones that any honest working class militant could make, and ones which we can all learn from. ■

Revolutionary History Vol. 5 No. 3 Autumn 1994
Victor Serge the century of the unexpected
Essays on Revolution and Counter-Revolution
Available from BCM Box 7646, London WC1N 3XX
Cheques made payable to Socialist Platform

TONY BLAIR does not have a molecule of socialism in his body. That is not a surprise. But in the fight over Clause Four it has become clear that he doesn't share much in common with Labour's timid brand of reformism either. The Euro MP, Ken Coates put it beautifully:

"This young man has not the faintest idea of how socialists think and does not begin to understand the mentality of the party he has been elected to lead. He is, quite simply, a Liberal."

Coates declared that Blair and his friends were "bastards and shits who are going to walk past the unemployed."

Its rare that we can agree with a Labour Euro MP 100%. But we do.

Coates was voicing the real fears of thousands of activists in the labour movement. They desperately want to kick the Tories out. They are even prepared to accept that Blair is someone who can win the next election for Labour: but they know that his plans are for a Labour government that will cruelly betray the hopes of millions.

The battle over Clause Four has given Labour's activists their one opportunity to try and prevent this, by defeating the Blair leadership before it gets into government. That is why it is an important battle that needs to be fought and won.

In itself it won't stop a Blair government selling out the workers to please the bosses. But it will rally and broaden the forces opposed to such betrayals—forces whose pressure can at least rein in the leadership's worst excesses and at best organise successful and effective opposition to it.

Blair wants to get rid of Clause Four to make Labour a natural party of government for the bosses. He is deliberately appealing to those capitalists who recognise the uselessness of the Tories' privatisation dogma—to the bosses dismayed at Britain's crumbling infrastructure, at the Tories' divisions over Europe.

Blair spelled out his vision to a meeting of businessmen from Britain and Europe who paid £500 a head to hear him:

"I want a Labour Party that looks to the future and says clearly what it means and means what it says. The

new constitution will state what we actually believe. We believe there are key services that should remain in public ownership. We need as well as strong public services a dynamic modern economy. Indeed, the one assists the other."

Sweet music . . . to the bosses' ears. They know that they need some public services to help the capitalist economy function, but that those services are not sufficiently profit-yielding to warrant private capitalist investment and ownership. They look enviously at the infrastructures of Germany and Japan. They wish they too had a government that would run those services in their interests. And they might be persuaded that Blair is the man to give them such a government, if he can get rid of Clause Four.

Because what the bosses *don't* want is a party committed to state ownership of those sectors of the economy that can bring them healthy profits. While Labour retains Clause Four there is a chance that its members and supporters might actually demand its implementation. They might demand nationalisation of industries as well as services.

Blair calculates that, if he can force the unions to accept the change, and make centre-left allies like Prescott and Robin Cook toe the anti-Clause Four line, it will be the strongest possible signal to the bosses that he has neutralised the unions' ability to pressure a future Labour government.

Though Blair cannot yet end Labour's historic link with the unions, and does not yet need to, the removal of Clause Four will be a sign to the bosses that the unions' influence on Labour has been reduced to a minimum.

Labour left MP Tony Benn has claimed:

"There is a suspicion growing up that not a new Labour Party is being established but a new party, similar to Clinton's Democrats . . . It is now a new party whose object is to gain office for its parliamentarians."

Actually, it is about more than just securing seats for MPs. It is about securing them in a way that enables them to freely carry out the bosses' needs. To get that every last shred of party democracy has to be cast aside

as well. Neil Kinnock went a long way to attacking party democracy, through his witch-hunts and his "reforms". Blair is availing himself of the "leader right or wrong" atmosphere that this created in the party.

Blair is bullying anyone who opposes him into shutting up, into accepting his god-given right to lead without let or hindrance. And to make sure he can do this he has now clamped down on any of his shadow cabinet from being allowed to say anything about Labour policy unless it is approved by him in advance.

He demanded:

"Every member of the front bench must check their policy statements and adhere to our policy making process."

Wait a minute—the conference decides policy. And the last conference re-affirmed Clause Four. So the MEPs who issued the statement to defend Clause Four were only restating Party policy. But the policy making process is Blair's office. He flouts conference policies and makes up new ones to suit the situation, to suit his aim of placating the bosses. ■

Defend Clause Four



Tony Blair has let it be known that his crusade against Clause Four is a vital test of his leadership. Good. For, beyond the battle over the constitution, it is a battle against Blair's leadership that the Labour Party and the trade union movement needs.

**Mark Harrison,
Helen Watson and
Paul Morris look at
the issues.**

Blair tramples on party democracy

In order to push through his reforms, Blair has had to trample on party democracy. Nobody knows what Blair's draft is. The excuse for this is the need for "consultation". Do these tricksters think that working class activists will fall for this ad-man's try on. We know that Blair has a draft of Clause Four. Why can't we see it and debate it at the rallies and in the constituencies? Why will the NEC only agree a draft just over a month before the 29 April Special Conference on the question?

The reason is that Blair doesn't want his draft debated. He wants to railroad it through without debate. In the meantime he wants to turn the "consultation" exercise into a prolonged media exposure of himself and Prescott wowing the party faithful at rallies with no votes and no debate (questions only are allowed).

For exactly the same reason the special conference has been timed to prevent the political levy paying members of Labour affiliated unions from debating the issue. Only the shop workers' union, USDAW, will have a conference before the special Labour conference. The rest won't have time to organise ballots on

the question, nor hold delegate conferences. How often do we hear about the importance of balloting the members on each and every issue? Yet here is Blair deliberately obstructing even the most minimal consultation with the party's millions strong base in the unions.

And, woe betide any dissidents who choose to use the same channels of debate—the media—that Blair does. It seems he, and he alone, has the exclusive right to use the media to put his point of view. When 32 MEPs published an advert in the *Guardian* in January defending Clause Four—something that they had every right to do—Blair went berserk.

It didn't matter to him that the very same advert had already been published in *Tribune* the previous November. After all nobody reads *Tribune*. But the *Guardian* was a different matter. He can use it—as he did in late January with a big interview (which unlike the MEPs he didn't have to pay to get published)—but nobody else can. If you oppose Blair, and use the media to get your opposition published you are guilty of offending the great leader. Blair winged that the advert was a "gross discourtesy" and an example of "infantile incompetence". ■

WHAT ABOUT the privatisation of the rail? Labour policy is against privatisation. It is for the re-nationalisation of the railways.

The fight against railway privatisation and the case for a state owned railway system is by no means a preserve of the left. Most big capitalists in Britain favour publicly owned railways. Economists calculate that it would cost very little to re-nationalise, particularly if Labour made a promise to do just that now. Such a promise would sabotage the Tories' plans because it would deter the already small band of people willing to buy shares in the railways. Already the Tories are despondent that only six of the 25 passenger businesses will be sold off by the time of the next election.

Mindful of this Prescott promises conference that the railways would be re-nationalised. Yet Tony Blair—not adhering to "our policy making process"—refused to say that Labour

OFF THE RAILS

would re-nationalise the railways:

"I am not going to get into the situation where I am declaring that the Labour government is going to commit sums of money to re-nationalise several years down the line. It is not sensible politics."

The man should have the word "forked" tattooed on his tongue. Besides, everyone knows it is sensible politics. Most voters want a modern, state owned railway. You don't have to be a socialist to want a railway system like the French TGV.

Blair is so hostile to nationalisation that he could not bring himself to stand by a popular party policy. His sidekick Prescott was brought in to reassure people there was "a working party" busy looking at options for dealing with a privatised railway. Mind you, those options could entail allowing all privatised sectors of the industry to

run their full tracts. Pres

"This is a situation and we will look options."

It isn't complex at all. It's stolen by privateers. They compensate them—not—it would be cruel to nationalise. But Blair's single costed promise class. They are more what the bosses' press releases than about the needs of working class.

Meanwhile the Tories after promise to represent.

The debacle over real issues behind the debate. Blair is detaching away any levers the workers might use to place Labour in office to their interests. ■

THESE ARE those on the left of the party who are lining up with Blair on the pretext that "nationalisation is not the same as socialism". Robin Cook and Clare Short have both come out against Clause Four, despite their previous loyalty to it. Their feeble justification for this is that they have now learned that nationalisation is not the same as socialism, and of course they still want socialism.

They both attack Clause Four because it doesn't deal with "social

justice" and women's rights. Clare Short argued that her loyalty to Clause Four was "youthful conviction". Now she's older she knows better.

"We all know that it is a complete illusion to think that if the top 250 monopolies were nationalised we would automatically live in a fair and just society."

We know this from the failure of past nationalisations and from the downfall of Stalinism. This "left" argument against Clause Four may sway people in the party. It shouldn't because it is a sham argument.

Revolutionary socialists have never argued that nationalisation, in and of itself, was the same as working class emancipation.

Under past Labour governments industries were nationalised on a capitalist basis. That is, they were placed at the disposal of capitalism as a whole (cheap fuel and steel for industry, the subsidised transport of cargo for the capitalist firms). They were a means of helping capitalism function. That is why massive compensation was paid to their capitalist owners. It is also why they were run by capitalist managers. They were not placed under the control of the working class.



Left illusions

This form of nationalisation, capitalist nationalisation, has existed for years. It is usually extended during wartime. It is sometimes used, as it was by the Tory Edward Heath, to bail out key capitalist concerns (Rolls Royce for example). It has nothing to do with socialism.

Nor has Stalinist "command planning". The reason Stalinist nationalised economies failed was because the workers' movement, smashed by the Stalinist bureaucracy, was deprived of control over the planning process.

But even socialist nationalisation, with full workers control, is only a means to the end of building a socialist society.

None of this invalidates the need to nationalise industry, including the 250 monopolies. What is certain is that there will never be any "social justice" or equality so long as the capitalists are allowed to run industry solely in pursuit of profit. Capitalists invest for profit, not to build "social justice". And so long as they are allowed to do so unhindered injustice will be prevalent.

Clause Four does not get us out of this dilemma. It is ambiguous, designed in the 1920s to give Labour's politics a "socialist" colouration and head off the influence of revolutionary socialism.

Its commitment to "common ownership" can mean, and has been interpreted as everything from mass nationalisations to employee share ownership schemes.

But it is worth defending. Blair wants an unbridgeable gulf between new Labour and any whiff of socialism. Clause Four is only a whiff. It is not the real thing. But unless we do stop Blair fighting for the real thing will be even more difficult. ■

PASS THIS RESOLUTION!

- 1 This union/branch deplores Tony Blair's attempt to change Clause Four of the Labour Party constitution.
- 2 We call on our union/CLP delegates to the 29 April Special Conference to vote against all motions which seek to change or abolish Clause Four.
- 3 We call on the Labour leadership to commit the party to the renationalisation of all the industries and services privatised by the Tories, with no compensation to the institutional and big private shareholders. They should be run under workers' control and management.

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Why nationalisation?

TONY BLAIR has one great advantage over Hugh Gaitskell when it comes to getting rid of Clause Four. Reality. In 1959 when Labour leader Hugh Gaitskell tried to ditch Clause Four he was flying in the face of the economic facts of life. Capitalism was booming. Full employment existed alongside rising profits and efficiency. And the recently nationalised industries were part of this success story.

State ownership was most definitely in fashion. For years the coal owners and railways magnates had clamoured for it. Nationalising the steel industry proved a bit more of a struggle but the Tory government left it alone when they got into office.

Most nationalised industries could not be made to work under private ownership. They needed huge injections of public money to provide the investments they'd been starved of. Others were run at a loss to subsidise the profits of the rest of industry.

Tony Blair, however, inhabits a different world. Most of the state sector has gone or is going. He just wants to bring the constitution into line with capitalist reality and Labour policy.

In his blast against a blanket commitment to state ownership, he argues in his policy statement:

"A competitive market economy, with a strong industrial and wealth generating base is in the public interest. So are well run public services. To achieve both we need not just a thriving private sector but an enterprising public sector where there will be a role for public ownership for reasons of efficiency as well as justice."

So on grounds of public interest and efficiency, nationalisation in general must be rejected. In a string of interviews he adds that it would be much too costly to nationalise industries anyway.

Let us take these arguments in turn.

Social justice?

He wants justice. In the late 20th century, in a developed country, "social justice" means a job, a decent home, safe and efficient transport, local services, an education system and health service. Let's not be too ambitious, after all. This costs a lot of money. The capitalist system cannot provide these for all, because, if it did, it would undermine the ability of the bosses to make a profit. Providing these means high wages and taxes to fund social spending. But Blair wants a "strong, competitive, industrial market economy." He simply cannot have both.

As the twentieth century draws to a close we have got enough evidence from the developed economies of Europe and USA to see that the era of high-wage, high-productivity capitalist development is as firmly buried as Hugh Gaitskell. Decent wages and high taxes on business are in flat contradiction to the dividend-fix of shareholders and the asset management needs of the institutional investors. The words "social justice" and "thriving private sector" are not to be found in the same political dictionary.

Efficiency?

Blair also wants efficiency. Take the example of the two British-based pharmaceutical companies, Glaxo and Wellcome. Between them they make hundreds of millions of pounds in profits. They claim they need such huge profits to invest in the spiralling costs of developing new drugs. Because of this cost they are going to merge to be more "efficient", with the loss of thousands of jobs.

No one doubts that pushing back the frontiers of pharmaceutical science is expensive and needs huge investment. But think of how much money could be saved for research if the millions now spent on advertising and promotion of competing drugs were abolished. That's what nationalisation could do. It would increase efficiency through saving money, and would lower the costs of drugs and make them more widely available to those who need them—social justice.

But no Labour politician has ever seriously proposed nationalising the drug firms, or most of the other huge capitalist concerns which really have the wealth and power in Britain. Why not? This brings us to the question of cost.

Cost?

The shareholders—mainly other big capitalist companies and individuals—would demand compensation. Otherwise, according to capitalist logic, it would be theft. Every capitalist nationalisation ever carried out was done with generous compensation. The government was still paying the old mine owners compensation for nationalising the pits in 1947 right up until it decided to privatise British Coal. Is this an insuperable barrier?

Socialists have no interest in inflicting hardship on the many middle class and some working class people who rely on a small number of shares for their future income in retirement. That is why we say there should be no compensation to institutional owners, only compensa-

tion to individual shareholders on the basis of proven need.

But to really make nationalisation effective the commanding heights of the economy will have to be taken out of the hands of the bosses without compensation. They will have to be put into the hands of the state and put under the control of those who work in them. But that would also go far beyond what even an ardent Clause Four supporter would advocate.

The left in the debate with Blair accept the limits of Clause Four. They want to change the mix in the carburetor but keep the same engine of growth. So Tribune, the soft-left weekly, jointly issued with the *New Statesman* a "New Clause Four" aimed at improving the old one and concretising its commitments. It's new draft only calls for Labour to:

"promote a prosperous and fully employed economy through a mixture of government intervention and private initiative and endeavour... Labour recognises that there is a role for both market mechanisms and public ownership and provision."

The left advise Blair that by means of a "golden share" or a "super regulator" they can keep control for the public while leaving ownership in the private sector. This is toy town socialism. If the controlling share were ever used to achieve social justice, through say a big tax levy on profits, the shareholders would take their ownership elsewhere overnight and leave a huge hole where the capital stock used to be. Or, to resist this, the public regulator would have to nationalise the shareholdings.

The purpose of nationalisation is to facilitate the implementation of a rational plan for the whole economy which could gear production to meeting workers' needs. But Blair's supporters, like all modern critics of socialism, insist that rational planning is impossible.

Andrew Marr, wrote in the *Independent* (11 January): "[The Labour left] mentally inhabits a world that is gone, one in which there is no strong global economy, no international mobility of labour or capital, in which strong states can deploy powerful and predictable levers, including the ownership of big corporations, for social ends. Nice. Moral. But irrelevant."

His words succinctly summarise the case against state ownership and planning. Not only does the modern global economy mean socialism is out of the window: according to the current wisdom even most forms of state interventionist capitalism are outmoded.

In the first place it is just not true that the modern capitalist economy makes it impossible to deploy "powerful and predictable levers" to change social conditions.



Nationalising the mines in 1947

If you have a mortgage you were probably on the receiving end of such a "lever" this month. The Tories and the Bank of England decided to raise interest rates in order to slow down economic growth and inflation.

Or you may have noticed milk prices soaring recently. That had nothing to do with "supply and demand"—the hallowed "market mechanism"—and everything to do with new powers granted to the milk marketing monopoly and a new price structure designed to favour capitalist milk producers.

What is true is that government intervention is generally designed to bolster the profit system rather than to undermine it. But the techniques of intervention exist at a national level. It is the political will that is missing.

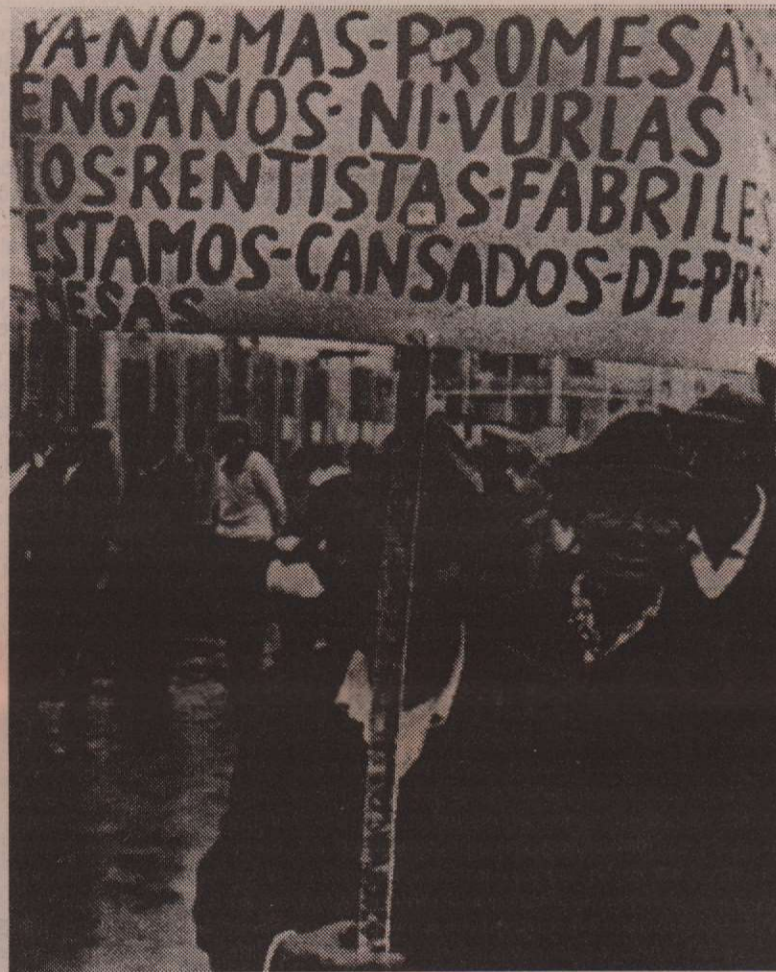
To make state owned industries into effective economic levers the profit system as a whole has to be dismantled. Clause Four cannot encompass that ambition. Only revolutionary socialism can take what is progressive in the idea of nationalisation—centralising the main means of wealth creation into one set of hands.

But we insist on two vital additions. First, our nationalisation is at the same time *expropriation*. That is, we must remove these industries and finance houses from any form of private property at all and without providing compensation. And secondly, we renounce the whole tradition of bureaucratic state capitalist management of these assets and entrust them to the workers and consumers. Now that would be a Clause worth having. ■

BOLIVIA 1985

The Miners' March Days

In March 1985 thousands of Bolivian miners descended upon the capital, La Paz, and for more than two weeks held the city while the country was engulfed by a general strike. José Villa, active in these events, assesses their significance.



Pensioners' protest, La Paz 1985

THE MORNING of 4 March 1985; around 15,000 miners are gathered in La Paz. Accompanied by tens of thousands of teachers, students, trade unionists and street traders, their protest resonates around the city all afternoon. Wherever they go they leave their calling card; explosions from detonator caps dancing loudly off the streets. These loud cracks intimidate the army and bring confidence to our ranks.

This was the scene that first morning. It was to be repeated daily for the next two weeks.

The trade union officials pleaded for the marchers to go back to their mines, but the miners shrugged aside their pleas. The key demands had yet to be won: a minimum living wage, a sliding scale of wages, and working class power! They pressed harder and harder. For days the President was a prisoner in his own palace; the roads in the city were blocked.

Nevertheless, this movement did not take power. Regaining their composure, the bosses launched a counter-offensive which was to inflict a heavy defeat on the miners and their supporters. How did this happen?

Bolivia is the poorest and least industrialised country in South America. The great majority of the population scrape a living from small plots of land or by running small shops. Yet the industrial workers play a central role in society, thanks to the importance of their work in the national economy. During and after the Second World War the political power of the miners transformed them into the vanguard of the popular and workers' movement. The miners had been the cornerstone of the resistance to the post-war oligarchic governments: they routed the army in the 1952 revolution.

In 1985 the miners numbered between 50,000 and 70,000, of whom 30,000 worked for COMIBOL (the state mining corporation).

Unstable

Between 1978 and 1980 Bolivia was totally unstable. There were three presidential elections, four coups and seven presidents. A general strike stopped the bloody Natusch coup of 1979. In 1980 the Democratic and Popular Union (UDP) won the elections. The UDP had been formed as a popular front by the Communist Party (PC) and the MIR, around Siles Zuazo, leader of the MNRI. [See box]

However, a coup by Garcia Meza forced the UDP out of government. Garcia Meza intended to impose a Pinochet-style dictatorship, eliminating the leaders of the left. Fortunately, he failed. There were three presidents in the military junta's two year life. The revolutionary upsurge of 1982 forced the military to put the UDP, which they had deposed, back in power with Siles at its head.

In the beginning workers had many illusions in the UDP. The PC, the principal party of the workers' movement, had two ministers. The COB and the peasants' confederation were led by members or supporters of the UDP.

But the UDP remained a "popular front"—a cross-class alliance tying the workers' parties to the "left"

bosses. But the popular front could not satisfy the workers' needs. At that time the whole of Latin America was suffering the effects of recession, sharp rises in debt servicing and a collapse in export prices.

In response to popular pressure the government put wages up, but paid for it by printing more and more money. The UDP offered the miners co-participation in state enterprises and a series of benefits which quickly evaporated in the heat of hyper-inflation. The workers soon became disillusioned with the UDP.

In November 1984 manufacturing workers declared a general strike, occupying the factories and taking their bosses hostage. Not a single day passed without fresh strikes and demonstrations. March 1985 marked the twenty-ninth month of disillusionment with the popular front.

It was the PC and the MIR which had instigated "co-government" during the UDP's term in office by encouraging the COB to enter the cabinet. Juan Lechin, the miners' leader and head of the COB executive for four decades, tried to mediate between the UDP and the radical rank and file in order to dissipate the discontent. The PC's support for the government at this moment led to it losing its predominant place in the workers' movement. The MIR then split, with its left wing going on to form the MIR-Masas.

The COB held a congress in 1984. It was polarised between the official

bloc around the PC on the one side, and the DRU on the other. The DRU was a trade union alliance put together by Lechin, including the MIR-Masas and the POR-De Pié [see box]. Rather than fighting the popular front, the DRU preferred to try and radicalise it. It put forward a number of radical measures but proposed that the workers enter the government and state enterprises.

Guillermo Lora's POR (the POR-Lora), which had about 2% of the COB delegates, tried to pose as the opposition to both wings, demanding an insurrection to install the dictatorship of the proletariat. The DRU won, the PC lost positions and the MIR-Masas candidate, Delgadillo, was elected as the number two figure in the COB.

When the miners took La Paz in 1985 the left was paralysed. It was taken by surprise by the sharp rise in militancy. The PC did everything possible to persuade the miners to moderate their demands and methods of

struggle. Lechin suggested replacing Siles with another MNR leader. Delgadillo argued that General Sejas should launch a "patriotic" coup. The POR-Lora demanded the immediate imposition of the dictatorship of the proletariat, although it gave no concrete explanation of how this was to be achieved.

Trotsky said that generally in revolutionary processes a moment arrives at which the vanguard of the movement becomes so radicalised that it spontaneously pushes towards power but the majority of the masses do not follow. The forces of reaction can take advantage of this to pass onto the counter-attack.

In Bolivia the miners and sections of workers in La Paz and the Andean plateau wanted to take power. But they were not armed and had not formed workers' councils and popular assemblies (soviets). Nor had they managed to split the army. The majority of the peasants, most students and the towns in the low lands and to the west were not integrated into the movement. In March 1985 the central task was to organise the broad mass of the rank and file workers and peasants in popular assemblies and to arm them.

In March the miners held huge assemblies with thousands participating in the open air. At one point Lechin was booed out of the meeting by militant miners. The miners found him and forced him to take off his trademark Italian hat and wear a ordinary miner's helmet! These assemblies were the raw material out of which soviets could have been built. It was necessary to organise other sectors of workers on the same basis. The assemblies should have then elected delegates to a national action council. The POR-Lora led the University Federation (Students' Union) in La Paz, a city with 40,000 students in a population of less than a million. Meanwhile the POR-De Pié ran the manufacturing workers' federation and the union at the Siglo XX mine (the biggest in Bolivia). The rank and file was radicalised and these federations could have initiated the formation of an elected and accountable popular assembly in La Paz. They could have taken their message out to the country.

As a first step such bodies would have put the distribution of fuel, gas and food under their control. In the armed forces and police force there

was discontent and this was fertile ground on which to sow agitation for the barracks to form soldiers' committees and ally themselves with the movement. But not one organisation of the far left called for the formation of soviet type organisations.

After two weeks of strike action the armed forces occupied the streets and forced the federation to negotiate. The COB leaders failed to organise any resistance and sold out. The miners returned home with only a paltry pay rise to show for their struggles. Before the "March Days" Siles had decided to cut short his period of government by one year in order to bring forward the presidential elections. The right hoped to win and put in place a neo-liberal government which would lead an assault against the proletariat. The March Days delayed the poll by several weeks and the elections were not held until July 1985.

Bánzer, who had ruled the country as a dictator from 1971 to 1978, won the election, declaring that he was going to impose order and stability.

La Paz, which only three or four months earlier had supported the miners, was now transformed into a bastion of support for Bánzer. The petit bourgeois majority of the La Paz population were desperate for an end to hyper-inflation and scarcity, and a return to stability and order. If the proletariat could not deliver it (thanks to the betrayal of its leadership) then at least the extreme right would do so, they thought.

Endorse

Despite winning the election, Bánzer had not received the 33% of the vote required to assume office. Parliament refused to endorse him. The "left" then voted for Victor Paz Estenssoro's MNR, and on 6 August 1985 Paz Estenssoro returned to the Presidency for the fourth time. Within a few days his finance minister, Sánchez de Lozada, launched his economic shock therapy. Prices rose overnight—fourteen fold(!)—while wages were frozen. The organised workers took action but the urban traders, shanty town dwellers and the peasants did not join the movement.

In September the COB announced an indefinite general strike against the economic shock. The government was able to break the strike in the factories and the public services. During the second week of strike action there was a workers' and popular assembly held in Oruro, with some ten thousand people taking part. Among the leaders were the comrades who founded Poder Obrero, Workers Power's Bolivian sister organisation.

That night the state decreed a state of siege. Thousands of miners across the whole country began hunger strikes in their mine shafts. But the MNR government won out in the end.

Over the next year, a series of defeats decisively closed the revolutionary period which had opened up in 1982. Time was to show just what a strategic defeat this was for the Bolivian working class.

In the years that followed the heart was ripped out of the workers' movement by the destruction of the tin mining industry. The whole movement was thrown back onto the defensive for the next decade as it tried to regroup to protect the gains of the 1952 revolution from the onslaught of neo-liberalism. ■

WORKERS POWER PUBLIC MEETING

London

Thursday 2 March 1995, 7.30pm

Room S300,

London School of Economics

10 YEARS SINCE THE BOLIVIAN GENERAL STRIKE

José Villa and other activists from Bolivia will recall the events and discuss lessons for revolutionaries today.

COB (Bolivian Workers' Centre): the Bolivian equivalent of the TUC.

DRU: alliance formed within the COB in opposition to the PC.

MIR (Left Revolutionary Movement): ex-Castroite current, moved from verbal espousal of guerrillaism in the Seventies to neo-liberalism and government in the nineties.

MIR-Masas (Left Revolutionary Movement-Masas): left split from MIR

MNR (National Revolutionary Movement): a bourgeois nationalist party that emerged triumphant out of the 1952 revolution. The MNR nationalised the mines and most workers voted for it. But despite anti-imperialist rhetoric and a "left" wing prepared to ally with the workers, it

eventually did the job of defeating the working class and maintaining order for the bosses. Now the party of government in Bolivia

MNRI (National Revolutionary Movement Left): a short-lived left split from the MNR in the Fifties.

PC: the (Stalinist) Bolivian Communist Party.

POR-Lora (Revolutionary Workers' Party-Lora): The POR, led by Guillermo Lora.

POR-De Pié (Revolutionary Workers' Party-De Pié): a syndicalist split from the POR. A very small group that occasionally found itself in a position of influence.

UDP (Democratic and Popular Union): a popular front involving the PC, the MIR and MNRI, which won the elections in 1980.

BELGIUM

Flemish fascist front

Last October the Vlaams Blok got 28% of the vote in Antwerp's local elections. Richard Brenner looks at how this fascist front party has gained such a hold in Belgium.

FRANCIS van den Eynde is not nice to know. One of his firmly held beliefs is that "the emancipation of women is like the emancipation of chimpanzees". Unfortunately, Francis has a lot of friends. In Belgium on 9 October 1994 many of them turned out for his party—the Vlaams Blok (Flemish Bloc, VB)—in local elections. By the end of the evening in Antwerp VB had won 76,877 votes—over 28% of the total vote. It secured 18 of the 55 council seats, making it the largest single party on the council. In Brussels VB took seats in four out of the 19 local communes. Throughout the country VB now has representatives on 82 of the 308 city councils.

And Francis van den Eynde is a member of parliament.

So what kind of a place tolerates scum like van den Eynde? How have they advanced to within a hair's breadth of power in a city the size and importance of Antwerp?

The Vlaams Blok was forged in May 1979 out of an earlier electoral alliance of hardline Flemish nationalist and fascist groups. From its inception it has drawn on the tradition of inter-war movements such as the Flemish National Federation (VNV) and the *Verdinaso* of Van Severen (League of Netherland-National Solidarists), both of which, as Roger Griffin records, "came to adopt overtly fascist or Nazi elements but without ever making a serious attempt to seize power at the head of a mass movement."

In addition, the VB has adopted modern fascist theories, such as the influential racist pseudo-science of Julius Evola. It translates and distributes Holocaust denial literature, and has attempted to capitalise on nostalgia for the wartime Nazi collaborationist leader Léon Degrelle.

Central themes in VB agitation are the demands for an independent Flanders, the expulsion of all immigrants, and an end to corruption in government. It combines demagoguery against "Flemish poverty" and unemployment with the racist slogan "Eigen volk eerst" (Our own folk first). VB calls for the banning of abortion, divorce and contraception, as well as the exclusion of married women from the workforce.

It was during the elections of the 1980s that VB made its steady advance. In 1982 it secured two representatives on municipal councils in the local elections, having won 5.2% of the vote. In 1987 it won two seats in the lower and one in the upper house of parliament. Then, in the local elections of October 1988, came the major breakthrough: VB won over 17% of the vote in Antwerp, taking about a fifth of the city's council seats.

Largest

By the general election of November 1991, VB polled 25%; the VB was now the largest political party in Flanders' main city. Nationally, the outfit attracted 10.3%, giving it 12 representatives in the lower house.

The VB moved quickly to capitalise on its gains. A major recruitment campaign was launched in 1992 under the slogan "We say what you think". Three thousand new members were signed up, bringing total membership to around 10,000.

The VB disputes claims that it is a

fascist party or that it is hostile to democratic liberties. Nevertheless there is clear evidence that Nazi groupings and cadres are active within the VB, and that the party as a whole serves as an electoral and legal front for these fascists.

Attention

One VB member of parliament, Xavier Buisseret, has attracted particular attention. Buisseret has faced numerous charges for crimes of violence against immigrants and was formerly the publisher of a Holocaust revisionist journal and leader of the Vlaamse Militanten Orde (VMO).

The VMO was a hardline, openly Nazi, paramilitary grouping. It was proscribed by the state in the 1980s for conducting terrorist attacks on immigrants and the left. Once it was

banned its leadership and members immediately joined the VB.

Far from distancing themselves from former VMO members, the Dillen leadership of the VB have made them more than welcome. Buisseret is now head of the VB's education department, responsible for the political instruction of party members and its sizeable youth organisation, the Vlaams Blok Jongeren.

The VB's relationship to organised fascism is further demonstrated by the presence within its ranks of numerous former Waffen-SS officers from the Belgian and Flanders divisions. Former members of the Flanders SS helped to establish and support the Vrij Historisch Onderzoek (Free Historical Foundation), a Holocaust revisionist propaganda centre which is affiliated to the VB.

The VB publicly denies that para-

military activity forms any element of its political strategy and appears to have no nationally-organised militia. Clearly, the VB want to avoid the fate of the banned VMO. Nevertheless, there is evidence that organised physical violence by VB members is tolerated and encouraged by the party leadership.

The student organisation Nationaal Studentisch Studenten Verbond (NSV) has close links to the VB, and one report states that "a large number of Vlaams Blok activists, and a high proportion of its leaders, were once members of the NSV". This organisation propounds racist and anti-Jewish ideas and organises violent street actions; the same report states that its "presence is felt on the streets of Antwerp" through attacks on immigrants and left wingers. Can we simply describe the VB as a fascist party? No. Despite the instances of organised violence, the VB's day to day practice does not include the mobilisation of a mass movement to physically liquidate working class organisations. This is what distinguishes fascism from other species of far rightism; this is what makes fascism a weapon of last resort for the bosses.

Incubate

Like similar parties in Europe, the fascists within the Vlaams Blok have had to incubate their ideas and programme in conditions very different to the 1930s. They have had to accommodate to a long period of bourgeois democracy and economic prosperity after the Second World War.

In these conditions, openly Hitlerite groupings have been condemned to a marginal existence. The alternative for fascists has been to broaden their appeal through front organisations and a more diffuse ideology.

Racism has played a fundamental role in this. In the case of VB this has



Vlaams Blok boss Dewinter

included aiming their sales pitch at workers, particularly Flemish members of the Christian Democratic trade union (CSC). Through its slogan "Work for our own folk first" the VB blame immigrants and "preferential treatment" of Wallonia for the sharp fall in employment in Flanders.

Anti-immigrant racism has played a key role in the recent rise in VB's support. The labour movement and the left have failed to organise effective opposition to the mounting racism directed against the increasing numbers of refugees and asylum seekers in the 1990s. In 1993, when some 26,800 refugees sought asylum in Belgium, the coalition government (with the support of the Socialists) introduced racist laws which allowed for the detention of asylum seekers (and indeed all foreigners thought to be a risk to "national security"). The immigration appeals procedure was tightened so that asylum seekers could be turned away at the border without any proper hearing. This rise in state racism served only to legitimise the extreme repatriation calls and anti-immigrant violence of the far-right and the fascists.

At present, then, the VB is a fascist front party. Not only are outright Nazis tolerated and nurtured within its ranks, but its official ideology is heavily determined by the history of fascism in Belgium. Belgium was conquered by German imperialism in 1940, and the ideology of mainstream Belgian bourgeois nationalism has—since 1944—been that of the wartime allies, the resistance and national independence. The VB's open identification with the wartime collaborators severs it from the nationalist ideology of the democratic bourgeoisie and associates it directly with the history of fascist rule in Belgium under German military occupation.

Expansion

The VB's electoral front is designed to allow the reorganisation and expansion of fascist forces in Flanders and Brussels whilst avoiding the unpopularity that a direct attack on democratic liberties would attract under present conditions.

However, with each passing year the social and political conditions in Europe mature for a further open growth of fascism. At present no ruling class in Europe has need for this weapon of last resort to impose brutal sacrifices on the working class. The time may come when it does. It is our job to stop groups such as Vlaams Blok long before then. ■

● Trotskyist International 16, out this month, contains an in depth analysis of the fascist front phenomenon, focusing on the French Front National and the Italian MSI. Details page 3.



Anti-racist demo in Brussels

Feeding on despair

WHY HAS such a party been able to rise to prominence over recent years? The answer lies in the deepening economic and political crisis of Belgian capitalism.

Belgium's national debt stands at 120% of GNP, higher than any other western European state. The magnified effect of the 1990-94 European recession has led to mass unemployment and falling living standards. Between 1982 and 1992, real wages fell by 13%. By 1994, unemployment stood at 500,000 (12.1%); some 21% of households were living in poverty and material insecurity.

This situation has resulted from a series of austerity programmes imposed since the late 1970s. But Belgian capital is still in a weak position and further attacks will be necessary if the bourgeoisie are to ensure convergence in accordance with the Maastricht criteria for further European union after 1997.

The workers' movement had a first class opportunity in 1993 to come to the head of opposition to the coalition government and its austerity programme. A mass strike wave, beginning with sectional strikes and

culminating in a one-day general strike on 26 November, brought the country to a standstill. But the leaders of the social-democratic trade union federation FGFB and the Christian union CSC ensured their respective actions were not co-ordinated.

After 26 November there was no further national action except for an FGFB demonstration called for two weeks later! What is more, far from taking advantage of the solidarity between French and Flemish speaking workforces (demonstrated throughout the strike wave), the FGFB and CSC effectively sabotaged it. Since the CSC is predominant in the Flemish areas and the FGFB in Wallonia, their failure to unite in action actually exacerbated national and regional antagonisms.

Forced

The defeat of the 1993 strike movement against the Christian Democratic/Socialist Party coalition left wages frozen until 1996. Arrangements to index pay and benefits were profoundly weakened, young workers were guaranteed only 90% of the national minimum wage,

and the unemployed could be forced to work on cheap labour schemes. Such a defeat for the working class inevitably strengthens the forces of despair and reaction.

The Socialists—both in Flanders and Wallonia—have discredited themselves through participation in the government coalition. In 1991 some 29% of VB voters were previous supporters of the Socialist Party. This fall in Socialist support continued after every one of the Walloon Socialist Party's MPs voted for the austerity programme. The fact that the Socialist Party has been part of the municipal authority in Antwerp since the end of the war, wholly integrated into the local bourgeois political establishment, has been an important factor in enabling the VB to find an echo for its right wing "social" and anti-establishment rhetoric.

The failure of the workers' movement and the left to give effective leadership to mass discontent with the political establishment has allowed the VB to capitalise on the crisis and pose as the strongest "radical" alternative on offer to the electorate. ■

RUSSIA

Last days of
Tsar Boris?

IN THE MIDST of continued killing in Chechnya, Russia's President Yeltsin claims the war is over. This is partly no doubt to reassure his "friends" in the West, but also because the longer the war continues the more the political, and economic, cost of the war increases within Russia itself.

How will the groaning government budget pay for the war? How will the shattered morale of the army—so cruelly exposed by the war—be repaired? Which of the struggling factions in the Kremlin will Yeltsin turn to next in his bid to steer Russia towards capitalism?

There are three main factions in Russian politics at present. There is the shadowy, unelected, Security Council which gave the orders to start the Chechen war. Then there are those around Prime Minister Chernomyrdin, who declared that he would try to stop the war. And finally there are the ex-Yeltsinites in Russia's Choice, led by Yegor Gaidar, who has been organising anti-war protest meetings in Moscow.

These political forces are not just divided on the war, they are also battling it out over the economy. The restoration process is a battleground which looks more and more likely to lead Russia not to capitalism but to economic disaster.

In the early stages of the restoration process the aspiring reformers, led by Gaidar, opted for the fast track approach. On the advice of Western economists such as Jeffrey Sachs, they plunged Russia into an industrial slump in a bid to destroy loss-making industry. They let prices for most goods rip so as to bring them up to world levels while holding wages back. The mass of workers only survived by drawing on their billions of roubles of savings.

All this was designed to open the way to a slimmer, export-oriented Russian capitalism. It did not work. First of all, the Central Bank eluded the grasp of shock therapists. When the Communist Party was dumped and the central planning agencies broken up, the old bureaucrats in the Central Bank hung on to their posts. The finance directors printed money and oversaw a build up of inter-enterprise debts to allow the major industries to escape Gaidar's discipline.

In 1993, the fast track restorationists launched a privatisation programme in the belief that this would transfer power from the hands of managers and workers into those of owners who would take harsh commercial decisions. This did not work either. Most "shares" fell into the hands of the same managers and workers.

The short, sharp shock began to look like long, lasting agony. Workers had used up their savings. Millions were losing their jobs and finding no welfare safety net at all, only a harsh life on the streets. Some 49 million Russians were officially living below subsistence level by mid-1994. Life expectancy is now falling in Russia.

The Russian workers, seeing that there is little for them between the factory floor and the gutter, have clung tenaciously to what jobs they have. Workers know that a job is essential, not so much for the wages it brings—they often come months late and are on average only a third of the official subsistence level—but for the much needed housing, food and medical supplies it can guarantee.

Faced with this stubborn resistance, another push for capitalism was needed. Yeltsin took matters into his own hands in October 1993. He decided to batter Parliament and with it all those who had used it to try and obstruct Gaidar's path to capitalism. He managed to bring the interior troops and army to heel as a result. But it all backfired when elections the following December delivered a substantial protest vote against the restoration process, and led to success for the reactionary far-right nationalists.

Unable to form a government, Gaidar and his crew resigned and eco-

nomics moved towards the centre and the figure of Prime Minister Chernomyrdin. He was associated with a slower track approach to the transition and was deemed more responsive to the demands of the enterprises. Chernomyrdin speaks for a layer of the army high command and the oil and gas sector managers. They are trying to get western multinationals involved in exploiting the huge Russian reserves and are very pro-IMF.

But as 1994 wore on the fall of Gaidar served to embolden another faction within the ruling administration who had yet another agenda. This faction includes figures such as Oleg Soskovets, a deputy Prime Minister, General Alexander Kozhakov, chief of Yeltsin's personal security and Oleg Lobov, the secretary of the President's Security Council. This is the crew which has been dubbed the "War Party" for its role in pushing for the invasion of Chechnya. They speak for the old loss-making heavy state industries which are linked to the military/defence sector. These industries, unlike those in the oil and gas sectors, have no rich backers abroad. The War Party aims to rescue this military and defence sector as the foundation of a strong national economy with imperial ambitions, at least in the "near abroad".

Each faction crowds in around Yeltsin. Utilising the extensive power granted to him under the new constitution, he leans on first one and then another faction in order to keep the process of capitalist restoration alive. His last major turn in the autumn pushed him towards Soskovets. Given the deteriorating economic situation in the autumn and winter, Yeltsin agreed to don the mantle of Great Russian chauvinist, and thereby steal the thunder of his nationalist critics and deflect from the economic hardships.

The invasion in December allowed the War Party to draw the reigns of decision making away from Chernomyrdin and the Council of Ministers and into the Security Council. By this

move Soskovets was to strengthen his grip on overall economic policy.

But the war has gone badly. It was no quick surgical strike followed by a mop-up operation, carried out behind a veil of press censorship. Yeltsin's reputation as a democrat lies firmly interred beneath the rubble of Grozny.

The Chechen war has caused intense dissent within the army. Yeltsin finally acted against those in the army high command who had opposed the war and sacked four of his generals. One of those sacked was General Gromov, who led the Afghan

invasion and is reported to have support amongst all ranks in the army. Gromov is linked to those whose interests lie with the power and banking sectors. When Yeltsin removed Gromov he struck at the Chernomyrdin faction's support in the army.

As Yeltsin continues his balancing act, those elements of the army who support the war and the Security Council cannot feel too comfortable. Yeltsin has been forced to defend his Security Minister, General Grachev. But in a speech last month Yeltsin ominously declared that someone

would have to take responsibility for the war, signalling that he is prepared to sacrifice Grachev if necessary.

The economy has worsened as a result of the war. The rouble is in free fall again. It is likely to drop below R4,000 to the dollar in February, making it much more difficult for the government to sell bonds to finance its spending. The war has cost the government at least \$5 billion to date. The IMF, in Moscow to negotiate financial support for the rouble, insists on a strict budget stabilisation as a condition. Chernomyrdin has responded to the call and, in a move against the War Party, announced that "subsidies to the state enterprises will have to be slashed" to pay for the war.

Russia in 1995 is set for more crises. It remains a country with a dual economy with little interaction between the two parts. The Security Council faction clings to the old military/defence sector for grim life. It knows its future is on the line if credits go by the board. But if they succeed in getting credits extended in the present slump then inflation will rocket again and lead to a further crash in the distance.

As the year unfolds further authoritarian measures are likely. Yeltsin may cancel the elections for the end of the year. He could eclectically combine elements from various programmes to survive and muddle through. Or, failing to impose his stamp, Yeltsin himself could fall to a new "strongman".

An increasingly reactionary, authoritarian crackdown would pose a real threat to the embryonic resistance by the Russian workers to the effects of restoration. Last year there was a small increase in economic strikes, 280 more than 1993, mainly around demands for prompt payment of wages.

The bureaucrats, defending their privileges, and the aspiring capitalists, looking for massive profits, have nothing to offer the working class. Whatever their differences, they know the potential threat that lies within the Russian working class. In January the Duma voted to virtually treble the minimum wage, raising it from R20,500 to R54,100. They expect that Yeltsin will veto this increase since it would wreck the budget and the deal with the IMF.

But for how much longer can these charlatans get away with fine words, but no action? They should remember their training in the numerous Marxist-Leninist institutes of their Stalinist youth—fine words "butter no parsnips". ■



While Russia's war in Chechnya rages, so does bitter faction fighting in the Kremlin – and not just about the war. As **Keith Harvey** explains, Yeltsin's Russia is heading for an economic disaster that will make the Chechen fiasco look like a side show.

"Yeltsin, murderer: hands off Chechnya!"

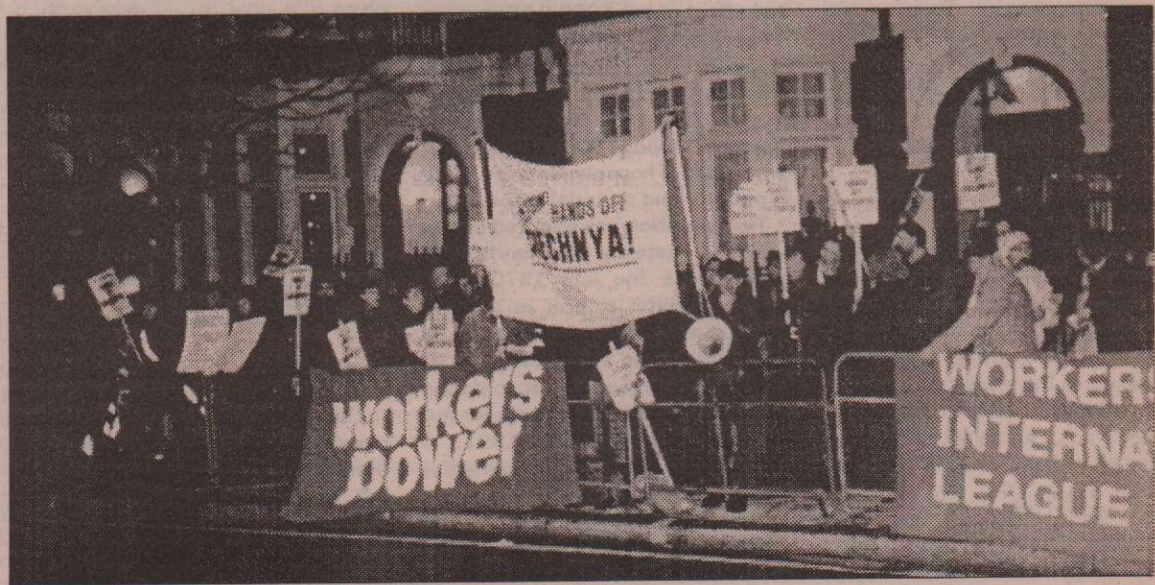
The disgusting hypocrisy of the likes of Douglas Hurd who have lifted not a finger in defence of the Chechen people comes as no surprise. But what of the British labour movement and the left? Whilst there has been a lot of coverage in the press, there has been very little actual solidarity with the Chechen struggle for self-determination. Workers Power decided to take the initiative and, with the Ad hoc Committee Against the War in Chechnya, organised a picket of the Russian Embassy in London.

The picket in late January was lively and well supported. In addition to members and supporters of Workers Power, the picket was supported by comrades from the

Workers International League and the Workers Revolutionary Party (Workers Press).

It was addressed by a leading member of Workers Powers' International organisation, the League for a Revolutionary Communist International (LRCI), and a member of the Chechen community in London. The speakers called for the withdrawal of Russian troops, an end to the killings and a recognition to the Chechens' right to self-determination.

It is vital that the British labour movement and the working class internationally takes action to support the Chechens' fight to free themselves from national oppression by Russia. ■



EASTERN EUROPE

Free market in sex

NEW JOBS are in short supply in the ex-Stalinist states. For capitalism to impose itself on Poland, Hungary and Russia, for example, there has to be a free market in labour. And this, of course, means mass unemployment.

Capitalism knows no other way of keeping productivity up and fixing a lid on wages. Wherever there's a free market there's a market in sex. And wherever there's mass unemployment there are people willing to sell sex.

Today it is estimated that one out of thirty women in Prague is working as a prostitute. In Hungary, according to a 1993 survey:

"... prostitution has experienced an unprecedented boom. Massage parlours and night clubs catering to prostitution have mushroomed." (Edith Oltay RFE/RL May 1993)

Abolished

Prostitution did not appear overnight in these countries even though, under Stalinist rule, prostitution did not officially exist. In the 1930s Soviet bureaucrats declared that, "by the victory of socialism, the economic roots of prostitution in our country have been abolished." Of course prostitution existed in these countries, providing sexual services not least for the bureaucrats themselves. Anyone who went to Moscow as a tourist or student in the 1970s or 1980s can tell stories of the women working the Intourist hotels.

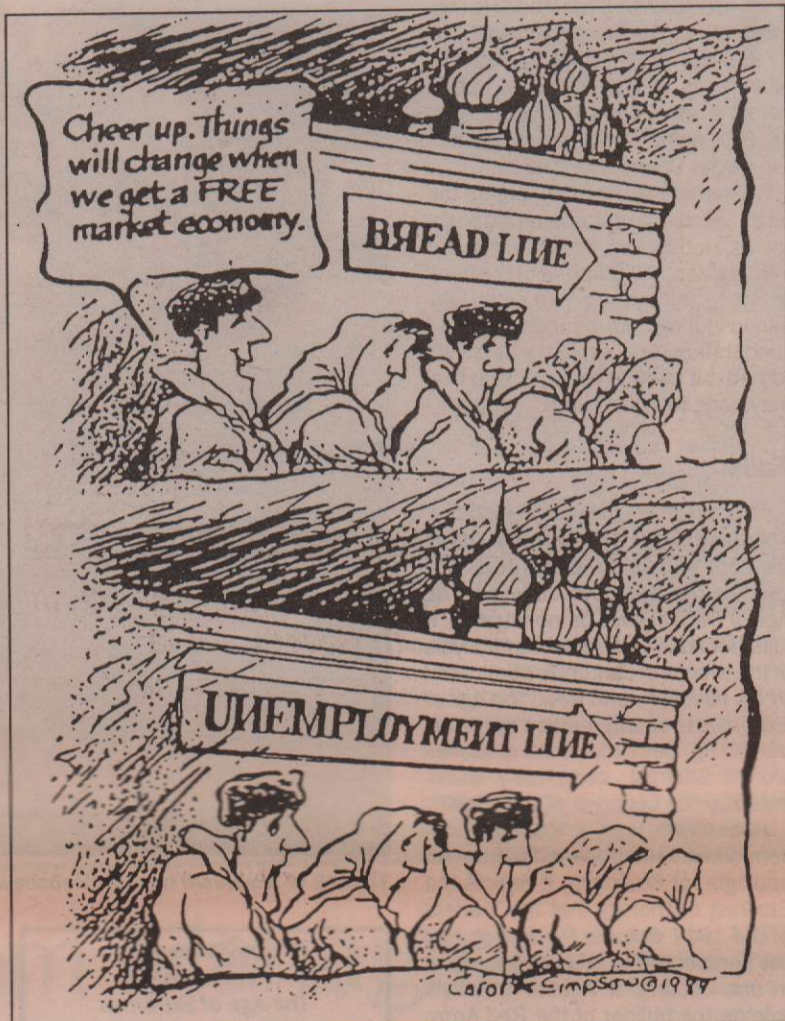
But prostitution was marginal, not a mass phenomenon. Employment was secure and unemployment very limited. The overwhelming majority of women had paid jobs outside the home.

In Poland in the mid-1980s, nearly three-quarters of women aged between 18-60 had jobs. In East Germany, the proportion of women in the workforce increased from 40% to 80% between 1949 and 1980. In the USSR, 90% of women had jobs in the mid 1980s. They also had access to child-care which was affordable, if generally of poor quality.

Since the collapse of Stalinism unemployment has escalated, and is rising more rapidly for women than men: in Russia 62% of the unemployed are women. Women under 35 years old are the worst hit. In Romania, 55% of the unemployed are women.

In addition, child-care costs have

The market has made deep inroads into Central Europe since 1989. In the first of a series of articles on the social effects of the new capitalism in the old Eastern Bloc, Clare Heath looks at the rise of prostitution in eastern Europe.



leapt: they now make up 82% of the average woman's income. Many single mothers are unemployed. Previously the state funded child-care and other welfare benefits that helped women with children to work. This has now become the responsibility of individual factories and provision has been severely cut.

The typical unemployed person in Russia is now described as a middle aged woman with further or higher education. Their chances of finding new jobs are low. Increasingly employers are advertising for "young and pretty" women for secretarial posts.

These changes in employment are a direct result of the attempt to

restore capitalism. For capitalism to function, there has to be a supply of workers who can be hired, and fired, according to the profits of the bosses. A market in labour has to be created.

This is likely to affect women more than men when it is combined with a decline in provision of child-care and maternity rights. Women then have to take time off when they have children, and have difficulties re-entering work. Or they do so on part time and less secure contracts as they do in the west.

In this situation, prostitution is the only option for many women. And the conditions for an increase in demand for prostitution exist as

the ideological commitments to women's equality are junked, women and sex are used for advertising and women's sexuality becomes more of an object. The market promoted spending on luxuries, and sex is one thing that men will choose to pay for.

One recent study notes:

"Two pressures are at work. The deterioration of services and fringe benefits provided by the enterprises, such as kindergartens and maternity leave, discourages women from participating in the labour force; the decline in real family income works in the opposite direction.

(N Barr et al *Labor Markets and Social Policy in Central and Eastern Europe*, 1994).

The study does not tell us what results from these two contradictory pressures. But other studies and our knowledge of the history of capitalism allows to suggest an answer that many women come up with: prostitution.

Income

Selling sex is a form of work that can increase real family income. The relative real value of money wages for the other jobs available has declined considerably, making the marginal rates of pay for prostitution very attractive indeed.

This type of work is flexible enough to fit in with the new child-care demands on women's time and the market demand for women's labour in this area usually outstrips that for men.

Prostitution is also one of the export successes of the new transitional economies. The flow of prostitutes, men and women, into the west from poorer parts of the world, is not new. But the numbers arriving from Eastern Europe and the ex-USSR have increased massively since 1989.

One project working with foreign prostitutes in Holland reports that nearly 20% of the women they saw last year were from Eastern Europe.

A few may already have been prostitutes in their own countries. But it is likely that many more came full

of the ideals of finding a new life in the freedom on the west, but found no jobs or even any right to work. Prostitution, as always, was an option when they found no other way of making money.

Interviews with Polish prostitute women working in Holland and Germany suggests that they are highly educated, usually had families back home, and had not worked as prostitutes before. They saw prostitution as an opportunity for making money to support their husbands and children back in Poland, where they hoped to return after a few years.

Most, of course, will return fleeced by racketeers and with their hopes destroyed. Others will make money but never return. A very few will be lucky enough to support themselves and be independent of oppressive minders. As in every other dream capitalism throws up for the oppressed and exploited, the failure of the many is the condition of the success of the few.

Capitalism has been sold to the workers of the old Eastern Bloc as a system of opportunity: of an economy full of new jobs to replace the old. But in truth capitalism is busy installing a system of wage slavery, of job insecurity, of lowered social provision.

It is reproducing all the old fault lines of women's oppression. And soon all the old morality will come to the surface as well. Rich men will insist on spending their new wealth on sex and at the same time condemn prostitution as a crime against the family.

We should condemn governments which decimate industry and social services while criminalising prostitution. Women in Eastern Europe must not be prevented from finding work where they can.

But better still, workers have to fight to keep women in the factories and offices, where they can participate in socialised labour and, through this, the fight for their own liberation. ■

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and
women's
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Bolsheviks and prostitution

MARXISTS in the nineteenth and early twentieth century often used the existence of prostitution as a symbol of the moral and social decay of capitalism. Although a prostitute only sells the use of her or his body for a defined period much like other workers sell their capacity to work for some hours once sex is the service that sold most people find it difficult to think of it as simply another job.

It is partly moralism, a belief that sex is something so intimate that it is inalienable and therefore must not be sold like other services (e.g. nursing, teaching, hairdressing). But it is also because prostitution is something that working class women, and men, often turn to only as a last resort when faced with abject poverty. In addition prostitutes are often prey to violence and abuse, particularly from their pimps and from the police.

At the time of the Russian Revolution in 1917, prostitution was a mass phenomenon across Europe, including Russia. During the Civil War (1918-20) the Bolsheviks "requisitioned" labour: everyone had to work. This applied to men as well as women, and prostitution was not recognised as a legitimate job.

This, combined with the fact that the wealthy fled from the country or had their property and privileges removed, meant there was neither a supply of poor women without work, nor the demand from men with money to spend on entertainment.

The period after the revolution was also one of rapid changes in morality and sexuality there was an explosion in freer sexual activity, a liberalisation of divorce and marriage laws, so that there were many alternatives to the purchase of sex.

But this "eradication" of prostitution didn't last. After the civil war the free market in some goods was encouraged to stimulate growth, the so-called New Economic Policy (NEP). Unemployment rose, and prostitution returned to the streets.

By 1921, according to official statistics, there were 17,000 prostitutes in Petrograd. Within a year it had increased to 32,000. Many of these women were peasants, others were daughters of the old bourgeoisie and gentry.

The Bolsheviks tried to reduce the numbers of prostitutes in the early 1920s. Lenin considered that they should not use repression, but return the prostitute to productive work, find her a place in the social economy. Programmes were set up to carry out this re-integration, similar to those tried by philanthropists in many other countries.

The revolution was trying to undermine the material causes underlying the phenomenon—low wages, social inequalities, economic dependence of women upon men.

But the revolutionary socialist Alexander Kollontai argued that this was not enough positive campaigns were also needed. She linked it to a campaign against all unproductive work for women, including the labour of housework and childminding.

Although she was successful in arguing that prostitution should not be treated as a specific crime, the social basis of prostitution was not undermined during the 1920s. The economic crisis was too great and the political counter-revolution led by Stalin ensured that the positive commitment to women's liberation was abandoned. ■

SCIENCE

JACK TULLY

How genetics proves the racists wrong

Racists often argue that different "races" are genetically different from each other.

There are obvious differences between Africans, Europeans and Asians. But genetic differences between human "races" are - literally - only skin deep. The genetic variations within any "race" are greater than the genetic differences between supposedly different "races". So called "races" differ from each other by only a handful of very minor genes (skin colour and thickness, hair colour), compared to the great number of genetic differences between different individuals within any given "race".

There is no scientific test that can determine what "race" a particular person belongs to. Classification by "race" is an exercise in prejudice, using pseudo-science to bolster a political agenda.

Not only are the racists wrong about genetic differences between "races", they are also completely wrong about the genetic make-up of the human race. The overall genetic variation within our entire species is remarkably small compared to that in other animals. If we look at the genetic differences between, say, two humans from different continents, we discover that they appear much more alike than do two gorillas from the same West African forest. In evolutionary terms, human beings are all very similar.

This lack of genetic variation has been something of a mystery. Why should we be so much more alike than other animals? The answer lies in our history.

All rational people now accept that human beings came "out of Africa". Around one million years ago, creatures that could stand upright (hominids) and could make primitive stone tools crossed what is now the Sahara desert and moved into the Middle East and Europe, pushing as far east as China.

These primitive humans did not look like us: they were smaller and hairier and they did not live like us.

Although they eventually mastered fire, they did not make artefacts, apart from simple tools, and they did not bury their dead.

Our species finally appeared on the scene around 80,000 years ago, once again in Africa. This time round, the beings that appeared were taller and cleverer. They could speak, they made artefacts, they made an incredible variety of tools and they buried their dead.

For the next 70,000 years or so our ancestors lived in a turbulent relationship with nature, but without exploitation of other humans

and without social oppression. It is the period Marxists refer to as the era of "primitive communism". This came to an end around 10,000 years ago with the beginning of settled cultivation, the development of a surplus and the formation of classes.

Recent genetic studies have revealed quite how delicately balanced mankind's survival was under "primitive communism". Our existence hung by a thread.

Scientists have long recognised that we share many of our genes with chimpanzees. But recently they have been able to track the rate at which our genetic structure parted company with the chimps. In this way we can work out when different human and animal populations separated.

If this "molecular clock" is tested in a sufficiently large number of genes, it is possible to work out the number of people who constituted the total world population of humans for most of our existence.

The answer is quite surprising. From the time of our appearance up until about 10,000 years ago there were only about 10,000 humans on the whole planet. This explains why we are all so genetically similar. For most of our existence the human population was simply too small to allow great genetic variation across our species, let alone the myriad of separate "races" into which the bigots delight in classifying humanity.

So how did this tiny number of human beings with a small gene pool survive? Scattered throughout Africa, and then across the globe, living in small wandering groups, these early humans could easily have fallen victim to illness or predators.

It was a mixture of luck and intelligence. The great advantage of our species is our ability to talk, something we can be almost certain that their predecessors could not do. Language grew out of brain enlargement which in turn evolved out of using our hands for tasks due to upright posture.

Language gave humans the capacity of rapidly passing on learnt information - how to make an axe, where to find food - and also let them manipulate that information in an abstract way. Someone could now literally think of a better way of making an axe without actually doing it first.

Early humans lived in a delicate balance with nature. But their use of language and social organisation gave them the ability to consciously adapt to their environment, instead of relying on genetic variation and natural selection alone, to ensure their survival. ■

HOBSBAWM'S 20TH CENTURY

The party's over...

HOBSBAWM'S NEW book is subtitled, *The Short Twentieth Century*, a title that marks the boundaries of this historical essay, covering as it does the years from the First World War to the collapse of the Soviet Union after 1989.

At something over 600 pages the term "essay" might appear strange, yet as Hobsbawm points out in his introduction, the purpose of the book is not to tell the story of what happened during this period, rather to "understand and explain why things turned out the way they did, and how they hang together". (p3)

Fails

This attempt fails: not because Hobsbawm is a bad historian, quite the contrary, as his previous books such as *The Age of Revolution* or *The Age of Capital* have demonstrated. It fails because Hobsbawm's analysis of the twentieth century is dominated by his political world view. *The Age of Extremes* is deeply marked by the all-pervading pessimism of a disillusioned Stalinist, completely disoriented by the collapse of the USSR.

Hobsbawm was a leading Euro-communist. His book is far from an apologia for Stalinism. It rejects the Stalinist mythology that the leaders of the 1917 October Revolution had the perspective of building socialism in one country. It admits Trotsky's role as the builder of the Red Army, and asserts that the Bolshevik Party after Lenin would have been less authoritarian under the leadership of any alternative to Stalin.

Hobsbawm also condemns the terror directed against the peasantry during the forced collectivisation of agriculture, as well as the purges of the 1930s which established Stalin's unchallenged dictatorship over the party.

He even asserts that the collapse of "actually existing socialism" was the product of the internal contradictions, the economic stagnation and disintegration which were products of a "corrupt, inefficient and largely parasitic" party command system.

However, these admissions are not used as the basis for a Marxist critique of Stalinism. On the contrary, Hobsbawm uses them as a means of further advancing his reconciliation with reformism.

The October Revolution was seen by the Bolsheviks as the first step in an international revolution that, in the end, never happened. Instead of analysing the causes of the isolation and degeneration of the young Soviet workers' state (the failed German revolution in the early 1920s, the role of Stalin's international policy in the failure of the Chinese revolution in the mid-1920s etc), Hobsbawm treats the defeats as inevitable.

Mistake

Echoing the Labourite and social democratic "critique" of Leninism, the October Revolution is written off as a gigantic mistake that was bound to deform into an authoritarian caricature of socialism:



The fall of Stalinism has left Hobsbawm without answers, only pessimism

David West
reviews

The Age of Extremes
by Eric Hobsbawm
Michael Joseph 1994, £20.00

"The tragedy of the October Revolution was precisely that it could only produce its kind of ruthless, brutal, command socialism." (p498)

It is not surprising therefore to find Hobsbawm reserving his harshest criticisms for the decision to found the Communist International. For him, this destroyed a "broad church" labour movement and, in its place, created an elite of full-time professional revolutionaries whose utter commitment to the October Revolution left them totally subservient to the latest twists and turns of the Moscow line.

Instrument

Yet the Communist International was the very instrument that the Bolsheviks forged to break out from their isolation, to provide the world proletarian vanguard with a real leadership which could achieve the goal of international socialist revolution. It was Stalin who turned it into its opposite, a subservient tool of Kremlin diplomacy, while Trotsky and his followers continued to fight for true internationalism.

Hobsbawm's pessimism deepens as he surveys other aspects of the "short twentieth century". The century, according to Hobsbawm, has been one of growing irrationality.

The social effects of the long boom, destroying stable family structures and other traditional social groups seen by Hobsbawm as the only barrier against unrestrained egoism, have now burst the dam. Indeed at points

in his narrative Hobsbawm sounds like a cross between a Pope John Paul and a "back to basics" John Major.

Twentieth century armies, like terrorists, treat civilians as combatants. Inner cities become urban jungles, where there is universal fear of wild adolescent males. Ordinary sexual encounters produce extreme insecurity and mental suffering—the breakdown of old unreasonable rules have left a vacuum of no rules at all, or no agreement about what such rules are—for Hobsbawm, the symptoms of decadence are everywhere.

Decide

He rails at modern science which is cut off from common sense perceptions of reality, at art critics who think it is impossible or undemocratic to decide whether Shakespeare's Macbeth is better than Batman, at rock music where, unlike with the classical or jazz music of the past, there are no objective standards of reality, only "the huge flood of sound which has swept down the valley of this music for the past forty years."

Hobsbawm declares towards the end of his book;

"The century ended in a global disorder whose nature was unclear, and without an obvious mechanism for either ending it or keeping it under control."

Hobsbawm the disillusioned Stalinist can only see disorder and decadence in the new millennium.

For revolutionary Marxists, however, there is an "obvious mechanism" for controlling the disorder and irrationality of late twentieth century capitalism: the collective strength of the working class and the struggle for a new society through proletarian revolution. ■

Ooh aah anti-fa?

Dear comrades

ERIC CANTONA is undoubtedly one of the most gifted footballers to play in this country for the last 20 years. He is also one of the most controversial. He is no ordinary footballer off the field either, being a self-styled poet, painter and socialist, not your average footballer's interests! His attack on the Crystal Palace fan on his way to the players tunnel was stupid and self-destructive, putting his whole career in Britain and with the French team at risk. But he was clearly severely provoked. It appears that this fan "ran 20 yards down the stand steps to have a go at Cantona", according to an eye witness. He then proceeded to hurl racist and xenophobic abuse at Cantona, as well as possibly throwing something at him. Given this intimidation it is perhaps not surprising that Cantona responded violently.

Who was this "ordinary" fan who was attacked? While the *Sun* hinted at a violent past, before hypocritically signing him up the next day for his story, the *Daily Mirror* revealed him to be a racist thug. Twenty year old Matthew Simmonds turns out to be a supporter of the fascist BNP, having attended several meetings and rallies while still at school. He also received two years probation for attacking a Sri Lankan-born petrol station attendant with a three foot spanner during an attempted robbery. The attendant said he thought that Simmonds "was going to kill



me". Given this we should have no sympathy for this fascist!

The only way to deal with fascists and organised racists at football matches is to see them off. Some may think it is unpalatable to see violence at the matches, but Nazis must

be allowed no space to spread their filth—neither in the football grounds nor in the streets. There should be no witch-hunting Cantona. Instead we need a real commitment to Kick Racists Out of Football. It is not Eric Cantona, but every

club that claims to support the Kick Racism Out of Football Campaign, who should be put in the spotlight.

In comradeship,
Pete, Cardiff,
a lifelong Manchester
United fan.

Letter from Managua

Dear comrades,

I ARRIVED HERE in Nicaragua just before the New Year to work. I certainly seem to have landed in a turbulent political situation! In the last couple of weeks the FSLN (Sandinistas) has officially split. For some time now they have been polarised into two camps. One side is led by Sergio Ramirez and used to call themselves the *Renovadores* while they were in the FSLN. Now they have launched a new organisation called the MRS and aim to stand candidates of their own in the 1996 elections.

The split seems to have gone right through the FSLN from top to bottom. The MRS have taken the bulk of the parliamentary deputies, effectively expelling their opponents from the parliamentary group. Daniel Ortega, the old FSLN head of state until they lost the 1990 elections, heads the half that's left.

Most of the people I work with are supporters of the MRS and give three reasons for the split. First, they claim that the "Daniellistas" are stuck in the past and in particular they refuse to recognise that the time for armed struggle is over. Secondly, the MRS claim it is essential to draw closer politically to the "patriotic capitalists" in order to rebuild the country. Thirdly, the renovators say that

they are protesting against a long history of corruption within the FSLN. They insist that leading Sandinistas lined their own pockets for years when they were in power—especially as a result of the property laws they passed in the last days of the FSLN administration. The MRS want to distance themselves from the stigma of corruption that surrounds the FSLN.

In general these comrades seem to be drawing quite right-wing conclusions from the defeat of the FSLN in 1990. They want to collaborate in seeing through the austerity packages that have savaged people's living standards since 1990. They hope this will attract foreign investment in future and on this basis new growth and prosperity can come.

But the implications for the here and now are all too obvious when you look at what's happening on the trade union front. There have been teach-

ers' strikes recently. The public sector in general here has taken a hammering at the hands of the government as they have energetically implemented the IMF/World Bank demands for privatisations, factory closures and wage freezes.

There is possibly worse on the horizon. The word on the streets here is that the Mayor of Managua—Aleman—could

win the 1996 Presidential elections. This is pretty terrifying since he is a supporter of the ousted and now dead dictator, Somoza, who was overthrown in the revolution of 1979 by the FSLN. Aleman is currently working hard to buy votes and win hearts by using his position to launch a number of infrastructural projects here in the capital, Managua. Given the political demoralisation of the FSLN base this kind of trickery could be effective.

I'll keep you posted
MC

Left follow Sheep

Dear comrades,

TO ME, LIKE most trade unionists in London I imagine, the appearance of picket line braziers on the streets again, and the words "wildcat strike" in the headlines, was the most welcome sight for months. Especially as this was prompted by the biggest illegal walkout for years, staged by postal workers fed up with management bullying. A few years ago, a strike in defiance of both the law and the union leaders, by 15,000 manual workers, would have been front page news in most socialist newspapers. But not today.

In the week the postal workers struck, *Socialist Worker* led with... those animals again! "Essex town in revolt!" was the headline, with the postal strike relegated to page five.

Militant, also covered the strike with a half page article inside, but saved it's ecstatic headline "Victory" for, you guessed it, Shoreham. Now don't get me wrong. I'm all in favour of defending animal rights protesters against police brutality, but it seems to me that the left has got it's priorities wrong. A mass, unofficial strike in the heart of the capital is not just news, it's big news—especially for socialists.

Are left wing groups so obsessed with getting their next few recruits that they are prepared to give up on the basic socialist principle that one workers' strike is worth a hundred animal rights demos? Or is it "Goodbye to the Working Class" for the British left?

Tony Dixon,
Hammersmith, London.

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 (the Fourth) collapsed in the years 1948-51.

The LRCI is pledged to fight the centrism of the degenerate fragments of the Fourth International and to refound a Leninist Trotskyist International and build a new world party of socialist revolution. 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

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- ★ Tory Euro-chaos

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CHECHEN BLOOD ON YELTSIN'S HANDS

Russian troops

OUT NOW!

“We have been robbed by the reform and now they take our boys too.” This is the voice of Ludmilla Komerova, a soldier's mother. Yeltsin brushed past her when he ventured outside of Moscow in late January to visit the Russian city of Lipetsk. Ludmilla Komerova has seen through Yeltsin and his warmongers in the Security Council.

After a month of heavy aerial bombardment and an assault with 40,000 ground troops Russian forces finally managed to take the centre of Grozny. They appear to have won the battle for the Chechen capital, but the war moves on—south to the suburbs, out to the villages and up into the Caucasus mountains.

As the Chechens continue their desperate fight, the Russians are determined to cut off the retreat, bombing the road into the mountains. Thousands of civilian casualties are reported as towns and villages are flattened. The Chechen war is leading to new protest movements within Russia, such as the Committee for Soldiers' Mothers. They are driven by a desperate need to know the fate of their sons, husbands and lovers. The Russian Ministry of Defence has responded by providing a single telephone line for anyone wanting to get information on relatives.

Killed

Even if these are able to get through, few believe the bureaucrats at the ministry. Officials are claiming that only 450 Russian soldiers have been killed in Chechnya. Returning soldiers estimate that the real figure is around 7,000.

Some relatives have taken events into their own hands and are travel-

ling into the war zone to try to find out the truth. As they, and the soldiers, return to Moscow, opposition to the war is growing. Yeltsin has attempted to restrict news from Chechnya, attacking the press and closing the border to prevent anyone getting into the area. There are road blocks on roads into Moscow staffed by Interior Ministry troops—a clear sign that Yeltsin is concerned about the instability caused by the war.

Yeltsin is right to fear this opposition. The war has revealed to millions the bitter divisions within the government and the lengths to which Yeltsin will go to subvert democracy and silence opponents.

With opposition building on all sides within Russia, Yeltsin will no doubt take heart that Germany's Chancellor Kohl still considers himself a friend! Western governments have remained notably muted in their criticism of the war.

Douglas Hurd, for example, recently restated the British government's position against any sanctions being imposed by the European Union. In a statement which is a staggering insult to the thousands of Chechen dead, he called the war a “botched job”.

Clearly more concerned with the

● Last days of Tsar Boris? see page 12

Russian army's inefficiency in slaughter than any Chechen rights, he declared that Britain will continue to deal with “enlightened currents” in Russia.

The imperialist powers of the West are afraid that any pressure from them might further destabilise Yeltsin; at present they do not welcome an alternative, potentially even more authoritarian, figure. It is clear to them that capitalist restoration, even if it has to be built on the bodies of the Chechen people, is the only priority for Russia.

Nationalist

However, as more and more Ludmilla Komerovas make the connection between capitalist reform and nationalist adventures, it is Russian workers who will pose the most serious threat to Tzar Yeltsin and his reformist rivals. Unlike Hurd and Kohl, we are not silent on the question of Chechnya. We actively support the Chechen fight for self-determination, and demand that Russian troops be withdrawn.

Workers Power initiated a picket of the Russian Embassy in London (see page 12) and will continue to raise solidarity with the Chechen people.

- Russian troops out of Chechnya and the Caucasus!
- Self-determination for the peoples of the Caucasus!



Moscow anti-war demonstration—“Uncle generals, you cannot kill children.”