

# Workers power

INSIDE

A new mood of militancy?  
pages 4,5 & 6

British Section of the League for a Revolutionary Communist International

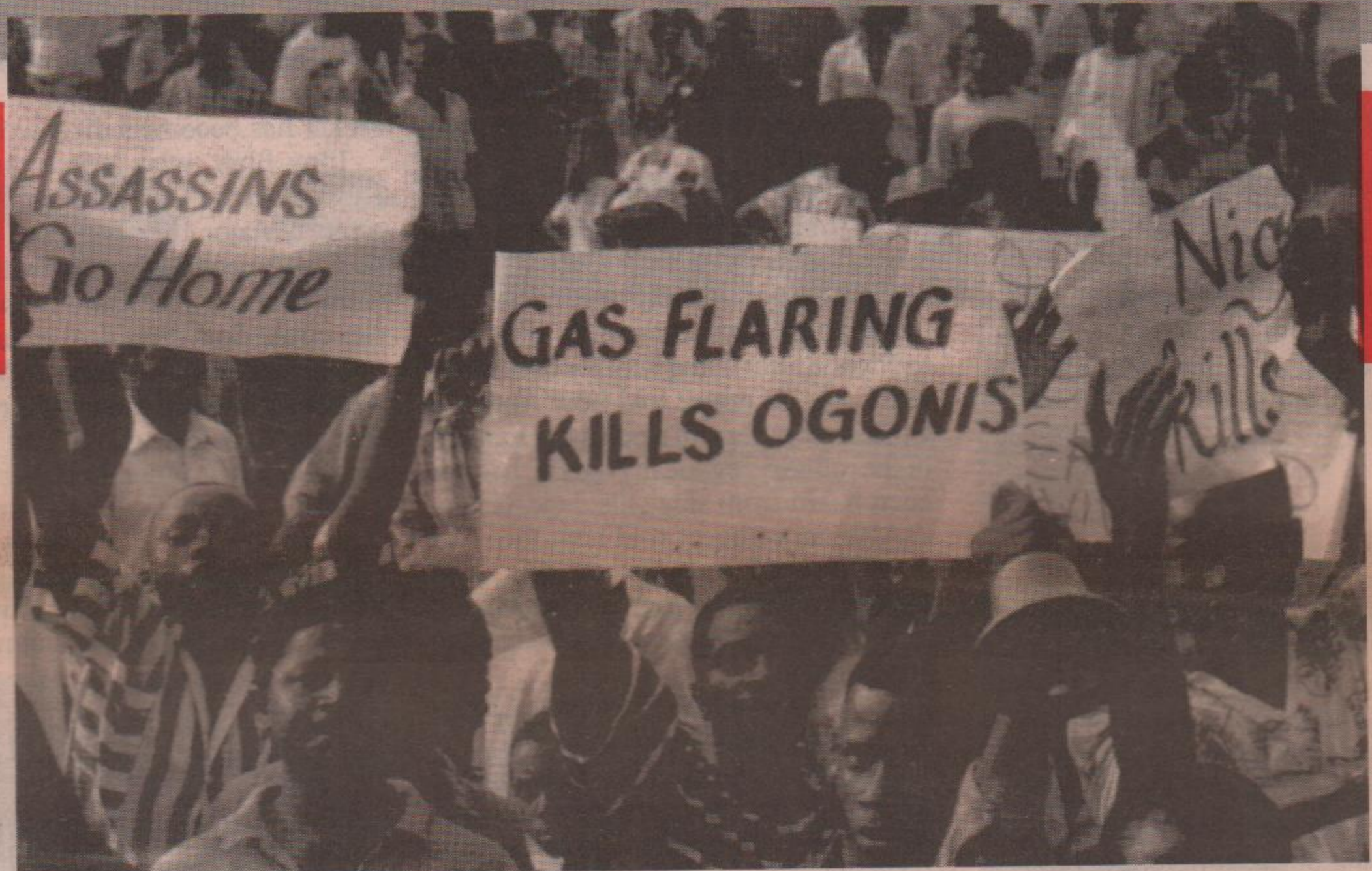
No 195 DECEMBER 1995 ★ Price 50p



## French general strike

Millions of French workers have gone on strike to defend their benefits. Students have occupied schools and colleges.  
★ Eyewitness report page 13

## Nigeria



# Down with Abacha!

**THE BLOODY dictatorship in Nigeria showed its contempt for democracy last month when it hanged Ken Saro-Wiwa and eight other activists from Ogoniland.**

Dragged before a "Special Tribunal", the activists were sentenced to death with no appeal. Their "crime" was to challenge the right of the multinational Shell Oil company to destroy the environment and livelihood of their community.

Their campaign was too much for General Abacha's military regime in Nigeria. They had to be silenced for good.

Over a thousand Ogoni activists have been murdered over the last few years. Tens of thousands have been driven from their homes by the army in a brutal campaign to defend Shell's profits and the income

flowing into the pockets of the Generals.

Shell has played a despicable role. It tried to hide behind a statement declaring: "it is not for a commercial organisation to interfere with the legal processes of a sovereign state". In private Shell did offer to intervene—but only if Saro-Wiwa agreed to call off the campaign against the oil company!

The British government's role is no less despicable. John Major told reporters at the Commonwealth Conference that the executions were "judicial murders". But for years Britain has been supplying Nigeria with arms.

When the Nigerian military cancelled the 1993 elections, the European Union adopted a "sanctions package". One of these restricted military exports. But weapons like CS gas and rubber bullets, and even

spare parts for tanks, have been declared "non-lethal" and exported in large quantities.

Abacha's regime has consistently murdered and repressed opponents. He has jailed leading trade unionists, detained journalists merely for reporting arrests, banned and fined leading newspapers and journals and passed decrees setting up special tribunals which can impose death penalties.

Despite this Major's Home Office decided that Nigeria is a safe place. This year 2,032 refugees fleeing the Abacha regime asked for asylum: just ONE was accepted.

Ken Saro-Wiwa's son has called on the western powers and the UN to impose economic sanctions and stop buying oil.

This is the wrong strategy. No one should advocate the

imperialist powers using such a weapon. Why? Because they will use it to further their own interests, not the interests of the masses in Nigeria. The moment the Nigerian workers take on the regime and look like overthrowing it the imperialists will do everything they can to preserve the army's power and supply all it needs.

Calling on the imperialists to act against Abacha will do nothing to help the masses in Nigeria. The real allies of Nigerian workers are the British workers and the trade unions.

Indeed it is shameful that the British trade unions have left it to middle class-led environmentalist groups and liberal bosses like Bodyshop's Anita Roddick to organise "solidarity".

A solidarity campaign should be launched in the unions and the Labour Party which aims to give aid and

support to all struggles against the dictatorship. The unions should go all out to develop links with workers' organisations in struggle such as the Nigerian Campaign for Independent Trade Unions.

Trade unionists should campaign for an immediate workers' boycott of Nigerian exports. If the American and European dockers refused to unload and turned back the oil ships, it would be an enormous

boost to the struggle in Nigeria and to the trade unions there. If they rigorously checked all exports for arms at airports and docks, the continuing military trade with the regime could be stopped. The hypocrisy of Major and the dirty dealing of Shell should be exposed through pickets and protests, which should call on Shell workers to campaign against their employers' role in Nigeria. ■

- Down with the Abacha Regime!
- No arms to Abacha! For a workers boycott of Nigerian exports!
- Build a campaign in the unions in solidarity with the Nigerian struggle!

➔ Turn to pages 8 & 9 for more on Nigeria:  
The roots of the Ogoni struggle,  
Prospects for the working class



**Activists' Diary****Birmingham**

Public Meeting  
Black Liberation and the struggle for socialism  
Launch meeting for new Workers Power pamphlet  
Wednesday 6 December 7.30  
Summerfield Centre, Dudley Road  
Winson Green

**London**

Public Meeting  
Black Liberation and the struggle for socialism  
Speakers from Workers Power and Newham Monitoring Project  
Launch meeting for new Workers Power pamphlet  
Wednesday 13 December 7.30  
Davenant Centre 179-181  
Whitechapel High Street, London E1 (Tube: Whitechapel)

**London**

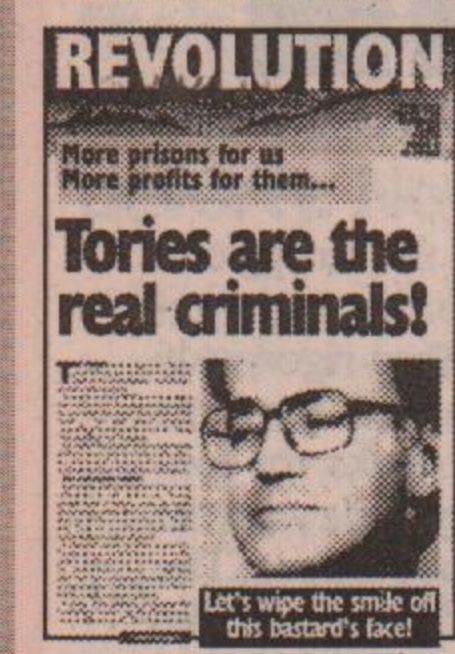
Debate  
Do we need a Socialist Labour Party? Paul Morris of Workers Power debates Tom Willis of Workers' Liberty. Organised by Workers Liberty  
7.30 Wednesday 6 December, Lucas Arms 245 Gray's Inn Road, Kings Cross. Details from 0171 639 7965

**National Conference**

Which Way Forward For NATFHE? Sponsored by the North West and West Midlands Regional Councils. Open to delegated representatives and individual observers:  
● marketisation of education  
● fighting the employers' offensive  
● the crisis of leadership in the union  
● democracy in the union  
11.00 am - 3.30pm Saturday 13 January 1996  
Mechanics Institute 103 Princess Street Manchester (BR: Manchester Piccadilly, Bus: Chorlton St Station) Details: Phil Griffin 0161 953 5995 x2276

**Fund Drive**

**£1000 Technology Fund**  
£485 has been raised since August enabling Workers Power's publishing technology to take another big step forward. Thanks to the generosity of regular standing-order payers and donors we have virtually completed the upgrading of equipment used to produce Workers Power, making it one of the best designed papers on the left. Unfortunately we have not completed paying for it all! We urgently need another £515, before the end of January. We urge all our readers and especially Workers Power branches to get fundraising over the Christmas period so we can meet that total and repay our debts.

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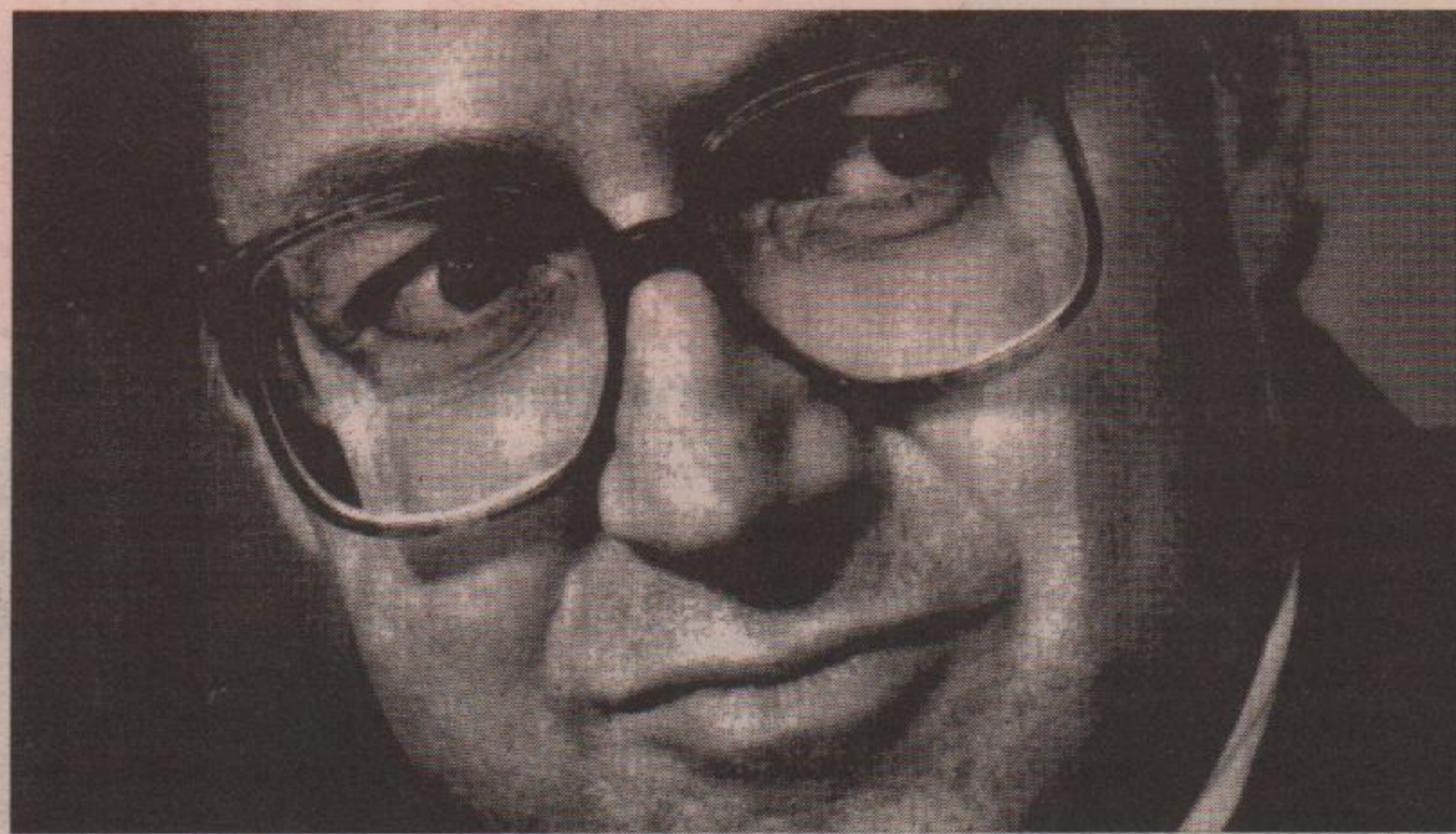
**Socialism and Black Liberation**  
Price £1.50 inc P&P

**Trotskyist Bulletin 7**

Documents of struggle against Stalinophile splitters from the LRCI. Price £3 inc P&P

# Asylum Bill

## Howard's Catch 22



**T**HE INSTITUTE of Directors and the CBI joined forces to protest against the plan to fine employers who take on illegal immigrants. Of course, it was not the racism of internal immigration checks that bothered them. It was the time and money it will cost them to police it.

They needn't have worried. "A light regulatory approach" is what Home Secretary Michael Howard has promised employers affected by his new laws.

But there is to be no "light regulatory approach" to the victims of Britain's racist immigration system.

Hundreds of asylum seekers continue to be kept in prison camps like Harmondsworth and Campsfield. Thirteen thousand asylum seekers, who have broken no law, are to be punished by the withdrawal of all benefits on 8 January.

Tens of thousands of black people will continue to face hostile and racist treatment from immigration officials whenever they enter the country. And every

year two million people will have to undergo nationality checks when they change jobs.

The main thrust of the new legislation is to make it virtually impossible to claim asylum once admitted to this country. The catch, a real Catch 22, is that it

is already virtually impossible to claim asylum if you have not already been admitted to this country.

Howard's new Bill will  
● establish a "white list" of countries from which asylum seekers' applications are assumed to be bogus. Until

the execution of Ken Saro-Wiwa the Tories planned to put Nigeria at the top of the list!

● abolish oral appeal hearings and introduce a "fast track" decision making process, so that asylum seekers can be whisked out of the country without contacting their friends and supporters or exercising the few human rights they have left.

The requirement for public officials to question the immigration status of "suspicious characters" and the stopping of benefits to asylum seekers will be enacted without new laws: ministers will simply sign a piece of paper.

The message is clear: the bosses can flout the law. But asylum seekers, refugees immigrants and black people born in Britain will face a mounting racist crackdown. They will be presumed guilty of breaking the immigration laws until they prove otherwise. For thousands of asylum seekers this means prison, starvation and deportation. ■

## How to fight this racist law

**O**VER 300 people - mainly black - packed into a Committee Room in the House of Commons last month for the launch meeting of the Campaign Against the Immigration and Asylum Bill.

We heard heart-rending stories from the victims of the racist asylum and immigration laws. Abdul Onibayo was beaten by police, imprisoned for six months and then summarily deported to Nigeria after living here for over thirty years. His daughter told how Abdul, a Unison member and a political opponent of the military regime in Nigeria, has not been heard from since his deportation.

Algerian refugees told how they had been tortured with electric shocks to their genitals. Now they face starvation as the Tories propose to cut their meagre benefits.

But what we did not hear was a fighting strategy that can stop this Bill.

CAIAB is a classic cross-class alliance where the victims of the new law, and the millions of workers who can stop it, are tied to a strategy that is designed to appeal to various middle class organisations, charities and "progressive" Liberals and Tories.

CAIAB has called for a mass lobby of parliament on 19 December, and a mass demonstration against the Bill on 23 March 1996. This is good, and we should start mobilising now to make these protests massive and angry.

But what if - as looks likely - the Bill cannot be stopped in parliament? After all, key parts of the new system will not even have to be voted on.

While one vicar on the platform pledged his willingness to go to jail in defiance of the new law, we saw no pledges to defy the law from the main forces involved: the Labour Party and the TUC.

Although outraged by the Tories' willingness to play the race card for electoral gain, all these forces exhibit a deep seated fear of fighting them on their chosen terrain. Claude Moraes of the Joint Council for the Welfare of Immi-

grants denounced Major for "putting race into the political arena". But then he warned that "millions of people believe the Tory propaganda . . . asylum seeker has become a dirty word".

Tony Blair, who sent a message of support to the CAIAB launch meeting, offered Major the chance to take race "out of the political arena" with a Select Committee, where Labour and the Tories could do a dirty deal in private.

Meanwhile black Labour MP Diane Abbot denounced Howard for claiming that the new law would lead to "good race relations". What short memories the Labour "anti-racists" have! It was Labour leader Roy Hattersley (himself billed to speak on the CAIAB platform) who first introduced that lie into British politics, with the famous claim that "as-

simulation without limitation is impossible".

No wonder Labour does not want a fight over racism. Every Labour government has maintained and worsened existing Tory anti-immigration laws.

Racism is widespread. It can be an electoral weapon in the Tories' hands. But the answer is not to duck the issue, but to fight back. Millions of workers and youth hate racism. The Tories have chosen to fight the election on race and racism: we should give them a fight, by branding them as racists and making their vicious laws unworkable.

Only with an active campaign, led by the Labour and trade union movement, can racist illusions and bigotry be challenged effectively.

The key to that campaign is defiance.

### Immigration controls

#### Part of the racist system

**H**oward's new law is just one part of a racist system of bigotry and discrimination.

All of Britain's immigration laws are racist. Tory and Labour politicians alike protest against this accusation. But the laws were designed to "solve" the problem of "race relations". They are rarely or never applied to the hundreds of thousands of white South Africans, Australians, New Zealanders and Canadians who have the right to come to Britain to live and work here.

Immigration laws are designed to keep out black people. In the process they target millions of black people already living here as "aliens" and potential law-breakers.

Alongside the racist immigration system goes a system of job discrimination which keeps unemployment much higher amongst black people

than whites, and forces black people into low-paid jobs. Howard's new laws will make this situation worse. Racist employers faced with the need to carry out nationality checks on new black employees may well use this as an excuse to employ white people instead.

A vicious regime of racist policing exists to keep the lid on this system. Black youth face daily harassment from police. Victims of police violence - like Joy Gardner and Brian Douglas - get no justice from this system: their police killers walk free.

The struggle against Howard's Law is part of the struggle against the system as a whole.

It is a system designed to divide and rule workers in this country and to turn us against a "foreign enemy" instead of the real enemy: the bosses and their profit system. ■

## Abolish the monarchy

**D**IANA WINDSOR's interview on the BBC was excellent. Her miserable whinings revealed to millions of viewers what socialists have been saying all along. The Royals are a bunch of parasites. The monarchy should be abolished.

Diana's reference to the "enemy" she faced showed us that her marital traumas were in fact part of a crisis of direction for the monarchy.

She tried to present herself as acting alone, in the face of a hostile and old-fashioned family at Buckingham Palace.

She carefully spelt out her vision of a modern royal family, in touch with the people. She explained how her "work" made her just such a modern royal, helping "battered this, battered that" - a description that revealed her contempt for the working class women she periodically shakes hands with on her visits to refugees.

But Diana was not acting alone. Her attack on Charles is part of a wider campaign within the establishment that is seeking to make the monarchy a more effective vehicle for carrying its respon-

sibilities of the head of the British state. This section recognises that the monarchy is discredited in the eyes of millions, but still needed by the rulers who want it to provide a unifying force for the nation.

After the interview many people, particularly women, felt sympathy for the wronged princess. Some even identified with her as a woman who had been badly treated by a heartless, philandering husband with a wicked, scheming mother. This reaction shows just how successful the Diana-campaign

has been. But don't be fooled. She may be a more minor aristocrat than Elizabeth or Charles, but she is still a spoilt and pampered royal who has never had to do a day's work in her life. Yet she is surrounded by wealth that everyone else can only dream about.

There is only one answer to the crisis of the monarchy - abolish the lot of them. We should confiscate the wealth they have robbed over the centuries and abolish all their privileges. Then Diana might have something really interesting to say. ■



# EDITORIAL

WORKERS POWER 195 DECEMBER 1995

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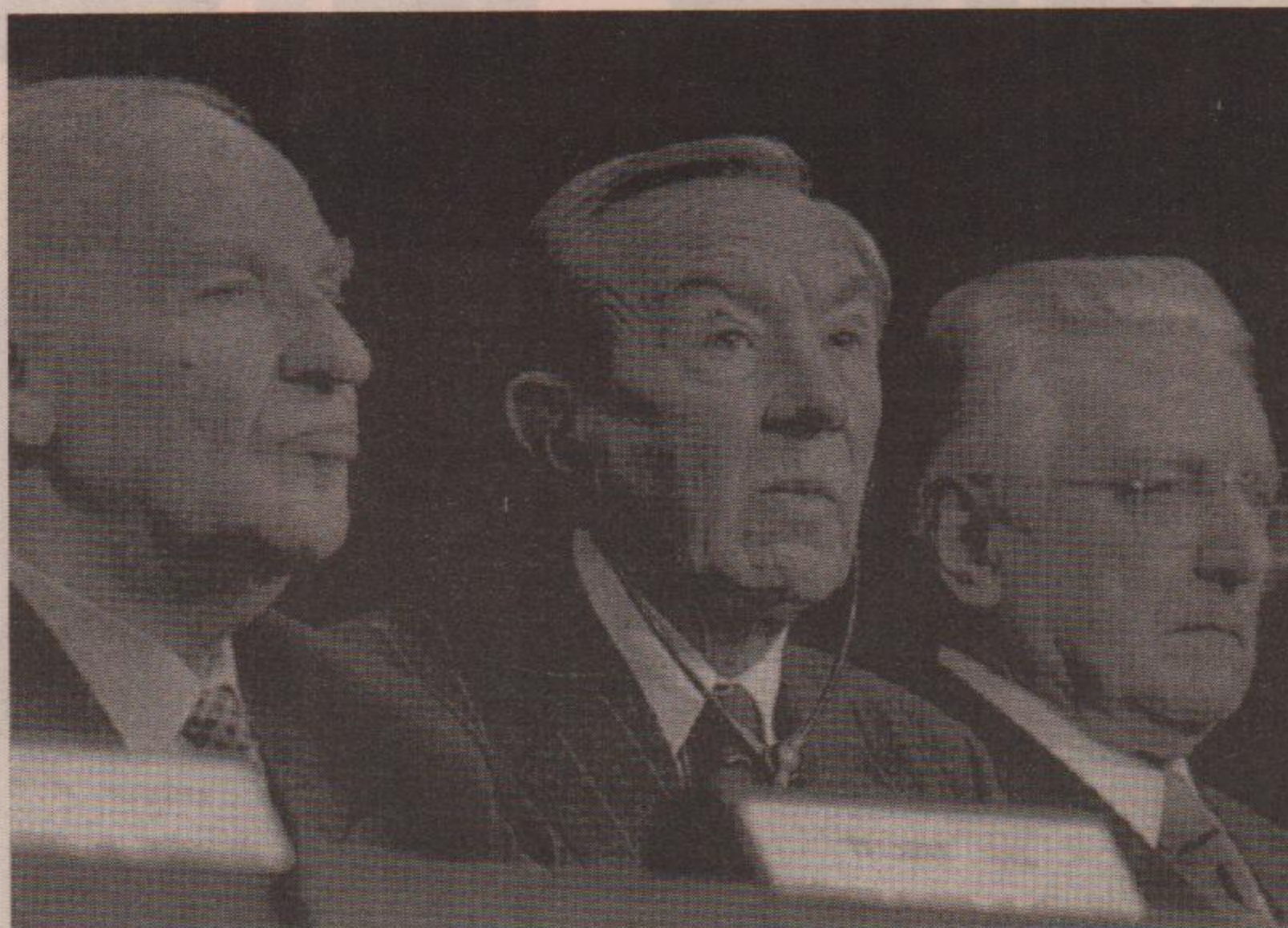


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## Bosnian peace deal

# Blueprint for future slaughter

**T**HE IMPERIALIST powers, under the direction of the United States, have succeeded in brokering a "peace settlement" for the states of former Yugoslavia. After four years of reactionary nationalist wars, aimed at creating a Greater Serbia and a Greater Croatia, the talks in Dayton, Ohio have led to a settlement based on the division of Bosnia Herzegovina along ethnic lines.

The Dayton agreement is primarily a reward to Tudjman and Milosevic for three years of ethnic cleansing and attempted genocide. The Serbs have now suffered as much as Croats in terms of the numbers displaced from their lands, but it is only the multi-ethnic state of Bosnia and in particular the ethnic Muslim Bosnians that face the final loss of state existence. The settlement is a deceitfully worded blueprint for the dismemberment of Bosnia into two statelets—and the end of a multi-ethnic state in Bosnia.

This is true despite the loudly trumpeted sovereignty, provisions for parliaments and a presidency. In the last instance, a state is, as Lenin once wrote, "special bodies of armed men". If there are two such bodies in Bosnia, (the Croat-Muslim and the Serbian armies) and neither of them is under the control of the Bosnian parliament or presidency, then the latter constitute merely a hypocritical facade of unity and statehood.

### Succeeded

The Bosnian Serbs and the Croatian state have succeeded in the greater part of their war aims, while the multi-ethnic aspirations of some sections of the Bosnian government and people have been defeated. Croatia has regained all its territory lost in the war with Serbia in

1991; moreover, it has done so while murderously "cleansing" itself of hundreds of thousands of Serbs.

In addition, Croatia has gained control of large parts of the former Bosnian Republic by dint of a Croat-Bosnian Federation put together in 1994 and strengthened at Dayton. This "federation" has never taken on real life. Many of the towns and villages under its sway are still divided into Croatian and Bosnian halves; no joint military staff or meaningful government institutions exist. It was created under US pressure and conceded by the Bosnian government out of military weakness.

The Bosnian Serbs have also gained nearly half of the territory of former

would have to live under a hostile administration without protection from hostile neighbours.

By signing the agreement Izetbegovic has delivered a massive blow to the multi-ethnic hopes of the Bosnian working class. Already, progressive multi-ethnic forces in Tuzla—who have spoken out and resisted the growth of ethnic nationalism within the Bosnian government—have been threatened and marginalised. The Dayton agreement gives a green light for Izetbegovic to purge such forces once and for all.

The working class movement in Bosnia and worldwide must oppose this arch-reactionary "peace settlement" with all their might.

- **Down with the Dayton Accord!**
- **No to imperialist peace plans which carve up Bosnia on ethnic lines!**
- **Drive all the reactionary leaders—Milosevic, Tudjman and Izetbegovic—from office!**
- **NATO and UN troops out of the Balkans now!**

Bosnia. It is "ethnically pure", linked up to Serbia proper by a garrisoned corridor.

No-one should have any doubt that this is a completely reactionary settlement. Over quarter of a million are dead or missing as a result of this war. Nearly 2.5 million, mainly Muslims, have been expelled from their towns and villages, well over 500,000 sought refuge in European Union countries. While the agreement recognises their right to return, no-one, least of all, the refugees, believes this can be realised since their homes and jobs have gone, and they

It can bring neither peace, national self-determination nor independence from imperialism to the peoples of former Yugoslavia. It provides for long-term Nato domination of the Balkans and it contains the seeds of future even more destructive nationalist wars.

This agreement will now be enforced by 60,000 Nato troops, including up to 20,000 from the United States. Within this strait-jacket, the national independence and freedom of Bosnia would be a fiction and the full effects of a restoration of capitalism will be forced through. Opening Eastern Europe to the advance

of the Nato "policeman" poses an enormous threat to the working class and poor peasantry of the entire region.

The sheer weight of imperialist military force, together with the need for a respite from the economic costs of war on the part of Croatia and Serbia, may allow the imposition of "peace" on the territory of Bosnia. Even if this is achieved, it will not represent a resolution of the conflicts that originated in the collapse of the former Yugoslav state.

### Hardships

The inevitable gravitation of the Croat and Serb components towards Croatia and Serbia will disrupt any chance of integrated economic development in the "new" Bosnia. Equally, the demands of capitalist restoration will bring more hardships to many and the creation of permanently disaffected populations in each statelet who will hanker after their lost lands and provide a source of support for nationalist and fascist movements.

Yet the inevitability of future tensions and conflicts also holds the promise of generating new political forces which have learned the lessons of this dreadful war.

Such forces must drive their various national leaders from government, be they Tudjman in Croatia, Milosevic in Serbia or Izetbegovic in Bosnia itself.

Throughout the region, the most burning need is for the political rearmament of the working class, the need for revolutionary workers' parties, Trotskyist parties, in each of the combatant states.

Only through their creation and their victory in the fight for multi-ethnic workers' republics within a Socialist Federation of the Balkans, will lasting peace come to these war-torn lands. ■

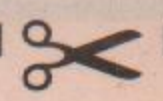
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# Scotland Victory in the post!

**H**UNDREDS OF incensed Scottish postal workers besieged the Edinburgh headquarters of the Royal Mail on Friday, 24 November as Communications Workers Union's (CWU) official John Keggie met John McKay, the Royal Mail's top boss for Scotland. They met with the aim of reaching a deal that would end five days of unofficial—and so completely illegal—strike action. The walkouts began in Edinburgh on Monday and, by the weekend, had spread to involve some 6,000 workers from Lanarkshire to Aberdeen.

**In a clear lesson to workers across Britain, the unofficial action won.**

The strikers who had gathered in Edinburgh were there not only to vent their anger against an increasingly dictatorial management, but also to give a pointed reminder to their union full-timer that they were in no mood for a sell-out. Throughout the week, CWU bureaucrats had repeatedly pleaded with their members to return to normal working, and strikers had repeatedly told them to "get stuffed".

The immediate trigger to the mass wildcat was Royal Mail's attempt to axe four full-time jobs at Edinburgh's Portobello depot, in anticipation of a dra-



Pickets confront scabs in Hamilton

matic reduction in second deliveries throughout the country. By Tuesday, the rest of the Scottish capital's posties and workers across Fife were out, with Glasgow's sorting offices joining the action the next day. This was all despite orders from CWU officials to wait until a legal ballot had taken place.

On Saturday, 300 men and women

poured out of Aberdeen's main sorting office when it became clear that employers had transferred mail from strike-bound offices. By the weekend, management had activated contingency plans to transfer mail for sorting in Newcastle, Liverpool and Manchester to undermine the strike – a reminder that this was not just a Scottish dispute.

The Royal Mail bosses, after some hesitation, went to the courts to obtain a ruling against the CWU. After refusing the bosses' original application, Lord Dawson then demanded the union submit its rulebook for examination to ensure that the bureaucracy was using all its disciplinary powers to force members back to work. The bosses' courts came

close to ordering the bureaucrats to suspend and even expel their own members.

**The workers' militancy paid off.** Strikers voted to call off their action after an agreement was eventually reached by Keggie and McKay, even as an official strike continued at the Hamilton office. Management agreed to withdraw the elimination of the 4 full-time jobs at Portobello and to consult with the union nationally before making further changes.

The action in Scotland has important lessons for other CWU members and trade unionists throughout Britain.

The workers' militancy is itself inspiring, but as with January's 48-hour wildcat in London the recent Scottish experience highlights the need for rank and file organisation to ensure that the union bureaucracy – who were desperate to get the unofficial action called off – cannot now bargain away jobs, terms and conditions.

The way forward is for postal workers to convene a meeting of activists from the wave of recent disputes in England, Scotland and Wales, with the aim of establishing a rank and file movement in the CWU as a practical day-to-day challenge to the right-wing leadership of Alan Johnson and co. ■

## Car workers Wildcat strikes

**W**ORKERS AT Vauxhall's Luton and Ellesmere Port factories voted overwhelmingly (four-to-one) in favour of strike action in response to their bosses' derisory offer of a 3.5% "rise" – barely the doctored figure for inflation. Meanwhile, their fellow TGWU members at Ford's main Dagenham plant and its Southampton van factory, dispensed with the formalities and walked out for the afternoon on 16 November.

The wildcat strike at Dagenham, the centre of Ford's European empire, involved more than 700 workers and sent a loud and clear message to the bosses that the improved "final" offer was not necessarily enough to buy industrial peace. The leaderships of the two key unions, the TGWU and AEEU, continue to drag their feet, however.

Despite the mandate for action at Vauxhall, the bureaucracy has so far only called for an overtime ban from 29 November. Incredibly, the company's bosses have replied with the threat of court action, alleging that they did not receive sufficient notice of the limited action in accordance with the anti-union laws. At Ford, the national officials claim that their members at Halewood on Merseyside and at the Bridgend, South Wales engine plant are prepared to accept the company offer, so the TGWU's Tony Woodley, and Jimmy Airlie of the AEEU, will not even call a ballot before 12 December.

While there are undeniable divisions within Ford's workforce because of fears at Halewood about job losses, militants in the car industry need to seize the opportunity to rebuild shopfloor organisation. Even if there are signs of a renewed downturn in 1996, the car industry bosses have enjoyed a couple of profitable years. The dramatic upping of the basic pay offer by Ford bosses highlights their fear of strike action.

They may lecture shopfloor workers about the need to be ever more productive in mind-numbing, physically knacker jobs to stave off "foreign" competition, but Ford executives certainly have no shame about booking a five-star hotel on Mauritius in mid-November for corporate golfing and champagne guzzling.

Meanwhile, British car workers still face a basic 39-hour week – the longest in western Europe. Both Ford and Vauxhall management have dismissed the unions' call for a two-hour reduction in the working week – even though the union negotiators look all too ready to agree productivity strings.

What is urgently needed, amid the current flurry of anger, is the rebuilding of inter-plant and industry-wide shop stewards' organisation, with the aim of challenging the bureaucratic stranglehold over negotiations and forging links with brothers and sisters at the companies' factories in Belgium, Germany, Spain and elsewhere on the continent. ■

## Defy the anti-union laws!

**“**LEGAL ACTION would be unnecessarily provocative. We don't want to disturb the balance of industrial relations”, announced Ford UK in response to unofficial strikes at Dagenham and Southampton plants.

The reaction of Ford's management, and the victory in the Scottish Post, shows that the union laws can be flouted and that illegal strikes can win. But meanwhile union

bureaucrats worked overtime to get Scottish postal workers to end their unofficial strike from the outset. Union leaders have refused to sanction potentially illegal action in disputes from the Liverpool Docks to JJ Foods in London.

The task facing all workers taking action is to ensure that the balance of forces are in our favour—by refusing to bow to the instructions of the cowardly bureaucrats and building the widest solidarity action for each and every dispute. ■

## Liverpool dockers fight on

**F**IVE HUNDRED dockers and their families are now in the third month of their determined fight to win back their jobs and defend union organisation in Liverpool.

Despite the continued refusal of the T&G to give the dispute real backing through defiance of the anti-union laws, dockers and their supporters have begun to escalate the struggle against the Mersey Docks and Harbour Company. November's action featured two big weekday pickets, which severely hampered the bosses' scab operation. Delegations of dockers have also gone to the continent and as far afield as Australia to seek solidarity from workers in other ports. ■

- Support the Dockers, join the next demonstration (called by Liverpool dockers and the Women on the Waterfront support group) Saturday, 2 December. Assemble 10.30am Liverpool Roman Catholic Cathedral in Mount Pleasant
- Rally at 12 noon, St George's Plateau
- Financial support is urgently needed. Cheques should be made payable to: Merseyside Docks Shop Stewards "Appeal Fund", c/o Jimmy Davies, Treasurer, 19 Scorton Street, Liverpool L6 4AS.



**O**VER 40 workers remain locked-out after being summarily sacked on 31 October for the "crime" of joining the Transport and General Workers Union (TGWU). The managing director of JJ Fast Foods Distribution, Mustafa Kaimil, dismissed the union members after they complained about the victimisation of a shop steward.

The sacked workers, largely Turkish and Turkish Cypriot immigrants, mounted a peaceful picket outside the gates of the north London depot, only to face a vicious attack by 20-30 armed thugs. Four of the sacked men required hospital treatment, with one receiving 18 stitches. The hired thugs are almost certainly supporters of the fascist National Action Party of Turkey, of which

Kaimil's brother-in-law is a member.

The workers had begun to join the TGWU over the summer in the hope that the union would fight to improve their abysmal pay and conditions. Many of the men received only £200 for a 60-hour week, with some on as little as £130 for work that included regular exposure to sub-freezing temperatures with no protective clothing provided.

The TGWU leadership, however, has all but ignored what should be a model struggle to win union recognition. The London regional office has shelled out a

paltry £35 a week in lock-out pay, and made little effort to appeal to its own members for money, never mind real solidarity.

Union bureaucrats have failed to declare the dispute an official strike, going down the hopeless, legalistic path of industrial tribunals.

While Kaimil's sackings are undoubtedly illegal, a tribunal does not have the power to compel the victimised workers' reinstatement. It is very unlikely that a tribunal will even hear their case until late 1996. Meanwhile, the employer has

agreed to a meeting at ACAS, due to take place as we go to press, but there is no reason to expect the slightest concession as the JJ operation continues with a scab labour force.

What the TGWU will not call for, but the sacked workers desperately need, is mass picketing of the industrial estate where JJ's is located—not the current passive demonstrations on windswept waste ground—along with a serious campaign to win solidarity action. First and foremost, this means blacking products from the North London depot,

which supplies local authority school canteens in the London boroughs of Enfield, Harrow and Southwark, as well as appealing to unorganised workers in Jenny's burger bars and restaurants, which are franchises of JJ's Fast Foods. ■

- Donations (cheques payable to TGWU) to: TGWU JJ Fast Food Campaign, Woodberry, 218 Green Lanes, London N4 2HB.
- A support committee meets every Tuesday at 7.30pm, Tottenham Community Project, 628 Tottenham High Road, N17.
- Daily demos outside the depot on Millmead Industrial Estate, near Tottenham Hale Underground station.

## JJ Fast Foods Stop this union busting!



# Unison

## Unite the left: mobilise the rank & file!

**T**HE ELECTION for Unison General Secretary ended in a surprisingly narrow victory for Rodney Bickerstaffe. Between them, the two left wing candidates polled 73,191 votes. Disturbingly, right wing populist Peter Hunter polled 93,402 votes, on a platform of opposition to the union's equal opportunities policies and to any active fight against the Tories. Bickerstaffe himself gained only 151,000 votes.

What do these results tell us about the state of Unison, its bureaucracy and its rank and file activists?

When the CFDU, the main left alliance in Unison, announced its decision to stand Roger Bannister against Bickerstaffe many on the left derided it. Tony Benn, for example, has hailed Bickerstaffe as a champion of the working class. Bickerstaffe opposed the abolition of Clause Four and fought for the minimum wage. As the former general secretary of NUPE he was said to represent the blue collar majority of Unison. Bickerstaffe embodied the views and aspirations of those who championed "old" Labour against the Blairite onslaught.

Bickerstaffe is one of the labour movement's foremost windbags, with a huge gap between rhetoric and effective action.

He supports the constitutional position of the "self-organised groups" of union members facing social oppression. He wants to strengthen links with the Labour Party in order to place minimal pressure on "New Labour" in government. In practice however, he was nothing more than the candidate of the reformist consensus at the heart of the Unison bureaucracy.

### Passive

The Unison leadership has overseen the sell-out of the local government and NHS pay claims. Tens of thousands of jobs have disappeared as compulsory competitive tendering (CCT) and privatisation have surged forward. Terms and conditions for those left in work have deteriorated dramatically.

The national leadership that unanimously supported Bickerstaffe's election limps behind the determination of the Asian women strikers at Hillingdon Hospital—taking six weeks to make their dispute official.

Ordinary union members have already paid a terrible price for such a passive bureaucratic strategy.

The election result revealed widespread disillusionment with Bickerstaffe's leadership. His failure to secure an outright majority of the vote, despite the virtually unanimous support of the union's bureaucratic machine, further discredits those on the left who refused to back a challenge to him.

Peter Hunter's strong second place—28% of the vote—is a warning to all those who were prepared to rest content with Bickerstaffe, hiding behind his fake-left credentials. Hunter is a reactionary populist—virulently anti-abortion, homophobic and racist. He became the focus for discontent among members opposed to all the progressive organisational gains made by the self-organised groups in the founding of Unison.

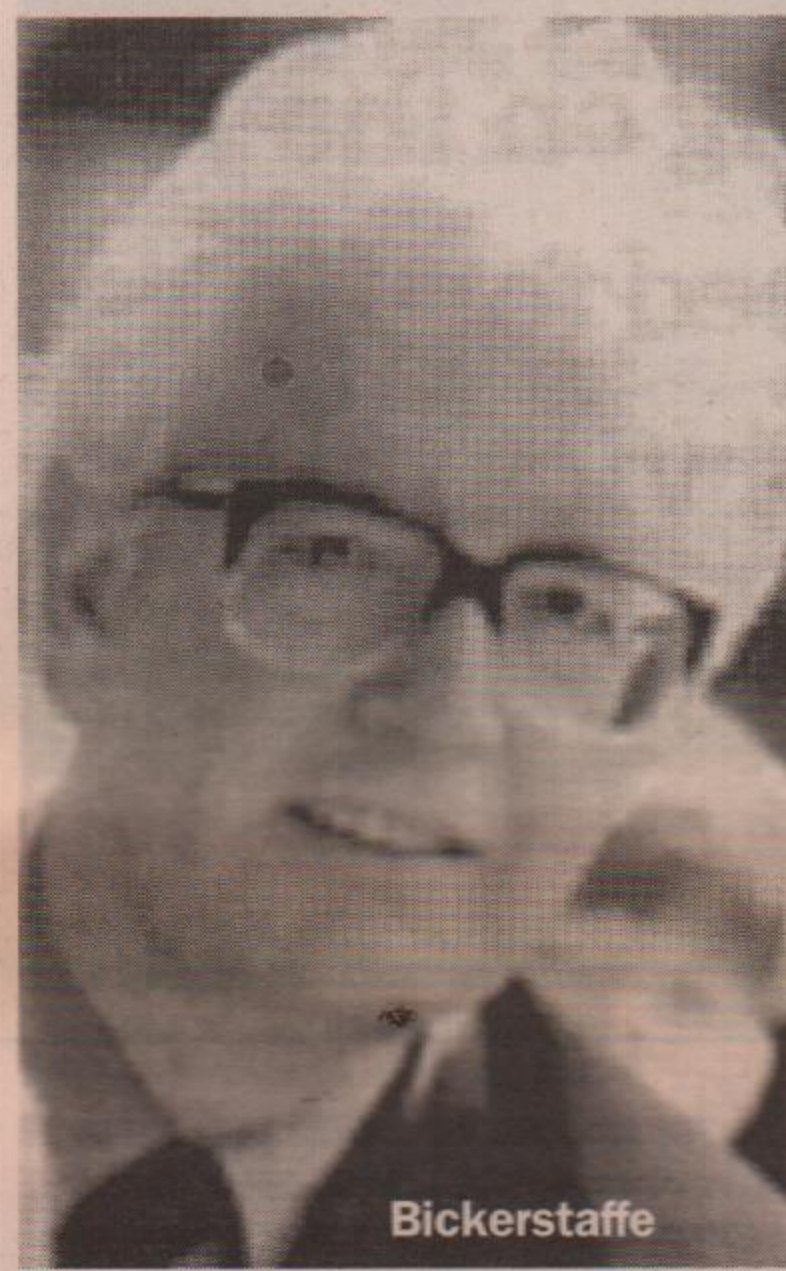
### Posture

His anti-bureaucratic posture was very weak and his call for lower subs was explicitly linked to an attack on the funding of the organisations of the oppressed within Unison. He achieved his vote in spite of being totally isolated at national conference, and with no formal

organisation behind him.

Hunter's vote is a warning to every militant activist in the union. The bureaucracy has separated the self-organised groups from the rank and file by embroiling them in struggles within the union's bureaucratic structure, played out above the heads of the membership. This has been used as an excuse not to actively fight against chauvinism and bigotry amongst the membership.

Hunter's success is unlikely to provoke a dramatic shift to the right at a national leadership level: Bickerstaffe is too dependent on the bureaucratic left to break dramatically with its existing policy. But



Bickerstaffe

### UNISON General Secretary Election

|                        |         |
|------------------------|---------|
| Rodney Bickerstaffe    | 151,893 |
| Peter Hunter           | 93,402  |
| Roger Bannister (CFDU) | 58,052  |
| Yunus Bakhsh (SWP)     | 15,139  |

it does point to future tensions amongst both the membership and the bureaucracy.

In contrast, the strong showing of Roger Bannister, the CFDU's candidate, is a warning to a bureaucracy which is so obviously failing to fight for the members' needs.

Roger Bannister stood on a limited but militantly left-wing platform which presented an alternative to the betrayals of the existing leadership.

The success of that platform in gaining nearly 19% of the total vote was directly related to the building of the rank and file organisation needed to implement it.

*Workers Power* supporters always understood the importance of standing against Bickerstaffe as a focus for opposition to the national leadership. Bannister's result has vindicated the CFDU's

decision to stand and shows that the basis exists for a rank and file movement. The task now is to build the CFDU into the type of fighting leadership our union so desperately needs.

The performance of the CFDU and Bannister is all the more remarkable, given the failure of the SWP candidate Yunus Bakhsh.

The SWP hastily decided to stand a candidate at the annual conference. After an energetic campaign, they picked up only 15,139 votes. This is a respectable total for any revolutionary group standing as a propaganda exercise, but pathetic when compared to Bannister's vote. Given it was the SWP who chose to split the left, and did so boasting that they would eclipse the CFDU, it is a terrible result. It confirms every criticism *Workers Power* supporters in Unison made of that decision, both at conference and during the campaign.

The SWP had said they were unable to unite with the CFDU because they see it as a 1980s-style Broad Left organisation. They counterposed to this the delegate-based structure of Fightback, their own "party front" in Unison. So committed were the SWP to this idea that they dropped Fightback as an organisation as soon as Bakhsh decided to stand, and it has not been heard of since!

### Platform

Bakhsh was to be the party candidate of the SWP. But his platform amounted to a few left demands without any explanation of how to achieve them or the kind of organisation needed to transform the union. It didn't even say "join the SWP!"

The CFDU now has the authority to again call on the entire left to unite in a single rank and file organisation.

The SWP should abandon their self-defeating sectarianism and unite with the rest of the left in the CFDU.

The combined vote of both candidates was half that of Bickerstaffe's. With a single, united campaign many more votes could have been won.

But irrespective of whether the CFDU can bring the SWP back into the fold, it has shown that it has the strength to go forward. *Workers Power* supporters in Unison make no apologies for our past and current criticisms of the CFDU leadership, but we will continue our fight to build the CFDU into the sort of organisation that can pose a real threat to Bickerstaffe's bureaucratic status quo.

That does mean overcoming the limitations of "Broad Leftism", where the fight for bureaucratic positions takes precedence over workplace and branch based activist networks.

The forthcoming CFDU National Conference must hammer out a fighting strategy to turn CFDU into a mass, active Unison rank and file movement. ■

## CFDU

### National Conference

Preparing for the battles of 1996

Saturday 9 December

10.00 am - 4.00 pm,

Swathmore Centre, 4 Woodhouse Square, Leeds 3

Information from:

c/o Paul Harris, 6 Beula View, Leeds LS6 2LA



## Civil Service Birth of a new left?

by a NUCPS Broad Left member

**I**N SEPTEMBER 1995, the memberships of the National Union of Civil and Public Servants (NUCPS) and the Inland Revenue Staff Federation (IRSF) voted in favour of merging the union to create the Public Services, Tax and Commerce Union (PTC). The official birthday of the new union will be 1 January 1996. With more than 160,000 members, it will be the largest civil service union and one of the top ten unions in Britain.

Most NUCPS and IRSF members will not have noticed the merger process. Those who voted cast their ballots heavily in favour of the merger. But the majority in both unions did not participate. As with most union mergers of the past decade, the PTC is a bureaucratic marriage of convenience, designed to boost the bureaucracy's depleted bank accounts.

Following the path of Unison in the early 1990s, the current union leaders will maintain control of their present jobs for some time to come. The current General Secretaries, John Sheldon of NUCPS and Clive Brooke of the IRSF, will rule jointly over the merged body, unelected for another five years. They plan a further bureaucratic lash-up with the low paid civil servants' union, CPSA. But in the meantime the existing divisions will be allowed to continue, with the NEC elected on a federal basis and the Inland Revenue section remaining autonomous.

Militant activists in the existing unions have not been idle during the process. On 2 December in Liverpool, the IRSF and NUCPS Broad Lefts were due to merge, creating the opportunity for building a rank and file movement to challenge the old guard for the leadership of the PTC. But if the merged Broad Left is to succeed, it will have to overcome the past deficiencies of Broad Leftism in the civil service.

The NUCPS Broad Left has been stagnant for some years. It remains a small, usually marginalised force, with no roots among the lower grades.

The IRSF Broad Left, on the other hand, has proved to be a paper tiger: numerically large, but frequently ineffective in practice.

Inland Revenue workers have enormous potential power. They can cut off the government's source of income through strike action in the tax offices.

Yet for decades IRSF members have been isolated from mainstream civil service trade unionism. The IRSF membership consists largely of low-paid women clerical workers, yet their governing body is dominated by male senior managers. This is a symptom of its failure to throw off its "staff association" character.

Against this background, a large but weak Broad Left emerged in the IRSF. When it called an unofficial conference in the early 1990s over 50% of branches sent delegates. It

has won numerous conference motions, only to see progressive policies overturned in membership polls carefully orchestrated by the leadership.

The IRSF Broad Left's main weakness, however, is at the level of ideas.

The Broad Left's glossy 1995 manifesto, "Facing the Future: Priorities and Policies" recites such laudable goals as full employment, re-nationalisation of the privatised industries, a decent minimum wage and a cut in the working week. But it offers no effective strategy for fighting to achieve these ends. Worse still, it proposes false strategies like a national overtime ban as the key to winning pay claims.

If we're taking on the Tories we will need more than just an overtime ban. We need indefinite strike action, controlled by the membership and prepared to face the legal obstacles the bosses will throw in our way.

What the PTC Broad Left should seek to create from day one is a rank and file movement. Unfortunately the danger is that the opposite will be built: an electoral machine for left-leaning bureaucrats.

We have already seen enough of these in the Civil Service. Despite the inactivity of the "open" Broad Left, NUCPS was, until very recently, under the control of a *secret* Broad Left, with membership by invitation only. Its principal purpose was to incorporate and seal-off from pressure promising young militants, who all too often went on to become foot-soldiers for the full-time officials. This covert bureaucratic "Broad Left" has now emerged as the "Unity" grouping.

Moves are already afoot to engineer an electoral pact between Unity and the NUCPS Broad Left, with a view to merger. Within the CPSA, similar plans are already in motion to create an umbrella organisation called Left Unity.

If these developments continue unimpeded, it will mark a dramatic change in the appearance—though not the substance—of civil service trade unionism.

A sea change is required in civil service unionism and the successful launch of a fighting, rank and file based PTC Broad Left would point the way to an alternative.

Two *Workers Power* supporters will be standing for the PTC Broad Left leadership on the basis of a serious orientation to the workplace and the commitment to fighting for strike action.

We will also advance the arguments for solidarity action, including strike action, across the unions. We will fight the bureaucratically imposed divisions within the PTC, even if this means breaking the anti-union laws.

Our goal must be the creation of a *workers' civil service union*: one that will eventually include those now in the CPSA but exclude the high level managers who currently infiltrate and mislead our unions. ■

Write to: BCM Box 7750, London WC1N 3XX



# After Hackney Downs who is next?

**T**HE ANNOUNCEMENT that Hackney Downs school would close on 31 December provoked opposition from parents, teachers and pupils alike. That, of course, made no difference to the North East London Educational Association (the "EA")—the quango that recommended closure.

This committee consisted of six businessmen, former council officials and educationalists, including a former head of a fee-paying private school.

The "evidence" of the school's failure was fraudulent—a tissue of slanders directed at staff and the 200 boys still at the school. Inspectors' reports indicated that educational standards were improving—even according to the government's narrow and fixed criteria.

The real reason for the closure is money; not just savings on costs, but also—cynically—the possibility of raising funds through selling the buildings and land. One leak from Hackney council suggests that plans are underway to sell the site off for private housing.

## Hit list

No wonder the EA wouldn't let a single teacher, student or parent attend their meetings!

The closure is just the first of many planned by the Department for Education and Employment (DfEE). Gillian Shepherd's office is busy drawing up a hit list for further closures, with schools in Islington and Lambeth topping the list.

Teachers across London know that if the Hackney Downs' closure goes ahead, they could be next. They could face a series of vicious battles in the near future.

Barring a dramatic escalation in the struggle to save Hackney Downs, it will close. Why is defeat now on the cards

after the early success in keeping Hackney Downs open?

Crucially, the response of the teaching unions has been far too weak. Instead of becoming a flashpoint for action that could turn the tide on the Tories' plans for schools, it now looks likely that the closure will go ahead without direct action to resist it.

At a lobby of the DfEE on 9 November, hundreds of pupils and teachers turned out to give a message of defiance to the Tories. A succession of speakers from other schools pledged solidarity. NUT representatives from Haggerston,

Clapton and Holloway schools reported that their members had voted to take solidarity strike action if Hackney Downs teachers walked out to stop the closure.

## Isolation

But NUT members at Hackney Downs voted not to strike, and received no hint of backing from either the national NUT bureaucracy or the local leadership. They feared defeat in isolation. At present, they are not even certain of receiving redundancy payments, never mind obtaining employment elsewhere in Hack-

ney.

Workers Power supporters were active in building for action on several fronts immediately after the closure announcement. We secured a solidarity strike vote at Haggerston school, while supporters of our youth paper, REVOLUTION, were instrumental in getting Hackney Downs pupils along to an NUT reps' meeting to increase the pressure for a strike. A REVOLUTION supporter attended the Hackney Downs student council meetings as a delegate from Pimlico School council in Westminster. REVOLUTION helped to link up the

Hackney Downs youth with students at Kingsland and Stoke Newington schools.

## Students

REVOLUTION was unique in agitating among the school students on the 9 November lobby, when the single largest student mobilisation took place. We backed this up with a series of leaflets, distributed to students at the school gates, coupled with daily discussions outside the school.

While the mood existed for a student strike in the wake of a walk-out the day after the closure announcement, pressure from heads and some teachers to stay in school proved too great to resist in the absence of much solid organisation. For instance, the head at Hackney Downs—who had been key in the earlier fight against closure—argued that a student strike would just give the impression that there was no discipline at the school. Even plain clothes cops turned up to try and ensure that no strike or occupation took place.

## Strike

Workers Power argued for the only action that could stop the closure—a strike across all Hackney's schools until the closure plan was withdrawn. The votes for strike action at other schools showed this to be a real possibility. Though an occupation of the school would obviously have raised the profile of the campaign, with the closure and the Christmas break both looming, it would have been very difficult to sustain an occupation until the start of the next term. Only a borough-wide strike would prove to the authorities that it would be more expensive and damaging to close the school than to keep it open and fund it properly. ■



## Hillingdon cleaners

# Strike goes official

**A**FTER WEEKS of delay, Unison head office has at last given the green light to the strike begun by 56 cleaners on 1 October at Hillingdon Hospital, West London. The strikers, virtually all Asian women, walked out when Pall Mall, a private cleaning contractor and arm of the multinational Davis Service Group, sought to impose wage cuts, the abolition of London weighting and shorter holidays.

## Support

Pall Mall had obtained the contract for Hillingdon under the Tories' compulsory competitive tendering programme. In the last fiscal year, the parent company reported profits of £25.4 million on annual sales of £322 million. The chief executive officially recorded a salary of £181,544. This same outfit is looking to slice cleaners' wages to £3.19 an hour. With some £25,000 from the union's London region, and food and material support from sympathisers in the local Asian communities, the women have kept up their determined fight against Pall Mall. Under consistent pressure from the strikers and their supporters—including a brief occupation of the Unison headquarters—the union's Industrial Relations Committee finally gave the dispute official recognition on 20 November. In the meantime,

other catering staff and porters had voted by 44 to 29 to join the strike. They were due to join the picket line from Monday, 27 November.

At the outset of their battle, the women elected an 11-strong strike committee. Though the dispute is now official, the strikers themselves must continue to call the shots, and not concede the running of the dispute to officials who are obsessed with staying within the anti-union laws and public relations. At present, it is vital to maintain and build on the existing pickets and step up the pressure against temp agencies supplying Pall Mall with strike-breakers.

## Action

While the extension of the strike to other sections of the workforce looks like a major step forward, the dispute could be brought to a swift and successful conclusion if the officials waged a serious fight for action by nurses and other actual or potential Unison members at the hospital. A real opportunity exists to give a bloody nose to a parasitic contractor making a whopping profit from the deterioration of standards in the NHS. ■

• Donations to Hillingdon Unison strike fund c/o Unison office, Hillingdon Hospital, Pield Heath Road, Uxbridge, Middlesex UB8 3NN.

## CPSA ES Strike

# "Bring out the rest"

**WP:** What is the background to the current dispute?

**LR:** Our pay claim is for 9% and for two hours off the working week. This would take us back to where we were in 1990. Their original offer contained nothing about reducing hours but included a performance related pay package.

Those workers in Box 4-5 (the lowest marks in the civil service annual reporting system) get nothing, Box 2-3 below inflation—a rise of some 55 pence a day maximum and Box 1, who only make up 5% of the workforce, would get an increase above the inflation rate.

**How long has the dispute dragged on?** Our settlement date was 1 April 1995, but negotiations didn't start until April. Our first ballot on the management offer was only in September. We rejected it by 10-to-one. Before the ballot finished, they suddenly "found" an extra £5 million. Even so, they still offered nothing to the lowest markings. After this, there was a ballot for action, which we won by three-to-two. But the bosses went to the courts and got an injunction. The officials obeyed, but they did re-ballot. With a higher turnout, we won by three-to-one with 6,000 in favour of strikes.

## So what's the strike plan?

Selected offices are on full pay after the one-day national strike on 30 November. We clearly need to escalate the action way beyond 40 or so offices, so in my view strike pay will have to be cut to, at most, 50%. At present, the union's strike fund has about £5 million, but

From Thursday 30 November, CPSA members at more than 40 local offices of the Employment Service (ES) were set to take indefinite strike action over management's attempt to cut pay and their refusal to reduce the working week. Workers from other offices will take part in a programme of escalating selective strike action. Lee Rock is one of those on indefinite strike. He is also the National Secretary of the Socialist Caucus, an important grouping for rank and file militants in the civil service unions. He spoke to *Workers Power*.

that'll be eaten up quickly.

Predictably, no levies of other members have been organised. The literature to date has been useless—the national officials haven't even provided recruitment material, even though membership in the ES is down to 55%. So branches and regions are going to have to bridge the gap.

Why have the misnamed, very right-

wing "Moderate Group" called the action at all?

I'm not sure myself. First, the offer itself is so bad. They may have an eye on upcoming elections and need to restore some credibility. Interestingly, the Deputy General Secretary led the negotiations himself and the rumour is that the management side treated him with contempt.

## What should activists be doing now?

The Socialist Caucus has pressed for a far more disruptive campaign. The union should name all the offices for strike action and name the ones to go on strike week-to-week. At the moment, the SWP are talking about unofficial action, but they're not even prepared to fight in offices where they've got members. As I said, people coming out indefinitely are on full pay, but it would be massive step forward to win people to going out on 50%. Militant Labour aren't even mentioning that. We've really got to pose the question of "what level of strike pay?"

## How does the strike link in with the fight against Job Seekers Allowance (JSA)?

Some of the targets for selective action are offices that were slated for JSA pilots or trials.

## Can the strike be spread to other relevant departments?

Some of our work will be done by staff in the Benefits Agency. They won't want to touch scab work, but the CPSA nationally will instruct them to "work normally". Instead, they should be bringing out those members over their own grievances. ■



# Art and Power

## "Engineers of the human soul"

IN 1937 two huge pavilions confronted each other across the grounds of the Paris International Exhibition of Arts. One was topped with a swastika, the other with a massive statue of workers holding aloft the hammer and sickle. No visitor could mistake the symbolism of the confrontation: Nazi Germany and Soviet Russia were squaring-up for the decisive conflict of the century.

But inside the two pavilions the art, design and architecture on show was notable for its similarity. Both Hitler's fascism and Stalin's bureaucratic dictatorship had, by the late 1930s, managed to strangle and suppress modernism in art and architecture.

Massive, dead-eyed statues; huge "realist" paintings devoted to adoration of the leader; master plans for Moscow and Berlin, based on the conscious rejection of the modernist "International style" in architecture; these, as the first room of the *Art and Power* exhibition shows, had become the hallmarks of totalitarianism in art, whether Stalinist or fascist.

The facile lesson that could be drawn from visiting this exhibition is that "communism and fascism are both the same". There will be any number of art and history teachers trying to drum that into the heads of their students as they drag them round the Hayward Gallery.

Stalinism and fascism did indeed look, and sound alike. Both were totalitarian dictatorships; regimes born of crisis, based on the crushing of individual freedom and collective revolt.

But they grew on different social soil. Fascism was the capitalists' weapon of last resort, unleashed by a European ruling class in mortal fear of workers' revolution. Stalinism grew out of the degeneration of a workers' state, out of the seizure of power by a bureaucratic elite, which corrupted a genuine workers' revolution.

Leon Trotsky, who led the revolutionary socialist struggle against Stalinism, once wrote that, were it not for their different property relations, the Stalin and Hitler dictatorships would be the same. By juxtaposing the creations of state-sponsored artists under both regimes this exhibition manages to illustrate both the ideological similarities and the socio-historical differences between Nazism and Stalinism.

More importantly it demonstrates that real communism—working class revolution and socialism from below—had nothing in common with Stalinism.

You get a sense of the effect of a workers' revolution on art as you progress through the first two rooms of *Art and Power*. The first room shows a selection of Soviet, Nazi and Spanish fascist art.

This "art of the dictators" is dire in the extreme. A large canvas from fascist Spain showing St. Teresa escorting a group of Spanish fascist "martyrs" to Jesus on the cross swooping down from heaven, demonstrates the sterile backwardness of such politics and their visual expression.

On the next wall hangs *Kirov at the sports parade* by Stalinist painter Alekandr Samokhvalov. Robotic ranks of idealised, athletic Russian men and women queue up to worship Kirov—a Stalinist bureaucrat whose assassination in 1934 turned him into a cult figure. To a revolutionary socialist it's a question of which one of these paintings makes you sicker.

But as you emerge from this first, foreboding room you step into another devoted to the art of revolutionary Spain of the mid-1930s.

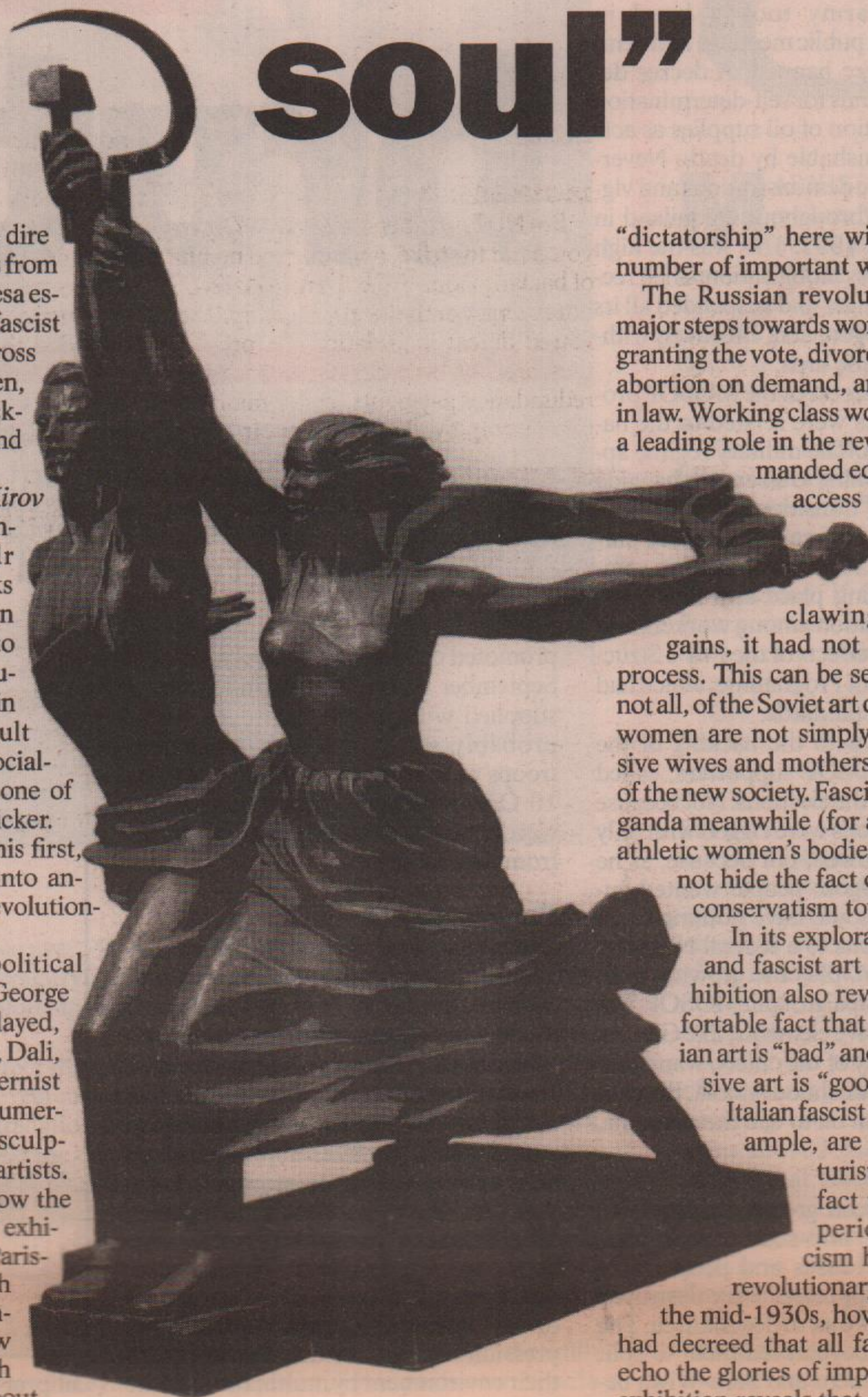
The brightly coloured political posters which so impressed George Orwell in Barcelona are displayed, along with paintings by Miró, Dali, Picasso, including his modernist masterpiece *Guernica*, and numerous impressive modernist sculptures by Spanish anti-fascist artists. The commentary explains how the Spanish pavilion at the 1937 exhibition became a magnet for Parisian workers at the time, with its combination of revolutionary propaganda, striking new painting and sculptures which spoke directly to workers about their life and struggle.

The Spanish room testifies to the power of working class struggle to influence art, and shows exactly why, in Trotsky's words:

"A truly revolutionary party is neither able nor willing to take upon itself the task of 'leading' and even less of commanding art, either before or after the conquest of power. Such a pretension could only enter the head of a bureaucracy".

Stalinist Russia could not have produced a *Guernica*, even when millions of workers were struggling to defend the USSR against the Nazi invasion. And revolutionary Spain in 1937 could neither have produced nor understood *Kirov at the sports parade*. In the realm of ideas, creativity and human progress real socialism and its Stalinist caricature are worlds apart.

Nevertheless, even the Stalinist art reveals its roots in a different set of social relations to those of fascism, despite the surface similarity. By the mid-1930s, Stalin had succeeded in crushing all



Paul Morris  
reviews  
**Art and Power**  
**Europe under the dictators**  
**1930-45**  
Hayward Gallery,  
South Bank Centre, London,  
until 21 January 1996, £5/£3.50

opposition to his rule. But he had not crushed the social conquests of the revolution.

As a result the Stalinist art of the period does contain echoes of the revolutionary origin of the USSR. This is particularly noticeable in the role of women, both as depicted in art and as artists themselves. The exhibition contains sculptures by Soviet women, Sara Lebedeva and Vera Mukhina, including a model of Mukhina's colossal *Worker and Collective Farm Girl* which topped the Soviet pavilion in 1937. It is significant that the Soviet Union is the only

"dictatorship" here with a significant number of important women artists.

The Russian revolution had taken major steps towards women's liberation: granting the vote, divorce on easy terms, abortion on demand, and total equality in law. Working class women had played a leading role in the revolution and demanded education and full access to work.

Although Stalinism was in the process of clawing back these gains, it had not completed that process. This can be seen in some, but not all, of the Soviet art on display, where women are not simply treated as passive wives and mothers but co-builders of the new society. Fascist art and propaganda meanwhile (for all the semi-clad athletic women's bodies it depicts) cannot hide the fact of its total social conservatism towards women.

In its exploration of Stalinist and fascist art together the exhibition also reveals the uncomfortable fact that not all totalitarian art is "bad" and not all progressive art is "good". Some of the Italian fascist paintings, for example, are modern and futuristic, reflecting the fact that, in its early period, Italian fascism had to pose as a revolutionary movement. By the mid-1930s, however, Mussolini had decreed that all fascist art had to echo the glories of imperial Rome. The exhibition reveals that there were similar tendencies to tolerate modernism even within Nazism before its seizure of power.

In general, the German and Italian rooms of the exhibition compete with each other in their monotonous inhumanity.

But our patience is rewarded when we reach the room devoted to art repressed in Nazi Germany. Alongside sculptures and drawings by socialist artist Käthe Kollwitz, and John Heartfield's anti-fascist photo-montages, hang a series of small paintings by Expressionist artist Emil Nolde. Though he tried to compromise with Nazi rule, Nolde was eventually exiled to Denmark and then forbidden to paint. This series of small paintings, done in secret, demonstrates the irrepressible urge of human beings to be free and create freely.

Both Hitler and Stalin hid behind populism in art. "The artist does not create for the artist. He creates for the people," said the Nazi leader.

Stalin ordered artists to become "engineers of the human soul" and decreed

that architecture should create "structures of mass character, reflecting the existence of a general plan".

But in the end Stalinism created structures which symbolised the tyranny of a small elite over the masses, and of bureaucratic planning. And Stalinist art crushed the human spirit, driving revolutionary poets like Mayakovsky to suicide, and jailing innovative geniuses like the painter Kasimir Malevich.

For real Marxists the progressive possibilities of art lie not in its "mass character", but in its contribution to the freeing of human individuality for millions.

As Trotsky wrote to a group of anti-fascist artists, not long after the Paris Exhibition:

"Art, like science, not only does not seek orders but by its very essence cannot tolerate them... Truly intellectual creation is incompatible with lies, hypocrisy and the spirit of conformity. Art can become a strong ally of revolution only insofar as it remains faithful to itself."



Above: Socialist Party poster from the Spanish Civil War.  
Centre: Vera Mukhina *Worker and Collective Farm Girl*.

The horrors of fascism are all too easily forgotten by a new generation, as are the monstrous lies and crimes of Stalinism. We should never forget the crimes committed against the working class in the 1930s, both by fascism and Stalinism. There are ample books and newsreels which show how these tyrants destroyed human bodies. But there is little to rival this exhibition in showing how they managed to destroy the human spirit. ■

### O B I T U A R Y

Genora Johnson Dollinger, 1913 - 1995

## Pioneer U.S. Automobile Union Leader

THE LAST time I saw Genora was when the BBC brought her to England to make the documentary "The Great Sit-down Strike". In 1979 she was featured in the documentary "Babies and Banners" which was nominated for an Academy Award. These films described her work as a 23 year old when she organised women to support and shield workers during the formative years of industrial unions in the USA.

On Christmas Eve 1936, 2,000 workers occupied a crucial Fisher Body Division plant in Flint, Michigan. The sit-in lasted for 44 days and ended with General Motors giving

in and recognising the union. The strike had crippled General Motors and was a turning point for the growth of unions representing industrial workers.

Genora organised the Women's Emergency Brigade and she and other women stood off the Flint Police, Pinkerton Guards and other hired thugs at the gates of strategic plant No 4 where Chevrolet engines were made. Her women's auxiliaries went from house to house to calm worried mothers and wives and gain their support.

They collected cash and food for their soup kitchens and she had her Women's Brigade wielding clubs, marching up and down the main gates and barricades to

Mildred Gordon,  
Labour MP for Bow and  
Poplar, sent us this obituary

put their bodies between Pinkerton agents and their husbands and brothers inside the plant. They wore red berets and armbands, carried American flags and sang "Solidarity Forever" and "Hold the Fort". When spirits flagged during the long confrontations her resolve stiffened the will of the "sit-downers".

Genora was blacklisted in Flint and moved to Detroit where she continued as a union organiser. She was the victim of an attack with a lead pipe during a

wave of anti-union violence which included the shootings of Walter and Victor Reuther, both veterans of the 1937 strike at General Motors and later top union leaders.

In the 1960s Genora Dollinger was development director of the Michigan American Civil Liberties Union. She was an early President of Women for Peace. After moving to Los Angeles she led a quiet life concentrating on gardening and sculpting.

She was born into a prominent family. Her uncle was a Vice President of General Motors. She rebelled against her background and married Kermit Johnson a labourer who was one of the

sit in strikers. Her early life was marred by tragedy as well as union success. Her two small sons died in a traffic accident. Her marriage to Johnson broke up and she married fellow socialist Sol Dollinger 51 years ago. She is survived by him and their son Ronald and two grandchildren.

Last year she was inducted into the Hall of Fame of the Michigan Women's Historical Centre in Lansing. She has been called a foremother of the Women's Liberation Movement. She was a heroine of the international labour and trade union movement who understood and organised the power of women in the class struggle. ■



**T**HE HANGING of Ken Saro-Wiwa and eight other Ogoni activists by the Abacha dictatorship in early November was the final act in a five year campaign of ruthless military oppression of the Ogoni movement. Saro-Wiwa was the President of the Movement for the Survival of the Ogoni People (MOSOP). The others were either MOSOP leaders or members of the organisation's youth wing, NYCOP. All were accused of "instigating" or being involved in the murder of four Ogoni chiefs.

The trial was a farce. A special tribunal had been set up by the military. It consisted of two handpicked judges and a military officer. There was no appeal, the sentences only needing confirmation from Abacha's Provisional Ruling Council. The defence lawyers withdrew in protest at the open bias of the judges.

This vicious response of the military is an attempt to destroy the fruits of a protracted struggle by the Ogoni people between 1990 and 1993. MOSOP was formed in 1990 and summed up its grievances in an "Ogoni Bill of Rights" presented to the military regime of General Babangida.

MOSOP denounced the neglect of Ogoniland by state and federal authorities. The area of the Ogoni is rich in oil but, like other regions of the country, little of the oil wealth found its way to the people. There was a chronic lack of basic facilities like roads, electricity, drinkable water, schools and healthcare.

### Degraded

The oil extraction methods used by Shell, the multinational oil company involved in Ogoniland, had dramatically degraded the environment. The 500,000 Ogoni living in the Niger river delta area are predominantly farmers and fishermen.

High pressure oil pipes were laid bare across farm lands. Regular spillages destroyed farmland and marine life in the river and mangrove swamps. Gas was regularly burnt off, a "gas flaring" policy which scorched farm land and dumped airborne pollutants on the village communities.

The Ogoni bill of rights defined the Ogoni as "a separate and distinct ethnic nationality" and called for "political autonomy to participate in the affairs of the Republic as a distinct and separate unit". It demanded the right to control and use a "fair share" of the economic resources of Ogoniland, and demanded protection of the environment from further degradation. The broad movement around MOSOP represented a powerful cross class alliance. It included the majority of traditional chiefs and clan leaders, several former state ministers, like Garrick Leton, then President of MOSOP, as well as small farmers, fishermen and students.

Ken Saro-Wiwa himself was a well known author, publisher and businessman. During the civil war, when a section of Nigeria—Biafra—attempted to fight for independence, Saro-Wiwa was a leading opponent of the breakaway. He was appointed administrator of the important oil port of Bonny during the war and, from 1968 onwards held various ministerial posts in the newly created Rivers State, of which the Ogoni area is still a part.

In the early 1990s, Saro-Wiwa ran a high profile international campaign, testifying to UN sub-committees and linking up with international environmental groups such as Greenpeace and Friends of the Earth. This earned him the undying enmity of the military. His own organisation EMIROAF, which called for Nigeria to be turned into a confederation of autonomous ethnic states, was banned in 1992.

### Encouraged

There followed a switch to mass action and confrontation with the oil companies. Saro-Wiwa encouraged, and was encouraged by, the militant youth wing NYCOP. A women's organisation was launched. An ultimatum was delivered to Shell, Chevron and to the state-owned Nigerian National Petroleum Corporation (NNPC) demanding \$6bn in rents and royalties, \$4bn compensation for environmental destruction, an end to gas flaring and the covering of pipelines. Negotiations were demanded within 30 days.

MOSOP had thrown down the gauntlet to the oil companies and the military. Shell asked the dictatorship for "protec-

tion". This was nothing new in the Rivers State area. In 1990 the neighbouring Etche people had demonstrated against a Shell installation.

Shell immediately called in the police. The heavily armed Mobile Police Force (MPF), known locally as "kill and go", duly obliged. The demonstration was dispersed with gas and the next day 80 people were killed in police raids on villages.

Then the army took a hand in Ogoniland. All public meetings and demonstrations were banned. A decree declared all demands for self-determination and for disruption of oil supplies as acts of treason punishable by death. Nevertheless, massive demonstrations and vigils took place throughout Ogoniland in the first half of 1993. This was the high point of the mass mobilisation. Shell recognised the danger and suspended all its operations in Ogoniland, effectively withdrawing from the area.

The initial success of the MOSOP protest movements were related to the national situation. The military regime appeared to be coming to an end. Babangida had declared a "transition to democracy" and had set up two carefully vetted parties to vote for. A national election campaign was taking place and there was growing opposition among workers and students to the effects of the IMF's Structural Adjustment Programme, which had slashed living standards.

Saro-Wiwa, with the backing of the majority of MOSOP supporters, called for a boycott of the elections. Not because the 1993 elections were rigged with only two parties allowed, but because, as he put it, if the Ogoni people wanted autonomy they should have nothing to do with the elections to a federal Nigeria.

This decision, plus the growing militancy of the campaign, split MOSOP. The more conservative elements, like Garrick Leton and many of the chiefs, wanted to support Chief Moshood Abiola, the candidate who went on to win the elections.

### Clashes

There had been growing clashes between NYCOP and some pro-government chiefs. Houses and property of government supporters were destroyed and many chiefs had to flee the area. The success of the boycott led them to split from the movement and Saro-Wiwa became President of MOSOP.

When the election results were annulled and the military decided to stay in power one of the first targets was the Ogoni leadership. "Ethnic clashes" were

# Nigeria's brutal reg

Nigeria's military dictatorship is in a deep crisis. They are responsible for brutality, but this is only hastening their inevitable end. But how can it be overthrown, and who will replace him? John McKee and Laura Wainwright look at the struggle of the regime and its opponents, and look at the struggle of the

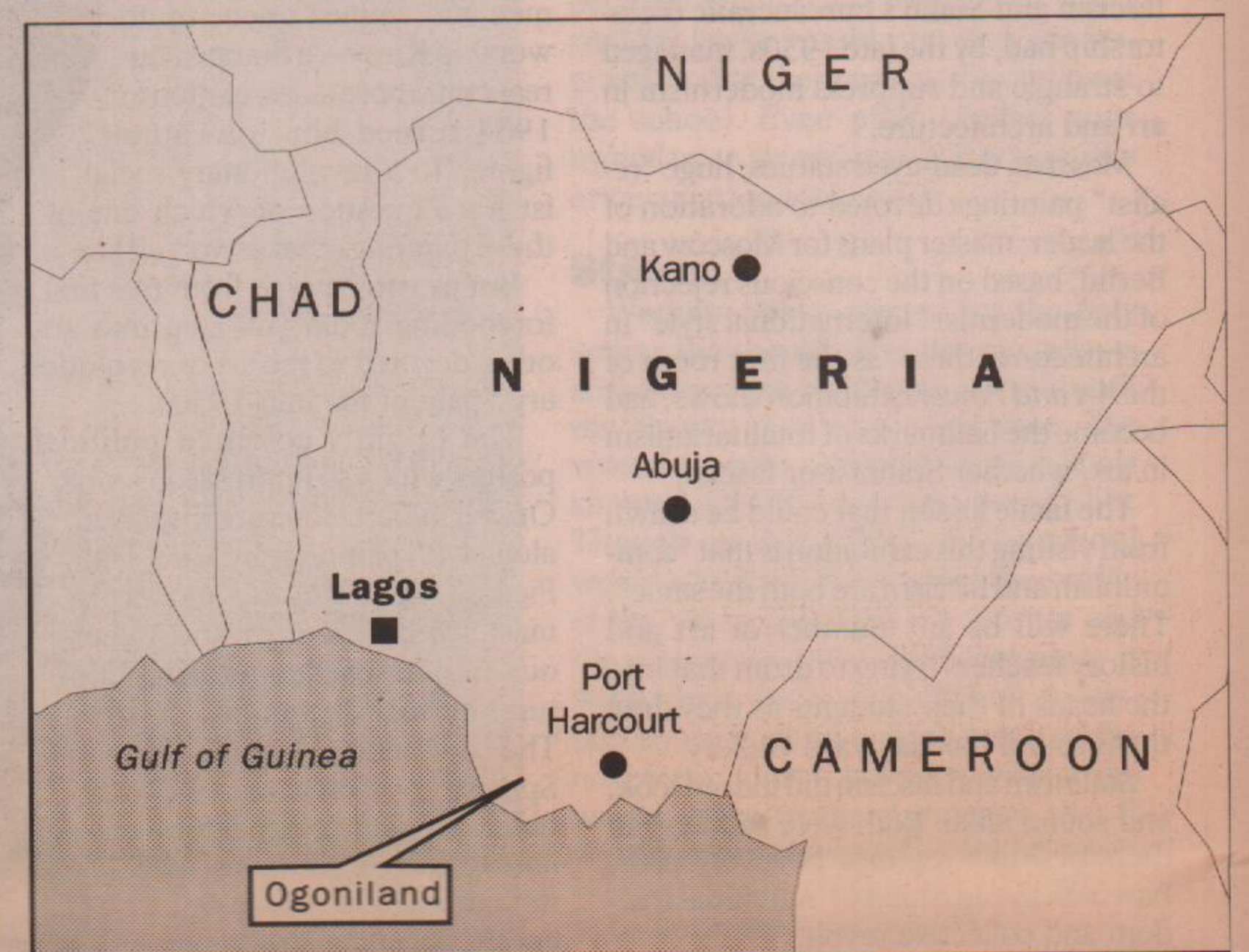
promoted or invented. Between July and September 1993 neighbouring Andonis, supplied with automatic weapons and probably strengthened by disguised troops or police, launched an attack on 10 Ogoni villages. Over 1,000 Ogonis were killed and at least 30,000 driven from their homes.

### Support

By the end of 1993 MOSOP was severely weakened and mass action was difficult. In May 1994 some Chiefs tried to organise support for the military's "elections" to a National Constitutional Assembly. This resulted in clashes between NYCOP and those who wanted to participate. Four chiefs were killed when an election meeting was stormed. It was this that led to Saro-Wiwa and other MOSOP leaders to be put on trial for their lives.

All workers must support the struggle of the Ogoni people against military repression and against the destruction of their environment by multinationals like Shell.

But despite the intransigence and even heroism of figures like Saro-Wiwa and other leaders of MOSOP, we cannot be uncritical of their politics. Such uncrit-



cal praise we can leave to the bosses of Body Shop and the leaders of Greenpeace.

For the workers and poor farmers of Ogoniland and Nigeria the perspective put forward by Saro-Wiwa and the

MOSOP leadership was a wrong one. MOSOP's whole policy concentrated on the idea that the Ogoni people were being robbed of their oil revenue by the "majority" ethnic groups or regions. Hence their strategy of a cross-class alli-

## Military cling

**T**HE ABACHA military regime is only the latest in a long line of military governments to rule Nigeria. The General himself has been a key player in at least three military coups.

It was Abacha, as Brigade Commander of Lagos, who announced the overthrow of the last civilian government of President Shagari in 1983. It was the same Abacha who plotted with General Babangida to overthrow the military leaders of that coup and replace them with Babangida himself. Again, when Babangida ended his eight year "transition to democracy" by annulling the 1993 elections and was pushed aside, it was Abacha, his number two, who took over in November 1993 and continued the dictatorship.

But the Abacha regime is a regime of crisis which stands over a divided ruling class and a potentially powerful working class. The regime is deeply unpopular, and its social base amongst important sections of the Nigerian capitalists is being eroded.

This has led to growing conflicts with the judiciary, divisions within the army and to an increasingly dictatorial and brutal repression of the bourgeois opposition, the press, the trade unions and Nigeria's national minorities.

Now Abacha has made a fatal mistake. He has humiliated the major imperialist powers, who pinned their hopes on a policy of "quiet diplomacy" to achieve change, by hanging Ken Saro-Wiwa while the Commonwealth Con-

ference was in session. For this he will not be forgiven.

*But while the overthrow of Abacha is desired by the vast majority of people in Nigeria, the way Abacha is overthrown and what replaces him is crucial.*

The imperialists and much of the bourgeois opposition in Nigeria all agree that there must be a "smooth transition". The last thing they want is a mass uprising against Abacha and the army which destabilises bourgeois rule. Chief Moshood Abiola, a millionaire businessman and press magnate, is their preferred candidate to oversee that transition.

### Treason

Abiola is in jail charged with treason. This is ironic, since Abiola was a friend of Babangida and leader of one of the two approved parties promoted by the military and allowed to stand in the 1993 elections. Even their manifestos were drawn up by government officials!

Only 30% of Nigerians bothered to vote in these fixed elections. In many areas, like Ogoniland, there was a total boycott. Nevertheless, because the military annulled the elections and because Abacha threw Abiola into jail for declaring himself the legitimate president, Abiola is now seen by many Nigerians as an opposition figure to rally around.

One result of this was a six week strike by oil workers in July and August 1994, which developed at points into a nationwide general strike. This shook the

Abacha regime to its foundations.

The workers demanded the release of Abiola and his assumption of power as part of the transition process. But they also raised their own demands for higher wages and protection against the rising cost of living.

They showed that the fight for workers right across the ethnic divisions that divide Nigeria's opposition, could unite and lead the struggle against the dictatorship. (see *Workers Power* 181, September 1994)

Abacha survived this test of strength largely because of the weakness of the trade union leaders, who called off the general strike. The oil workers were driven back to work. The regime took its revenge by jailing trade union leaders, dissolving the executive of the oil workers' union and the Nigerian Labour Congress, and proscribing 15 newspapers and journals.

Many of the leaders of the southern based National Democratic Opposition (NADECO) were arrested. NADECO, uniting many former government ministers and retired military figures, called for a negotiated settlement with the regime and an "interim government of national reconciliation" under Abiola. Their declared strategy is based on peaceful resistance and international diplomatic pressure to bring about change.

Nigeria is the most populous state in Africa and its oil wealth makes it a valuable area of exploitation. Nigeria is Brit-

ain's most important trading partner in Africa.

Over £450 million worth of British exports last year went to Nigeria. Shell has a 47% stake in the Nigerian oil industry. It accounts for 14% of Shell's world output. The United States also has a \$2.6 billion investment in oil, largely through the oil company Chevron.

### Trials

The treason trials of military officers, including senior figures of Nigeria's ruling class, convinced the imperialists that the whole country could be on the verge of civil war. The army might split, leaving their investments exposed. Suddenly there was a flurry of visits by heads of states and their emissaries to demand that the sentences of the "coup plotters" be commuted.

Combined pressure from the USA, the EU and South Africa led Abacha to relent and their sentences were commuted. At the same time the regime tried to mend its fences with the imperialists, offering "deregulation" of industries, opportunities for investment and decreasing its debts to the oil companies from \$1,000 million to \$200 million in one year.

Abacha's nationwide speech on 1 October offered yet another transition timetable, this time supposedly over three years.

But the latest killings and international outcry have further isolated the regime.



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Ken Saro-Wiwa

advocating in Nigeria.

The masses of Nigeria have every interest in maintaining a united country and a united struggle against dictatorship and exploitation.

Revolutionaries should direct the anger of the masses towards the real causes of their misery and the degradation of their environment, the fact that the massive oil revenues are pocketed by a handful of Nigerian capitalists and generals working alongside the massively profitable international oil companies which exploit Nigeria.

### Resources

The real struggle is to destroy this system of exploitative capitalism and distribute the ample resources of the country in a planned way to benefit all the toilers of Nigeria on the basis of equality. For the oil-producing areas this means

ensuring that the costs of protecting and repairing the environment are met from the enormous revenues from oil production.

It means making sure that such protective measures against environmental damage are under the control of the workers and farmers who live and work in the oil producing areas by fighting to build organisations that unite the oil workers and poor farmers.

Such a programme, and a workers party that will fight for it, can united all the Nigerian masses in a struggle against the dictatorship.

It can destroy the power of the military and the multinationals over Nigeria and open up the real possibility of building schools, hospitals, roads, of providing plentiful supplies of gas, water and electricity not just for the Ogoni but for all the peoples of Nigeria. ■

# to power

Whether the working class can take advantage of the isolation of the regime and any fracture in the armed forces depends above all on the programme it puts forward to mobilise and unite the masses against the regime.

The general strike has been shown to be a crucial tactic in the struggle against the dictatorship both in 1988 and 1994. But it has to be combined with developing organs of struggle in the cities and the rural areas that unite strikers with the unemployed, the oil workers with the rural workers and poor farmers. Such workers' councils must organise their own workers' guards to protect themselves from the military as well as campaigning amongst the poorly paid soldiers to join with them to end the regime.

The workers must reject any return to the results of the fixed June elections of 1993. They certainly have no interest in any deal which puts Moshood Abiola into power over the heads of the masses. In no way do these elections reflect the will of the masses.

### Convening

In their place the workers must fight for the immediate convening of a sovereign constituent assembly elected by all those over 16. Such an assembly must have the unfettered right to address all the issues facing the Nigerian masses, both constitutional and economic.

Nigerian workers have seen their incomes slashed over the last decade. Av-

erage income fell from \$800 in 1984 to less than \$250 today. Meanwhile the Nigerian capitalists and military elite flaunt their massive wealth, much of it gained through corruption. An official report estimated that \$12 bn dollars were mis-appropriated under Babangida's regime.

Workers must demand the confiscation of wealth and its use for the benefit of the masses, to build schools and hospitals and repair vital services. Workers' tribunals should be formed to arrest those who looted the state treasury and force the return of the thousands of millions held in domestic and foreign bank accounts.

The imperialists continue to demand the repayment of the foreign debt despite the billions of pounds they have taken from Nigeria in interest payments and profits.

The foreign debt must be cancelled. The multinational oil companies have also made billions of dollars out of Nigeria and continue to wreck the environment.

All their interests should be nationalised without any compensation. They have already been paid enough! The same should happen in other key industries so that the workers of Nigeria can use the wealth of the country to raise living standards and develop the economy for the benefit of the vast majority, not for a tiny handful.

Such a programme, to address the burning needs of the rural masses and

the injustices felt by the national minorities should be used as the basis for a genuine mass workers' party in Nigeria.

A workers' party must be independent from all the bourgeois opposition forces that want to continue the exploitation of the Nigerian masses, albeit under a democratic guise.

### Fight

It must fight for a workers and peasants' government in Nigeria.

Wouldn't such a programme bring down the wrath of the multinationals and the imperialists on the Nigerian workers' heads? Yes, but it would also inspire workers and peasants throughout the whole of Africa and the world to support the struggle.

The allies of the Nigerian masses lie not in foreign ministries of the Europe and America, nor amongst the Commonwealth heads of state, but amongst the workers of those countries.

The task is to mobilise the workers, especially the trade unions, in support of the workers' struggle in Nigeria.

The aim must be to impose a workers' boycott of all Nigerian exports, including oil, to prevent any arms or military equipment getting to the regime.

We must demand that the powerful trade union movement in this country breaks its shameful inactivity on the Nigerian struggle and gives all the material aid at its disposal to workers organisations and trade unions in Nigeria fighting against Abacha. ■

# g s

## The A-Z of Marxism

### is for God

**M**ARXISTS DON'T believe in God. No surprises there. But Marxists weren't the first atheists. In the eighteenth century a series of philosophers and natural scientists demolished the claims of the Church that the existence of God could be proved by reason.

The first theologian to try and use logic to demonstrate God's existence was St Anselm. This was his argument: if there is a supreme being then no other being, better or greater can be imagined. If the supreme being does not exist, then one *could* imagine a greater being. Therefore God must exist.

The complete circularity (and barmyness) of such reasoning is obvious. It is an attempt to prove that God's existence is a logical necessity, like the laws of mathematics. But the axioms of geometry and mathematics can be tested against the material world. Whilst God's existence is obviously a necessary axiom of *religious* thought and practice, it does not perform this function in any other sphere of human activity.

Under the pressure of the scientific reasoning which centred on discovering cause and effect, theologians moved the goalposts. They argued that since everything has a cause the Universe too must have one, one which exists before the Universe. But this argument too breaks down with the unproven assertion that there *must* be an "uncaused cause", and that this cause must be none other than a single, all powerful and perfect being.

To simply assert that, God starts wherever human scientific knowledge of the chain of causality stops, that is where proves nothing, especially since this boundary has been driven backwards time and time again by science. Another "logical" proof of God's existence goes as follows: Nature is orderly, therefore *somebody*, must have designed it. If you find a watch then there must be a watchmaker.

This argument too has withered under the impact of the advance of the natural sciences, which in sphere after sphere have shown the *internal* ordering (and disordering) of organic and inorganic matter. Nowhere can an *external*, inexplicable "designer" be demonstrated.

The idea that God is the source of all our morality is also full of contradictions. Is God "good" by some external absolute standard or is whatever God wills good? In the former case God is not omnipotent because the moral law is a higher force, and the question remains, who designed that? In the latter case God is an absolute tyrant, making whatever God wills good. What then is the source of evil? Does God will it too, or is there some source too powerful for God to overcome? The glib explanation that God allows evil in order to create free will opens the question: did God "allow" the holocaust for this purpose?

### Mysterious

Could God find no better way? Can God be all powerful and allow evil?

The religious person faced with this question, usually resorts to the old get-out clause: "God moves in mysterious ways".

One final argument is the historical universality of religious experience.

But these experiences are infinitely

varied and culturally different. And they rest on subjective testimony.

To argue that because people have "experiences", emotional trauma or exaltation, seeing visions, hearing voices, proves nothing about the objective origin of these experiences, especially since we know that mental disorder, drugs, and emotional or physical stress can and do produce these states.

Today people have visions of Elvis Presley in the same way that, in earlier decades, they had visions of the Virgin Mary. That proves the existence of a *need* for Gods to worship, a *need* for the supernatural, but not their existence.

Marxists have little to add to the rational atheists on these so-called proofs. But Marxists have long understood that it is not sufficient to simply disprove the rational force of the claims of religion. It is necessary to explain the varied and changing phenomenon of religion and how it can disappear. As students, Marx and Engels absorbed the idea from the German philosopher Feuerbach that religious consciousness was a form of *alienation*. We turn features of our own nature and experience into supposedly external, all powerful forces, and then worship them. Power, goodness and love were made absolute, unlimited qualities attributed to God who is then set up as the cause of all that is good in humanity.

### Alienation

The fact that some people today ascribe these features to Eric Cantona only goes to show that *alienation*, not God's existence, is the universal feature of class societies.

Marx and Engels took Feuerbach's insights into alienation further. They saw that the inverted world of religion was a result of a world in which the great majority of humanity were not in control of their own lives. Humanists like Feuerbach wanted to change humanity without first changing society, without uprooting the oppression and exploitation which are the roots of religious alienation.

Humanity as a species may have largely de-mystified nature, through science and industry. But it has not demystified human society itself.

Its own social relations of production and reproduction (the family) are the source of endless mystification. Indeed as long as a tiny minority of the owners of society's productive forces continue to exploit the majority, the latter will continue to feel powerless at the mercy of economic laws that act like a blind and often malign fate.

They will seek in the fantasy world of religion the salvation they were denied on earth. Religion according to Marx, is a psychological consolation for all this suffering: a pain killer, or in the famous phrase "the opium of the people".

Marx and Engels did not expect that religion would wither away as long as class society existed. It could not be got rid of by argument, even by mass anti-religious propaganda, let alone by banning it as the Stalinists later tried to do.

Only the overthrow of the profit system could create the conditions for the withering away of humanity's psychological need for religious belief. ■

by Dave Stockton



# Richard Brenner

## Hypocrisy and ecstasy

There hasn't been much good news for millions of Ecstasy users in the last few weeks. First we saw the terrible pictures of 18-year-old Leah Betts on a life support machine. TV news, tabloids and "respectable" press all rammied the point home: Leah was dying because she dropped an E on a Saturday night.

I thought the same as millions of others at first. Must have been a dodgy E. I felt angry at the Tories for banning the new testing kits that check purity. If only we lived in Holland...

Then she died. Leah's parents were on the radio and TV; their undoubted and deeply affecting grief was mixed with an angry attack on those who favour new, more liberal drug laws.

Dismissing calls for Ecstasy testing kits to be legalised, she warned the nation's youth:

"The tablet that killed our daughter was pure." The media dutifully rammed home that message: E is a killer. Testing for purity is irrelevant. Legalisation would see thousands more deaths.

Then, suddenly, the press fell silent. The inquest into Leah's death dropped out of the news. Except for small reports buried away in the "serious" papers: reports which revealed what really happened.

After taking an Ecstasy pill, doctors say, Leah drank a vast amount of water—far more than anyone would normally drink. Results of a blood test, leaked to the press, revealed that Leah's blood had been diluted to such an extent that her plasma sodium levels had fallen to well below the average: from 140 millimoles per litre to 126.

This sent her into a coma. Dr. John Henry, director of the National Poisons Unit and no liberal on the question of drug laws, told one paper that, "I would say that fluid excess is the most likely cause of death."

But these facts do not fit into Ecstasy panic generated by the media and the establishment. As the *Guardian* pointed out:

"If it is established that Leah Betts died from drinking too much water, the powerful anti-drugs message that resulted from the large media coverage given her death could backfire."

A tragic death was seized on for a cynical campaign to justify a senseless, repressive and unworkable ban on drugs.

### Overheating

At least 250,000 people—probably far more—take Ecstasy every weekend, millions in total. Of these there have been around 50 deaths. Some of these have been from impure tablets—most from the overheating that hours of dancing without a pause or a drink can cause.

If there have been deaths or injuries caused by pure E (MDMA) alone, they are a tiny fraction of the experiences of literally millions of youth.

There is less risk of this than of injury through allergies to antibiotics and countless other drugs. The danger of adverse reactions is far greater with inoculations.

For every 10,000 children receiving a jab against measles or whooping cough, on average one will develop a serious brain inflammation such as encephalitis, which can paralyse, blind and kill.

More young people die from car and motorbike crashes; yet how many parents encourage this "bad habit" by giving their children a set of driving lessons for their eighteenth birthday?

Of course E is not completely "safe". It carries risks. Most clubbers cannot but be aware of them—people take E to have fun, not to die.

If you dance all night on E you should drink water or juice—not in massive amounts, but sensibly, to cool down.

The real scandal is that the profit motive of the club owners works against doing this. Most charge £1.50 for a tiny bottle of cold water. Some clubs even turn off water supplies to stop people drinking for free.

Another risk with E is impurity. Es come in so many different forms that often you can't be sure what you're getting. But experiments with testing in clubs in Holland show that it can help stop these dangerous rip-offs.

But the Leah Betts affair shows there is another risk attached, one which is even more avoidable than the others: panic and ignorance.

Leah Betts' parents obviously pushed a persistent anti-drugs message. Leah herself thought the way to handle E was to drink massive amounts of water as an antidote.

But water is not an antidote to E—it is an antidote to dancing and dehydration.

With better information, less fear, less panic and shame, Leah could have had the same experience that millions have of their first E: elation, excitement, good humour and an irresistible urge to dance.

There should be proper information and education on drugs. For this we need the authorities to admit and accept that youth take drugs. Young people know that the official message that



Leah betts

"all illegal drugs are killers" is utter bullshit.

Recreational drug use is not just a youth fad, but has been a feature of every recorded human civilisation. From wine and beer through to cannabis, mushrooms and khat, every society and culture testifies to the fact that the desire to get out of your head is as old as entertainment itself.

Instead of impotent appeals to young people to avoid illegal drugs we should focus on minimising risks. There should be free testing of Es at clubs. Every club should be obliged by law to make drinking water freely available to anyone who needs it.

The Misuse of Drugs Act is as unworkable and counter-productive as Prohibition in the USA was in the 1920s. It doesn't work, it can't work, it will never work.

The only serious response to Leah's death is this:

Legalisation of drugs, with supplies under a state monopoly ensuring purity and clearly marked dosages.

Information and education about drugs under the control of youth, youth workers and others with experience of how to get the necessary information across.

The Tories—well-oiled with money from their backers in the breweries—will not give us this response. New Labour has silenced any discussion on changes in the law for fear of the tabloids and official prejudices.

But the dancing won't stop for these clowns. No amount of media panic is going to stop that. ■

# Austria

## The end of social partnership?

Only one year after the last general election, Austrians will return to the polls this month. In October the right wing Peoples Party (OVP) walked out of its "grand coalition" with the reformist Social Democratic Party (SPO). Meanwhile, Georg Haider's openly racist Freedom Party (FPO) stands to gain most from the fallout. *Frederic Haller from Workers' Standpoint* (the Austrian section the LRCI) explains.

THE SPO-OVP government elected in Austria in 1994 ran into trouble from the start. Its austerity package, launched to meet the convergence criteria for European Monetary union, was rejected by the unions. "Warning strikes" and anti-government rhetoric made clear to both the SPO and the open bosses' parties that any further cuts would require the consent of the union leadership. Otherwise, the government might have to face strike action, an event almost unheard-of in post-war Austria.

The two government parties drew different lessons from this experience. The SPO bent over backwards to gain union agreement to vicious cuts against public sector workers and welfare recipients, including teachers, university and school students, as well as the sick, disabled and pensioners.

Meanwhile the Peoples Party elected the coalition foreign minister, Wolfgang Schüssel, as its new leader. He is posing as the one bosses' party leader who could launch a Thatcherite attack on the welfare system.

By opposing an early retirement measure and pushing for harsh attacks against the unemployed, Schüssel broke the pact with the SPO. He openly challenged the unions and even the traditional Austrian system of social partnership.

For example, the OVP tore up a deal with the unions and helped push through a new law that allows shops to open on a Catholic holiday without a collective agreement between the shop owners and the unions.

Schüssel is gambling on winning back a quarter of a million votes from Haider's openly racist Freedom Party in order to eclipse the SPO. But this is by no means an easy task. Haider has profited from the discrediting of the coalition governments of the last decade, as well as from a succession of racist campaigns.

Haider projects himself as a critic of the whole system of power sharing between the "red" and the "black"—the socialists and the Christian Democrats. He even spouts off against "the rich" sometimes, only to praise the "honest" wealth of the industrious the next day.

This manipulation of popular cynicism and discontent has worked. In 1986 Haider took over a party that won a mere 4% in elections; last year he got 23% of the vote and the opinion polls suggest he may well win a still larger share this time.

Haider has set his sights on becoming chancellor in 1998 and has staked his claim to be the leader of the so-called "bourgeois camp", that includes virtually all the parliamentary parties except the SPO.

Haider's popular base consists of small capitalists, the middle class and those layers of the working class that have lost out under social partnership and are most repelled by the SPO. But the big industrialists and financiers still distrust him. His demagoguery is an incitement to instability and Haider has done little to distance himself from extreme right and even fascist groups.

As a result he is perceived, especially in the foreign media, as being a fascist himself. Although that is not true, the FPO lies on a political spectrum between the Italian Northern League and Berlusconi's Forza Italia, neither of which had any problems in forging a



People's Party leader Schüssel exits coalition; Austria's Thatcher?

coalition with open fascists.

The big capitalists are in a dilemma. On the one hand, they do not want Haider in the government because of the effects it might have on their business, given the FPO's unsavoury reputation abroad. They also sense that his arrogant approach could provoke the unions into demonstrating their power.

At the same time, the bosses want desperately to push the Social Democrats out of their leading role in government. The SPO has been part of the government for 46 of the last 50 years. For the last 25 years, the chancellor has been appointed from their ranks. The social welfare system has been their jewel in the crown.

The SPO still believes that Austrian

### At a glance...

OVP: The Austrian People's Party (Conservatives)

SPO: Social Democratic Party (reformist workers' party)

FPO: The Freedom Party (far right racists)

capitalism is only experiencing a temporary weakness and with a little self-restraint on the part of the workers and some well-directed public investment all will be well again. They have not understood the fact that capitalism can no longer grant Austrian workers the standard of living they were guaranteed in the 1970s. It is not a question of postponing a few luxuries, but of tearing up the social welfare system which formed the basis for social partnership.

The SPO's cautious approach is not the policy the bourgeoisie is looking for as it seeks to adhere to the "Maastricht criteria" for joining a single EU currency. Public debt is well over 60% of GNP, way over the level permitted by the Maastricht Treaty. The budget deficit in 1995 will be nearer 6% than 5%, whereas Maastricht only allows for 3%.

But the problem clearly is not just Maastricht. Many Austrian markets have enjoyed decades of protection against international competition and are now being gradually deregulated in line with the EU's demands on all member states. Although the government has for years reduced the tax burden on the bosses, they still claim to be insufficiently profitable to take on world competition.

Further cuts in taxes and social benefits are therefore demanded by the industrialists. And it is the workers who have to foot the bill: their taxes will be raised and their benefits cut.

In this situation it was Schüssel who offered his services to the hard-headed sections of the bosses. His game plan is clear: split the coalition, attack the SPO, push aside the FPO, win over the mass media to his cause, regain lost voters through anti-socialist rhetoric and conquer new voters by projecting himself as "breaking with the past".

Despite the admirable simplicity of this plan, the polls give it little chance of succeeding. The OVP has been part of the system of social partnership since its beginning. Its representatives are privileged bureaucrats and corrupt state functionaries who now claim that they want to change everything. People simply do not believe them. And if Schüssel does not gain a majority in the elections than he will have to take the blame for having provoked a completely unnecessary election. It will be impossible for him to grovel back into the coalition with the SPO. And most probably the People's Party will not want to do that either.

A more plausible scenario would see a government of so-called "experts" replacing professional politicians, as in Italy under Dini. They could be jointly selected by the bourgeois parties, but FPO politicians would not be in the cabinet. Austria's "international reputation" would be saved, and the "socialists" ousted. The bourgeoisie would have its way, even if its preferred candidate did not win a majority.

For workers in Austria this would be a very bad outcome. Not simply because the austerity attacks would come more quickly, but because the workers would lose the opportunity to experience the Social Democrats acting even more openly on behalf of the bourgeoisie. In the event of the SPO's departure from the government, workers would be more likely to retain illusions in the Social Democrats.

Thus, they would take longer to understand the need for a new workers' organisation, one that is really on their side—a revolutionary socialist organisation. For this reason the AS is waging a campaign for an SPO election victory and, at the same time, for the necessary fight against all social attacks from whatever quarter.

The Austrian workers will have to learn to fight again. Since the end of the war they have lived under the illusion that social democratic reformism will guarantee stability and the welfare system. Now they have to recognise that this is no longer on the cards. They have to put enormous pressure on their unions, transform them from top to bottom—indeed revolutionise them. They have to oust the bureaucracy which has no other function than to stifle all militancy and fighting morale and negotiate away decades of reforms.

The next cuts package, whoever carries it out, will include all the harsh measures that have recently been discussed: attacks against university and school students as well as against civil servants, women, unemployed, the sick, old, early-retired and the working class as a whole. Only a big wave of solidarity action can stop it. Only a massive strike wave can force the bosses into retreat. ■



## Irish peace process

# On the edge of failure

**E**ARLY IN November an old memo from a Tory prime minister, Ted Heath, to a stalwart of the British judiciary, Lord Widgery, was published in the press. The memo expressed British government concern about the events of Bloody Sunday, the day in 1972 when British paratroops gunned down 13 unarmed civilians on a civil rights march in Derry. The concern was not about the murder of innocent people. It read:

"It had to be remembered that we're in Northern Ireland fighting not only a military war, but a propaganda war."

The British state has always publicly denied that it was waging a war in Northern Ireland. To concede that fact would be to admit that the IRA was indeed an army, fighting a war of national liberation.

The resilience of the Northern Irish nationalists and the courage and determination of the IRA meant that Britain could never win the war outright by military means. But neither could the IRA, whose guerilla strategy increasingly degenerated into a piecemeal war of attrition separated off from the actions, concerns and needs of the nationalist masses. The ceasefire, welcomed by a war-weary population, emerged from this impasse.

For the republicans, the IRA and Sinn Fein, the ceasefire was designed to open the way to all-party talks aimed at a constitutional settlement to the Irish national question that would finally mean the end of partition. Sinn Fein's leadership had cultivated a pan-nationalist alliance between themselves, the middle class nationalists of the SDLP and the Dublin government. With the help of the Irish lobby in the USA, this alliance won the Clinton administration's backing for a peace process that would have all-party talks at its centre.

### Beleaguered

John Major had set peace in Northern Ireland as a key goal. His weak and beleaguered government desperately hoped that engineering a peace deal would partly restore its standing in the eyes of the British public. To achieve this, Major himself cultivated relations with Dublin, signing the Downing Street declaration which declared that Britain had no "selfish or strategic interest" in the six counties. At the same time, he authorised the secret negotiations with the IRA in which he promised Sinn Fein entry into all-party talks if the IRA suspended armed actions.

But while Major wanted peace, he also wanted and needed the support of the Unionists in Northern Ireland. Essentially, this meant that he was willing to begin a "peace process" but would not see it through to the resolution of the national question through the reunification of Northern Ireland with the Republic.

In the 14 months since the ceasefire, Major has become ever more dependent on the Unionists for his own government's survival. As this majority has fallen with every by-election so the votes of the Ulster Unionist Party (UUP) have become vital for the Tories to keep con-

"The hope and expectation... has been displaced by anger or dismay or frustration", says Gerry Adams - fearful of losing control over the republican movement. MI5 warns John Major that the IRA ceasefire is likely to end, sooner rather than later. *Mark Harrison examines the background to the stalled "peace process".*

trol of Parliament. Thus, the Unionist veto over the "peace process" remains unchallengeable.

The UUP's new leader, David Trimble, is modernising his party and undermining its link with the Orange Order. But he is doing this with a view to preserving Unionist domination of the North within the framework of an elected assembly which will be an alternative to any constitutional moves towards reunification. And he has made it absolutely clear that he will not enter any all-party talks until the IRA hands over its weapons.

### Shatter

This places Sinn Fein in a difficult situation. Any return to armed struggle will irreparably shatter the pan-nationalist alliance, probably leading to a new round of splits in the republican movement. The longer there is peace, the harder it becomes for the IRA to resume armed actions. Moreover, any renewed armed struggle will provide a pretext to justify in the eyes of many nationalists, as well as unionists, greatly increased repression against the IRA, at a time when it is ever more isolated from the mass of the anti-unionist population.

These considerations are at the heart of British strategy. It is why they are so determined on the question of the decommissioning of IRA weapons. Under the guise of demanding the surrender of weapons they are actually manoeuvring to get the unconditional surrender of the IRA. After all, it is only the IRA's weapons that they really want decommissioned. Major admitted as much when he said recently:

"The problem above all lies with Sinn Fein and Sinn Fein's complete reluctance to tackle the question, even with an international body, of how their arsenal of weapons and explosives are going to be taken out of commission."

No mention of the loyalist paramilitary arsenals! No mention of the stockpiles of weapons known to exist at the ready for the Unionist parties. No mention of



Loyalist wall mural, Belfast

republicans are not asking for them to be handed in as a precondition for talks."

By steadfastly insisting on the IRA, and the IRA alone, surrendering their

**By steadfastly insisting on the IRA, and the IRA alone, surrendering their weapons, the British government are deliberately sabotaging the peace process that they promised would commence after the IRA ceasefire.**

the need to disarm the sectarian RUC. As Martin McGuinness, Sinn Fein's chief negotiator, pointed out:

"What about the 150,000 legally held weapons in the six counties, most of which are in the hands of the unionists? That enormous number of guns is surely a threat to any lasting settlement, but

weapons, the British government are deliberately sabotaging the peace process that they promised would commence after the IRA ceasefire. Clearly, even John Bruton's Dublin government, not to mention Sinn Fein and the SDLP, are frustrated by Major's position. The Fine Gael-led coalition has continued the

work of Fianna Fail as a mediator between the British and Sinn Fein. Its reasons do not lie in a desire to end the injustice of partition, but in a desire to remove the North as a source of instability for Ireland as a whole. To that end it would be happy with the maintenance of the Union provided it had a role in the six counties that benefited Irish capitalism as a whole.

The collapse of the peace process threatens this objective. This, together with internal pressure from Fianna Fail, explains why Bruton has cancelled one Anglo-Irish summit and put off another. He has attacked Major's insistence on decommissioning as a precondition for all party talks as an "immutable position" that will destroy the hopes for compromise.

Bruton, Adams and the SDLP all support the idea of an international

commission to oversee the handing over of weapons, to be supervised by the US administration and/or the UN, as well as setting a date for all party talks (a definite date for Sinn Fein, a target date for Dublin). Major agrees with this "twin track" approach, but he is sticking to the condition that the IRA begin decommissioning in advance of the international commission. For Britain, this condition is essential—as a show of solidarity with the Unionists and as a guarantee of its victory over the IRA. For Dublin, Sinn Fein and the SDLP it is the stumbling block.

Continued delays in this process will all benefit Britain. But even an advance towards all-party talks would not be a guarantee of a just peace. So long as the terms of such talks accept the Unionist veto over reunification and so long as Britain acts to underpin that veto, the source of the conflict that has wracked Ireland for so many years—partition itself—will remain.

With partition, the discrimination against the anti-unionists in the North, though considerably less acute than it was, will be a constant threat. Sectarianism is built on the fact of partition, not on the different prayer books of the two divided congregations of the North's churches.

### Different

That is why we, as revolutionary socialists, advance a totally different solution to the present stalemate. It is one in which the choice is not either surrender or a return to a self-defeating, and ever more isolated, military struggle. It is one in which the class struggle against imperialism and capitalism, North and South, is waged by the masses themselves.

Britain's treachery in the "peace process" and Dublin's strategic compliance with British interests in Ireland, despite their tactical wrangle, demonstrate that neither will bring a just peace. The working class of Ireland, however, can direct its blows against the British and Irish states, and against the capitalists who exploit them on both sides of the border. By striking such blows it can prove to the unionist workers, who currently side with imperialism, where their long-term class interests lie. It can hasten their break from imperialism and pave the way for a socialist united Ireland.

The condition for the redirection of the class struggle in Ireland to secure such a goal is the rallying of all those committed to the fight against imperialism to the banner of a revolutionary socialist party.

Such a party will not flinch from a showdown with the British state and with those unionists who back it. But it will prosecute a mass class struggle, with strikes, demonstrations and armed self-defence under the control of the mass movement. It will proclaim the unifying goal of socialism, to minimise the number of committed unionists, and to shake British imperialism to its foundations in a way that not even the most spectacular bomb could. ■

**T**HE FINAL count of the divorce referendum has just been announced as we go to press. After a recount the Yes side have won by the tiniest majority—9,163 votes, thereby lifting the constitutional ban on divorce.

This victory, although narrow, is of enormous significance. It represents another body blow for the Catholic church in the South at a time when it hoped it could win a No vote.

The full results have not been published, but the turnout was around 65%, with a high turnout in Dublin that swung the result. A majority of rural constituencies voted No, but the urban vote was a solid yes.

The realities of life on estates is at odds with the backward doctrines of the

pope. One politician commented, "the church has lost the Dublin working class".

The narrowness of the victory reflects the fact that the government launched its Yes campaign with its hands tied behind its back.

It hoped to scrape through a win by using £500,000 allocated by the government for an inoffensive publicity campaign on TV, radio and the press. Its plans came unstuck when the deranged petty bourgeois rabble of the

### Referendum

## Divorce blow for church

by a member of the Irish Workers' Group

Irish Green Party sought a Supreme Court verdict that the use of this government money was unconstitutional.

The Greens, who at the same time were part of the Yes campaign, won their legal challenge. So a week before the poll the government were thrown into crisis. In the last week of the campaign this ruling forced them out

of their bunkers to actually argue for divorce rights—something they fear might lose them their seats in the next election.

The No campaign had no such scruples.

They fought a lying and sectarian campaign with the help of millions of pounds from the US right wing, especially US Catholic fundamentalists. They stooped to using anti-semitic arguments against two Jewish Coalition ministers.

The fact that they almost won represented a big danger facing all socialist and progressive forces in Ireland.

Despite the slim majority, the Yes vote is a kick in the teeth to the Catholic Church when it is already down on the ground over sex abuse and other scandals, and at a time when church attendance has dropped by 30% in the past five years.

We must continue to kick it while it is down by going on to mobilise workers, youth and women for free and legal abortion on demand, for the expropriation of all schools and colleges out of the hands of the church and the complete separation of church and education, church and marriage and the church and state. ■



# Rabin assassination

## Israel's man of war

The assassination of Yitzhak Rabin prompted the western media to recycle endless accounts of his great "achievement" in concluding the peace settlement of 1993. In death Rabin is set to become a saintly figure and national hero who, we are told, lived and ultimately died for peace. It is a lie, explains *Richard Brenner*.

IF THERE were a Nobel war prize, Yitzhak Rabin would have won it. As a young man he was an important figure in the Palmach—a militia established by Jewish settlers in Palestine. Like other militias such as the Irgun and the Stern gang, the Palmach aimed to establish a Jewish state in Palestine, which they described as "A Land without a People for a People without a Land".

Young militants like Rabin knew, however, that there was a people—the Palestinians—on this land. So they set about creating a land without a people by expelling the indigenous population.

The Labour Zionist movement of which the Palmach was a part – and which Rabin would later lead – sought to provide a "socialist" gloss for its policy of ethnic cleansing. Thus *Avoda Ivrit* (Hebrew Labour) was to be the slogan under which Arab workers were driven from their workshops and farms. Trade unionists who opposed this racist policy were denounced as "national strike-breakers".

Many reports of the assassination have expressed horror at the killer being a fellow Jew, but Rabin is hardly the first Jewish leader to be killed by a Jew. Many socialist Jews were killed in the 1930s and 40s by Zionist militias. Haim Arlosoroff, an early Labour Zionist, was assassinated by right-wing Zionists for "treason" as far back as 1933.

The Palmach participated fully alongside the Irgun in the anti-Palestinian pogroms between 1947-9, when, as Rabin admitted in his autobiography, he oversaw 50,000 Palestinian men, women and children being forcibly driven from their homes in coastal areas. This laid the bloody basis for a Jewish state twice the size of that envisaged in the United Nations' original plan for the region.

The Israeli state, as Rabin swiftly understood, could only assume a Jewish identity and maintain a semblance of democracy if a Jewish majority could be secured on its territory. That the "land of milk and honey" could be achieved only by methods of bloodshed, terror, forced de-population and resettlement was no problem for Rabin. He devoted most of his adult life to making this nightmare a reality.

Between 1963 and 1968 Rabin was chief of staff of the Israeli Army. This "socialist" ordered the attack on Israel's Arab neighbours in the Six Day War of



Palestinians celebrate on hearing of Rabin's death

1967, which resulted in the conquest of the West Bank and the subjection of hundreds of thousands more Palestinians to Israeli military occupation.

In his first term as Prime Minister from 1974 to 1977 he actively encouraged the settlement of Arab land by Jewish volunteers who were motivated by Biblical mythology and deep-seated notions of Jewish superiority over the Arabs. As the religious settler movement became ever more right-wing and aggressive, Rabin encouraged them.

He gradually permitted all orthodox Jewish settlers – no matter how fanatical – to carry arms, and even introduced a new scheme to allow students at biblical seminaries (Yeshivot) to combine part-time military training with their religious studies. Ironically, Rabin helped

sow the seeds for the emergence of the militant religious far-right that would eventually destroy him.

Rabin's hawkish stance showed no signs of abating when Palestinian youth and poor city dwellers launched the *Intifada*, their heroic uprising in 1987. The lesson that Zionism had drawn from the Holocaust was not to eradicate national and racial oppression, but to transfer its burden to others.

As Defence Minister, Rabin responded to the *Intifada* by ordering Israeli troops and police to break the bones of the demonstrators. TV footage recorded this sickening policy in action against helpless and disarmed captives, to the horror of viewers all over the world.

Even the current round of peace ne-

gotiations and the subsequent deals at Oslo and Taba are no testimony to Rabin's status as a peacemaker. Israel was forced to go down the path of negotiations by the US threat to withdraw \$10 billion in loan guarantees. Without its US underwriters, the artificial economy of Israel – an implanted settler semi-colony – would have collapsed like a pack of cards.

Rabin was the perfect Labour leader for the job, because his record as a war hero and strong man would – it was hoped – allay mainstream fears of any risk to Israel's "security". He would maintain the substance of the Zionist status quo with only cosmetic changes.

The Oslo Accord granted the Palestinians a near-powerless "Palestine National Authority", covering only the Gaza

Strip and the town of Jericho on the West Bank. Israeli troops were set to leave the West Bank gradually without a fixed timetable. This year the Taba deal extended withdrawal to six other West Bank towns and cities, including Jenin, Nablus, Qalqilya, Bethlehem, Ramallah and Tulkarm.

In Hebron, a town in which 380,000 Arabs are held to ransom by around 300 armed and violent Zionist settlers, the Israeli army will stage only a partial withdrawal. Though the settlers occupy the centre of the town, conduct violent attacks on Arab civilians and demand the "right" to settle the whole of the West Bank, the remaining Israeli troops are stationed in Hebron to "protect" them.

Some 70% of the West Bank remains under Zionist military occupation. Though Palestinian police are to patrol the areas under PNA jurisdiction, the accord insists that Israelis in these areas "may not in any circumstances be arrested or placed in custody by the Palestinian police".

Zionist troops may, however, enter any PNA territory at will to seek out Palestinian resistance members and drag them away to prison.

In short, the Palestinian "autonomy" granted in these deals is a fraud. The "peace" that Rabin pursued – and was finally killed for – was not a just or democratic settlement. Israel got away with offering the Palestinians the merest shadow of self-rule in return for the PLO's abandonment of decades of justified resistance to the conquest of their country and the theft of their land.

While Arafat added his voice to the exclamations of shock and regret at Rabin's death, it is no surprise that other, very different messages issued from the Arab world. Some were triumphant, tempering their delight with an implicit scorn for Arafat's accommodation to Israel.

Others focused on Rabin's true record and the hypocrisy of the Western leaders, whose regrets have never extended to the families of countless nameless victims of Zionist terror, from the *Intifada* to the victims of the bombing of Beirut.

Perhaps the most eloquent of these, from the Lebanese paper *Nida'a al-Watan*, may serve as an epitaph for Yitzhak Rabin:

"O civilised world, cry now over a terrorist killed by a terrorist . . . as for us, let us weep over many others." ■

## Who was behind the assassin?

YIGAL AMIR, Rabin's assassin, says he "acted alone and on God's orders". Meanwhile, the Zionist police look for more worldly collaborators.

On 8 November Avishai Raviv, head of the fascist EYAL movement (Jewish Fighting Organisation), was arrested and charged with conspiracy and failure to prevent murder. Amir's brother has been arrested and charged with direct involvement in the killing.

Fanatics and extremists these people certainly are. Isolated nutters they are not.

EYAL, and a myriad of movements like it, are only the sharpest end of an extreme reactionary and racist movement that has sprung up among the West Bank settlers.

They owe their jobs, their homes, their arms and their ideology to the very Zionist governments that they are now struggling against. The source of their

current militancy is their feeling of "betrayal" at the limited restraints on their expansionist plans that the toothless Taba Accord will impose.

To get people to settle territory with a flagrant disregard for the democratic rights of its inhabitants, an extreme ideology of national intolerance is indispensable. Ultra-orthodox Judaism – of a type that would be unrecognisable to most secular Jews in the West – fits the bill perfectly.

Just as Islamic fundamentalism is able to cite verses from the Koran to justify the oppression of women, so the settler movement can look to holy texts filled with statements about how those who give away Jewish land forfeit the right to live.

After Rabin's assassination, many within the government – not least caretaker Prime Minister Shimon Peres – have taken advantage of the widespread revulsion at Rabin's murder to press

ahead with the planned troop withdrawal from Jenin. Rabin's widow, Leah, has bitterly attacked the Likud opposition for raising the temperature in its invective against the peace deal.

What all these people prudently avoid mentioning is how successive Zionist governments have actively encouraged the settler movement and its most extreme wing.

Rabin steadily removed obstacles to the settlers arming themselves. Government subsidies have mushroomed to organisations in the diaspora promoting Jewish emigration to Israel. Israeli troops defend the armed settlers in Hebron.

Appallingly, the Israeli Army has mounted an armed guard over the grave of the mass murderer, Baruch Goldstein, now an obscene shrine for the settler movement. Goldstein's claim to immortality rests on his unprovoked murder of 29 Palestinians as they prayed

at a mosque in Hebron in 1993.

Yigal Amir himself was no isolated maniac. He was a widely known pro-settler activist, who had served in the Israeli Army's elite Golani brigade and had been an emissary of the Jewish Agency serving as a secret serviceman in the USSR, with the aim of smuggling emigres out to Israel. He was connected to the settlers' umbrella group, the Yesha Council, and regularly came into contact with members of the Likud Youth and fascist groups like EYAL, Kach and "Kahane Lives".

Recent evidence points to even closer complicity between the state forces and the settler movement. The Observer on 19 November reported that Amir was a former Shin Beth agent (Israeli secret police). Shin Beth apparently helped to fund the EYAL movement. Amir himself used Shin Beth ID papers to get through the police cordon to shoot Rabin.

The Zionists could not have pursued their policy of settlement without these fanatics and their utterly irrational ideology.

They trained them, armed them, funded them, encouraged them. Now the Labour government aims – under US pressure – to stabilise the Zionist occupation through minimal concessions, and the very monsters they have created turn on the Zionist establishment in blind desperation.

When the shock of the assassination wears off, Israelis will find that a legacy of bitterness and division remains.

The chickens have come home to roost. The task facing the Palestinian resistance now is not to rely on the Zionists to bring the settlers to heel, but to take advantage of their divisions to launch a renewed mass struggle now against the settlements and to drive the Zionist occupiers out of the West Bank for good. ■



## France

## Hit the road, Jacques!

“If there are two million people protesting in the street, my government will not survive. That's obvious to everyone.” So said French Prime Minister Alain Juppé, shortly after announcing a new round of attacks on the joint health and social security system (the “Sécu”).

A week later, on 24 November over a million workers took to the streets in one of the biggest general strikes ever seen. The race is on to get rid of Juppé, and his boss, President Jacques Chirac.

AT THE beginning of November, using a cabinet reshuffle as a pretext, Juppé came clean about his government's real intentions.

Gone was the “Minister for Solidarity Between the Generations”. Gone were the crocodile tears over the “social fracture” affecting French society. Gone were the promises to defend the Sécu.

In their place, Juppé and Chirac revealed themselves as born-again Thatcherites, determined to attack the working class and students.

Chirac, who had promised everything to everybody during his election campaign last May, was revealed, quite simply, as a liar. His election slogan “France for everyone” should really have been “France for the rich”.

In a major parliamentary speech on the 14 November, Juppé outlined his plans for the Sécu. They could be summed up in one simple phrase: the workers will pay more for less.

Dr Juppé's prescription consisted of a new tax to reimburse the Sécu's massive debt, a snap increase of 2.5 years in the length of time public sector workers will have to work before retirement, a freeze in child benefit, an increase in deductions from workers' pay and an annual reduction of £400 million in health spending over the next two years.

This was angrily rejected by the whole of the labour movement . . . almost.

Several leading Socialist Party members—including a former Health Minister—praised Juppé for his “audacity” and merely voiced their fears that he wouldn't go far enough!

Even worse, one of the main trade union leaders, Nicole Notat of the CFDT union federation, said she agreed with 85% of Juppé's attack and that she would throw her union's weight behind the government's policy!

But the pressure from the rank and file was enormous. Faced with this attack on pension rights in the public sector, the unions called a general strike for 24 November. Over 100,000 people marched in Paris, whilst many provincial towns saw their biggest demonstrations ever. So powerful was the strike that the whole of the Paris region was paralysed. For once, total unity was achieved.



by Emile Gallet, Pouvoir Ouvrier

It didn't last long.

Force Ouvrière (FO)—linked with both the Socialist Party and Chirac's RPR party—had previously called a strike of all its members for 28 November to protest against Juppé's attacks. FO leader Marc Blondel then backed out of the 24 November strike, using the excuse that the CFDT had “betrayed the working class” by its support for the attack on the Sécu and that there was no question of marching with them! This move was made under pressure from union officials, many of whom are linked with the “Parti des Travailleurs” of self-proclaimed Trotskyist Pierre Lambert,

The CGT union federation (linked to the Communist Party), which had originally decided to strike on 28 November, then changed its mind and called all its troops—public and private sector together—out on strike on 24 November, leaving FO to march with the doctors' unions on the 28th.

This ridiculous sectarianism and indecision shows up the deep contradictions in the French labour movement. The level of unionisation in the French working class is one of the lowest in Europe (5%). And yet the bureaucrats maintain their influence over the workers.

## General strike now!

THE FRENCH section of the LRCI, Pouvoir Ouvrier, rushed out a special issue of its paper, centring on the call for an immediate all-out general strike.

Over 450 copies were sold between 22 and 24 November, mainly to workers participating in the general strike. The response was particularly good in Paris, where we sold over 150 papers.

At Rennes University, our comrades successfully argued for the general strike slogan to be at the centre of leaflets addressed by students to workers on the railway and in the nearby Citroën plant, calling for joint action. They have been agitating for the creation of a joint delegate-based national strike committee of students, workers and the unemployed.

The call for an all-out general strike is gaining ground. On the morning of 24 November general strike, CFDT members put a resolution calling for an all-out general strike to a mass meeting of railworkers at the Paris

Montparnasse station.

In its latest paper Pouvoir Ouvrier wrote:

“To beat back the government's attacks on the Sécu, education and the public sector, we need a general strike, which draws in workers from both the public and the private sector.

But a 24 hour general strike is not enough to defeat the government's plans. What we need is a real, all-out, national general strike.

Such a strike would need a national leadership, made up of action committees composed of delegates from workplaces, the community and colleges all over the country.

It was a general strike 27 years ago, in May 1968 that posed terrible problems for the government.

Because if we all go on strike, who is going to provide transport, electricity and food?

The answer is simple: all these essential tasks will be carried out, but by the workers themselves, deciding for them-

selves, without being told what to do by the bosses.

In other words, under workers' control.

That's why the creation of workers' councils has to go hand in hand with the mobilisation for a general strike.

In May 1968 the fear of such an alternative form of power sent De Gaulle scuttling off to Germany. We can do the same with Juppé and Chirac.

But what are the possible outcomes of such a crisis?

The last time the question of power was posed like this, De Gaulle and Pompidou were able to regain control, largely thanks to the Communist Party, which ensured that the biggest ever general strike in history ended up in the cul de sac of parliamentary elections!

Elections are the last thing we need in such a situation of heightened class struggle. A general strike would demonstrate to everyone that we don't need bosses and MPs. We can very well organise the country ourselves without

them. They did not get things all their own way, however. Many of the FO public sector unions refused to obey Blondel's diktat and took strike action on the 24 November. Nicole Notat had to leave the demonstration in a hurry as 200 of her own members called for her resignation and eventually gave her chauffeur-driven limousine a good kicking!

The nature of the bosses' attack, and the reason for the unions' disorderly response, is even more complex than it first appears.

The funds of the “Sécu” are run by joint committees of workers' and bosses' representatives. In the last elections—in 1983!—FO lists swept the board, giving FO members access to the substantial perks associated with these posts, in particular the right to hire and fire, and control over the large number of flats and houses owned by the Sécu.

Juppé's reform will remove the unions' influence over the Sécu and thus represents a serious threat to the FO bureaucracy.

Workers have to oppose all aspects of the Juppé attack and fight for genuine workers' control of the Sécu, not just the perks and privileges of the FO bureaucracy.

Electricity workers are protesting against the attack on their pension scheme with an all-out strike on 30 November. Railway workers are protesting against a similar attack and the government plan to savage the rail network. The all-out rail strike launched on 24 November was highly effective and lasted three more days.

At the same time, over half of the country's universities are on strike, and over 100,000 students demonstrated on 22 November against the government's refusal to provide 8,000 extra university lecturers.

Commentators and politicians have been congratulating themselves that the current generation of students are not like their parents of May 68. “They don't want to change the world, they only want a job” they say.

That is the whole point. The youth want jobs. This system cannot give them jobs. That is what makes the current situation so explosive. It carries the promise of thousands of students drawing the conclusion that a world that cannot give them a job deserves to be changed!

Chirac will doubtless remember that in 1986, when he was Prime Minister, victorious strike action by railway workers and students put paid to his previous austerity attacks. This time round, the attacks are worse and the stakes are even higher. French workers and youth must respond with the only weapon that can beat back all these policies: an all-out general strike. ■

## A World to Win

## Argentina

A successful picket of the Argentine Embassy took place in London on 15 November to protest against the detention of Horacio Panario.

In Argentina 1,000 marched in Buenos Aires, while around the country thousands of workers in different towns and cities have demanded his release. In Brazil, Workers Party leader Lula has added his voice to the protests, while in France the International Campaign Against Repression did likewise.

Horacio was arrested on 2 October, in the town of Zapala in Neuquén province, for his leading role in a demonstration organised by the Unemployed Workers Co-ordination (UWC), which demanded payment of a \$200 entitlement long owed by the provincial government.

On the same day the government ordered the arrest of Alcides Christiansen (a candidate for state governor for the MAS—the ‘Movement for Socialism’), as well as three other members of the UWC. This demonstration was but one of many continuing struggles against the IMF-sponsored austerity policies of the Menem government and has been applied by all state governors since Menem's re-election in April this year. Trade unionists all over the world recognise in Menem's privatisation and cuts in welfare the same Thatcherite policies pursued by the ruling class in their own countries. In Argentina, as elsewhere, the government's response is to attempt to criminalise trade unionism and social protest. They must be stopped now. Solidarity is urgently needed with the struggle of Argentine trade unionists:

- For the immediate release of Panario; drop the charges and cancel the arrest warrants for all the others.
- Support the struggle of the unemployed for their benefits.
- Fax a letter of protest to the Argentine Embassy in London: 53 Hans Place, London SW1. Copies to CARA, PO Box 7268, London E10 6TX.

## USA

Workers at the *Detroit News* and *Detroit Free Press* are entering their fifth month on strike. The editor of the *News* said in August that to raise profits to 15% from 5% “we are going to hire a whole new workforce and go on without unions, or they can surrender unconditionally and salvage what they can.”

The workers walked out and began picketing the plant at Sterling Heights. But union leaders have refused to adopt the necessary illegal tactics of mass pickets and to call for solidarity action from other workers. Even so, printworkers and up to 3,000 supporters staged several militant pickets in late August and early September in the face of riot cop brutality.

Now 40% of the workers in the Newspaper Guild have crossed the picket line and gone back to work out of demoralisation with their leaders' useless strategy.

The owners have obtained an injunction restricting the numbers allowed to picket the plant.

The dispute in Detroit is following a pattern now all too familiar in the USA. The bosses' aggressive union-busting tactics meet with miserable excuses from union officials rather than tough action.

Their “realistic” alternative has failed completely to halt the tide of defeats suffered by US workers in recent times. Only militant rank and file organisation that puts solidarity strikes, action and mass pickets at the centre of union resistance can begin to reverse the employers' offensive. ■



# Do we need a Socialist Labour Party?

“DO WE meekly accept ‘New Labour’? Do we passively concede that the Party has abandoned Socialism and any commitment to common ownership? . . . Do we, and others who feel as we do, stay in a party which has been and is being ‘politically cleansed’? Or: do we leave and start to build a *Socialist Labour Party* . . . ?”

With these words miners’ leader Arthur Scargill has thrown down a challenge to the left of the labour movement.

October’s Labour Party Conference revealed the unprecedented weakness of the Labour left. Constituency Parties have indeed been “cleansed” of left-wing activists. The union leaders, who at first threatened to fight Blair over the minimum wage, rolled over and played dead. The remnants of the “hard left” are now huddled together, preparing for a long spell of political hibernation.

Arthur Scargill himself was isolated, at a conference which saw not a single vote go against the plans of the Blair clique.

But Scargill is nowhere near so isolated amongst Labour’s active supporters and the wider trade union movement. 38,000 people have left Blair’s New Labour in disgust at its right-wing trajectory; 73,000 members of the public sector union Unison voted for candidates to the left of Labour’s Rodney Bickerstaffe in the recent election for General Secretary.

## Fight

What is more, tens of thousands of trade unionists know that, once Blair is in power, they will have to fight *against* New Labour to restore a single penny, service or democratic right taken away by the Tories. In the months to come, whilst electoral support for Labour will almost certainly rise, doubts and suspicions about Blairism will also increase amongst both experienced trade unionists and young people wanting real change. They need a strong, well-organised socialist voice and an organisation to organise and lead their resistance.

**That is why Workers Power welcomes Arthur Scargill’s call for discussions on the left to consider the establishment of a Socialist Labour Party (SLP).**

We will participate fully in the process of consultation and debate that Arthur Scargill has called for in the run up to the planned launch of the new party in May 1996. The key question for this debate is, *what kind of party should socialists be aiming to establish in May?*

Some will argue that the new party will need to return to Labour’s “socialist roots”. This is understandable given Blair’s charge to the right. But it is a misleading argument nevertheless. It involves a mistaken estimate of Labour’s entire history.

This is the view put forward by Arthur Scargill in his discussion paper. He argues that,

“ . . . at the time of its formation, the Labour Party had both a Constitution and policies which projected a Socialist philosophy, policies and programme”.

He thinks that until recently, even when Labour adopted right wing policies,

“ . . . it has always been possible to fight to reverse these policies—because the party’s Constitution has been committed to the eradication of Capitalism, the establishment of Socialism and common ownership.”

## Roots

But the real roots of New Labour’s class collaboration go deeper than the recent seizure of control by a middle class clique, or the abandonment of Clause Four.

Labour was *not* established as a socialist party. The first Manifesto of the Labour Representation Committee, formed in 1900, pledged it only “to support trade union principles and ideas by political methods”. The union leaders who set it up aimed to secure the repeal of anti-union laws and court judgements. They were careful to avoid any more detailed programme or policy commitments.

Even the famous Clause Four part IV of the Party’s constitution was only adopted in 1918 in response to a wave of working class militancy at the end of the war and to the Russian revolution.

Clause Four, however, never took Labour further than a commitment to

We need a party that can organise the working class for power, not just parliamentary office. Such a party would be committed to putting ordinary people in charge of their own lives and destinies.



gradual reform. It aimed to secure common ownership for the workers from above, through parliamentary action alone, rather than to lead the workers in a struggle to secure socialism through their own mass activity as a class.

The idea of returning to Labour’s socialist roots is utopian. Its roots were never clearly socialist. Labour was a living contradiction from the outset: a party created and supported by workers’ or-

gradual reform. It aimed to secure common ownership for the workers from above, through parliamentary action alone, rather than to lead the workers in a struggle to secure socialism through their own mass activity as a class.

Real power in a capitalist state does not lie in parliament. As we saw in the Great Miners’ Strike of 1984-85, power rests with the unelected judges, the millionaire press and media, with the army, the police and the intelligence services. To this we can add countless checks on democracy: the monarchy, House of Lords, Privy Council and, of course, the

hands of the working class majority.

A revolutionary SLP would not turn its back on the millions of workers who still look to the Labour Party through their trade unions and support it through their votes at elections. It would call for a vote for Labour in any constituency where there was no revolutionary candidate, and continue to demand that Labour acts in the interests of those workers. This is crucial to ensuring that

## Statement from the Workers Power Editorial Board

organisations which was at the same time committed to maintaining the capitalist state and the capitalist system. It was this that led Lenin to describe Labour as a *bourgeois workers’ party*.

The false idea that Labour’s working class character flowed from its politics rather than its social base can lead to dangerous conclusions today.

For example, now that Clause Four has been removed from the party’s constitution, Scargill has concluded that Labour is “almost indistinguishable” from bourgeois parties like the democrats in the USA or the Liberal Democrats in Britain.

But something still stands in the way of Labour becoming such a party—it is not Labour’s politics, but its organised link to the trade union movement, and millions of working class voters across the country.

Blair intends to resolve this contradiction in the capitalists’ favour. He is committed to weakening trade union influence on the party still further, while marginalising any remaining socialists in the constituencies. It remains the responsibility of workers and socialists to stop him.

A new Socialist Labour Party would be stillborn and superfluous if it aimed only to re-establish “Old Labour”. Instead the call for the establishment of an SLP provides workers with an opportunity to settle accounts not only with Blairism but with the entire reformist

scandalously undemocratic first-past-the-post electoral system.

Any Labour government committed to removing the wealth and economic power of the bosses would have found itself confronting these forces, not just the heckles of the Tory front bench.

**That is why consistent socialism must be revolutionary socialism.**

We need a party that can organise the working class for power, not just parliamentary office. Such a party would be committed to putting ordinary people in charge of their own lives and destinies.

## Struggles

We need a party that roots itself in the everyday struggles of working class people: in the workplaces, on the estates, in schools and colleges and on the streets.

A revolutionary socialist party would not merely applaud the struggles of the working class. It would take on the job of organising and leading them: linking them up, criticising and challenging leaders who will not fight, defending the victims of injustice.

At the same time it would pursue these everyday struggles with a view to preparing a struggle for power: sowing the seeds of workers’ control, of democratic workers’ councils, of working class self-defence. In this way it would take the first steps towards establishing the means for a socialist revolution to break up the capitalist state and place power in the

hands of the working class majority. We fully agree with Scargill’s statement that:

“ . . . the new party and its Constitution would have to ensure that its members and affiliated organisations *control* the Party through its national executive committee. Never again should we have a situation where the Parliamentary Party takes control of the apparatus, and the political tail wags the dog.”

But he also warns that the new Constitution “would demand an end to internal wranglings and sectarian arguments”. Real sectarianism—standing aside from the struggles of the working class and putting the interests of the party separate from and above the interests of the workers—must be resolutely rejected.

But internal democracy and debate would have to be the lifeblood of the new party, including the right to differ. Without it, the party could die.

There is another danger to be avoided: the loose “network” where everybody does their own thing, oblivious to the democratic decisions of the whole party. This would make the new party little more than a talking shop for existing political groupings. If the SLP is to become a party in the real sense of the word, majority decisions will have to be implemented. They would need to be binding on all—leaders as well as members.

## Democracy

In short, Workers Power will be arguing for a structure based on maximum democracy and debate, and maximum unity in action once decisions are taken.

It is of course possible that the SLP project will not get off the ground. There are many left-wingers in the Labour and trade union movement who are out to wreck it. Others argue it is “too soon”, fearing a break with Blair without the backing of the big union bureaucracies—a development that could only realistically be expected months or years into a Labour government.

But the real problem is not the premature formation of an SLP. It could even have come too late.

If *Militant* had found the political courage to break with Labour during the struggles in Liverpool in the mid-1980s, and if Arthur Scargill and his allies in the NUM had made the call, tens of thousands could have been broken from the grip of Kinnock.

As it is we remain in a period characterised by the legacy of defeats, retreats and sporadic resistance.

But that is no excuse for delaying still further. The call for the SLP, the active fight for the SLP, the debate around its programme and constitution will demonstrate in practice whether it can summon sufficient forces from the working class and the youth to create a real party.

## Deserves

There are countless sects who label themselves “parties”, but in reality a party only deserves the name if it sinks roots deep into the working class. Every worker has to know it exists, what it stands for, how and where they can join it, what it has fought for in practice.

The road to a revolutionary socialist working class party in Britain is not easy. Revolutionary socialists will always be a minority in the class except in periods of mass struggle and revolutionary potential. But the present moment, when hundreds of thousands of trade unionists and Labour supporters are deeply concerned about the right wing rampage of Blair’s New Labour, Arthur Scargill’s initiative provides an opportunity to address them with the revolutionary socialist politics, practice and arguments that can really solve the crisis of leadership in the working class movement. ■

*What do you think? Workers Power is opening up the Debate page to contributions from our readers on this subject.*



# LETTERS

WORKERS POWER 195 DECEMBER 1995

## Independence for Quebec?

Dear Comrades,

Canada narrowly averted a political crisis on 30 October with the defeat of the Quebec referendum on sovereignty. An astonishing 94% of the five million eligible voters cast ballots: the "No" side received 49.7%, the "Yes" side 48.5%. But Quebec's status as a French province in an English-speaking continent remains unresolved and the issue will soon return to confront Canada's rulers with a problem they cannot solve.

The question of the survival or assimilation of its French-speaking people has defined Canadian politics ever since the British conquest of colonial New France in 1760. Subsequently, most of the French settlers of the Atlantic region were exiled and virtually all of the French-speaking communities west of Quebec were eventually assimilated by a combination of an influx of English-speaking immigrants and discriminatory laws and practices.

But the 65,000 defeated Francophone settlers in the part of the ex-colony that is now Quebec were allowed to continue their existence as a society dominated by the Roman Catholic Church. Their descendants resisted repeated assimilation attempts, despite their subjection to an English-speaking bourgeoisie centred in Montreal. Using the autonomy enjoyed by its government within the Canadian federal system, Quebec has developed into a national community with a language, culture and identity distinct from the rest of Canada. The Quebec nation remains overwhelmingly composed of the 80% of its population who are descendants of the original settlers of New France.

For the last 30 years, Quebec has sought its national rights either inside or outside Canada. The industrialisation of Quebec transformed the formerly rural and Catholic-dominated province, and created a substantial French-speaking capitalist class. The secular nationalism, which replaced Church leadership

in Quebec, upset the delicate balance within Canada's federal state.

The voting patterns of Quebec's four major "ethnic" groups diverged sharply. Francophones voted 60% for sovereignty, while the other three groups, who live almost exclusively around Montreal, voted 90-95% against. Also, the two largest aboriginal groups in the northern Quebec had separate referendums in which 95% voted in favour of remaining part of the Canadian state. These so-called "First Nation" peoples would have sought to retain the bulk of the province's territory, in the event of the "Yes" side having won the referendum.

The pro-sovereignty vote by French-speakers would have approached 70% and the referendum would have been successful if it were not for a vigorous campaign by big business, the Canadian government and the nine other provinces threatening Quebec with economic ruin and a complete break in trade and political relations in the event of a "Yes" vote.

In the last few weeks of the referendum campaign, as it became clear in the polls that the pro-independence forces might win, Canadian federal leaders whipped up panic among huge numbers of Canadians.

In the wake of the referendum, the Liberal Party government is trying to respond to some of Quebec's legitimate demands, but with little hope of success. The right wing opposition Reform Party and many provincial Premiers insist that all provinces receive "equal" constitutional status.

They oppose "special status" for Quebec in the same way they oppose "special rights" for homosexuals or visible minorities. Their opposition applies even to the watered down concept of "distinct society status" for Quebec, which the last Conservative-led federal government tried to entrench in order to stave off Quebec independence.

The next round of constitutional talks

is scheduled for the spring of 1997. The Quebec government, knowing that its demands cannot be met by the hapless and chauvinist Canadian leaders, has already signalled its intention to stage another referendum on sovereignty in anticipation of the failure of these talks.

Socialists in Canada must do everything they can to help Quebec achieve its sovereignty, on its own terms and with as little disruption as possible. It is clear from the results of the referendum that the people of Quebec want sovereignty. It was only the threat of economic destabilisation that prevented the "Yes" side from winning a large victory. And yet this threat itself illustrated national oppression.

And after decades of failed constitutional battles, it is only through the fight for sovereignty that the chauvinist lies about Quebec can be countered in the rest of Canada, most importantly in the labour movement.

The left and the labour movement have not done a credible job in combating anti-Quebec chauvinism. Canada's social democratic labour party, the New Democrats, once again disgraced the unions it represents by coming out strongly for the "No" side in the referendum. Given the blind chauvinism of the NDP leadership, it is no wonder that neither the NDP nor any other workers' party exists in Quebec. Instead, Quebec's unions, which were the most militant in North America in the 1960s and 70s, are tied to the bourgeois Parti Quebecois, which heads the provincial government.

In comradeship,  
Ian Kellogg, Toronto

### Workers Power replies:

*While we welcome Ian's contribution, we are far from convinced that socialists should have supported the "yes" side in the referendum. The relationship between self-determination and independence in Quebec will be explored in a future article.*

## Where did all the youth go?

Dear Comrades,

I was recently talking to a couple of people about youth radicalisation.

We agreed that at the moment youth only get involved in sporadic and short-lived movements. In the recent past many young people got stuck into the mass campaign against the Criminal Justice Bill/Act which targeted young people. All the demonstrations against the CJB/A were thousands strong with youth always forming the majority of demonstrators.

But why did the energy disappear after the Bill was passed?

There are a number of reasons. Firstly, the fight to try and stop the Bill was long and exhausting, and when it was introduced many of the repressive laws were not immediately used. They are just being saved up for when the government really needs them. Secondly, and more importantly, the campaign was badly led. The Socialist Workers Party soon took control of the Coalition Against the Criminal Justice Bill. Many "lifestylist" youth and anarchists left to form the Freedom Network, whilst the Coalition became weaker due to the SWP half-heartedly calling for events without consulting any other organisations in the Coalition.

When youth have only lived through years of workers' defeats under Thatcher and Major, have only seen a Labour Party travelling right fast, it is understandable that some youth become attracted to middle class pacifist campaigns such as anti-road building or oriented towards anarchist ideas. Even though these movements can bring youth into politics and encourage anti-establishment views, they also turn many youth against the mass working



Manchester 28 October, youth on the march against racism.

class movement.

So where will the next youth movement come from?

It looks unlikely that the Tories will bring about specific attacks against

youth in this pre-election period. They want to avoid large-scale youth mobilisations that might defeat them. It is possible that a youth radicalisation in another country, such as the present ones in France, could bring about something similar here. Another possibility is that a chain of small campaigns could join together and forge a more general youth movement. More likely is that the leftward moving young workers join in a big workers struggle, linking up other youth around it and creating a large and promising upsurge, for both youth and workers.

When a big youth movement does start we will have to get right into the middle of it and attempt to draw it towards the rest of the working class.

Adam, South London

- ✓ Agree?
- ✗ Disagree?
- ! Got something to say?

Write in to:  
Workers Power  
BCM 7750  
London WC1N 3XX  
or e-mail:  
paulmorriss@easynet.co.uk

## Where We Stand



### 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.



### The Trade Unions

must be transformed by 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.



### October 1917

The Russian revolution established a workers' state. But Stalin 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 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. Stalinism has consistently betrayed the working class. The Stalinist Communist Parties' 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.

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### Social oppression

is an integral feature of capitalism systematically oppressing people on the basis of 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.



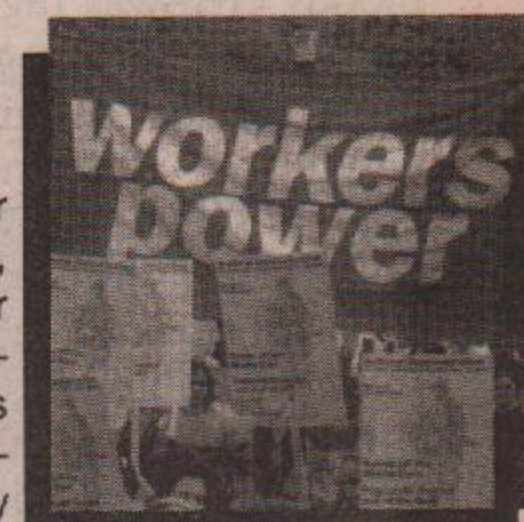
### Imperialism

is a world system which oppresses nations and prevents economic development in the vast majority of third world countries. 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. But against the politics of the bourgeois and petit-bourgeois nationalists, we fight for permanent revolution—working class leadership of the anti-imperialist struggle under the banner of socialism 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 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 International and on the Transitional Programme of the Fourth International. 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

For Internationalism, Socialism and Workers' Revolution

**INSIDE**

Socialists and  
New Labour—  
do we need a  
Socialist  
Labour Party?



No 195 DECEMBER 1995 ★ Price 50p

As election ploy brings race checks at work

# SMASH HOWARD'S RACIST LAW!

- Non co-operation with Howard's racist measures!
- Lobby Parliament 19 December

**ON 8 January 13,000 refugees face an immediate and total loss of benefit. Fleeing from torture and civil war they made their way to Britain. Lost in the bureaucratic world of the asylum procedure, they live a life of fear, uncertainty and poverty. Now they are to be condemned to starve.**

They are not allowed to work here and all access to the benefits' system is to be refused. How are they supposed to live? They are not. The Tories are determined to ship them back to the countries they came from. Countries like Algeria, where a bloody civil war rages; like Sri Lanka, where government forces are currently wiping out Tamil national liberation fighters; like Nigeria, which executed writer Ken Saro-Wiwa; like Bosnia, the scene of genocide.

It is a symptom of the sickness of the system that these

measures have been brought in to make the Tories popular!

With their opinion poll ratings at rock bottom, the Tories' only answer is divide-and-rule. They know that millions of people hate them and the misery they have created: mass unemployment, poverty and crime, collapsing education and social services.

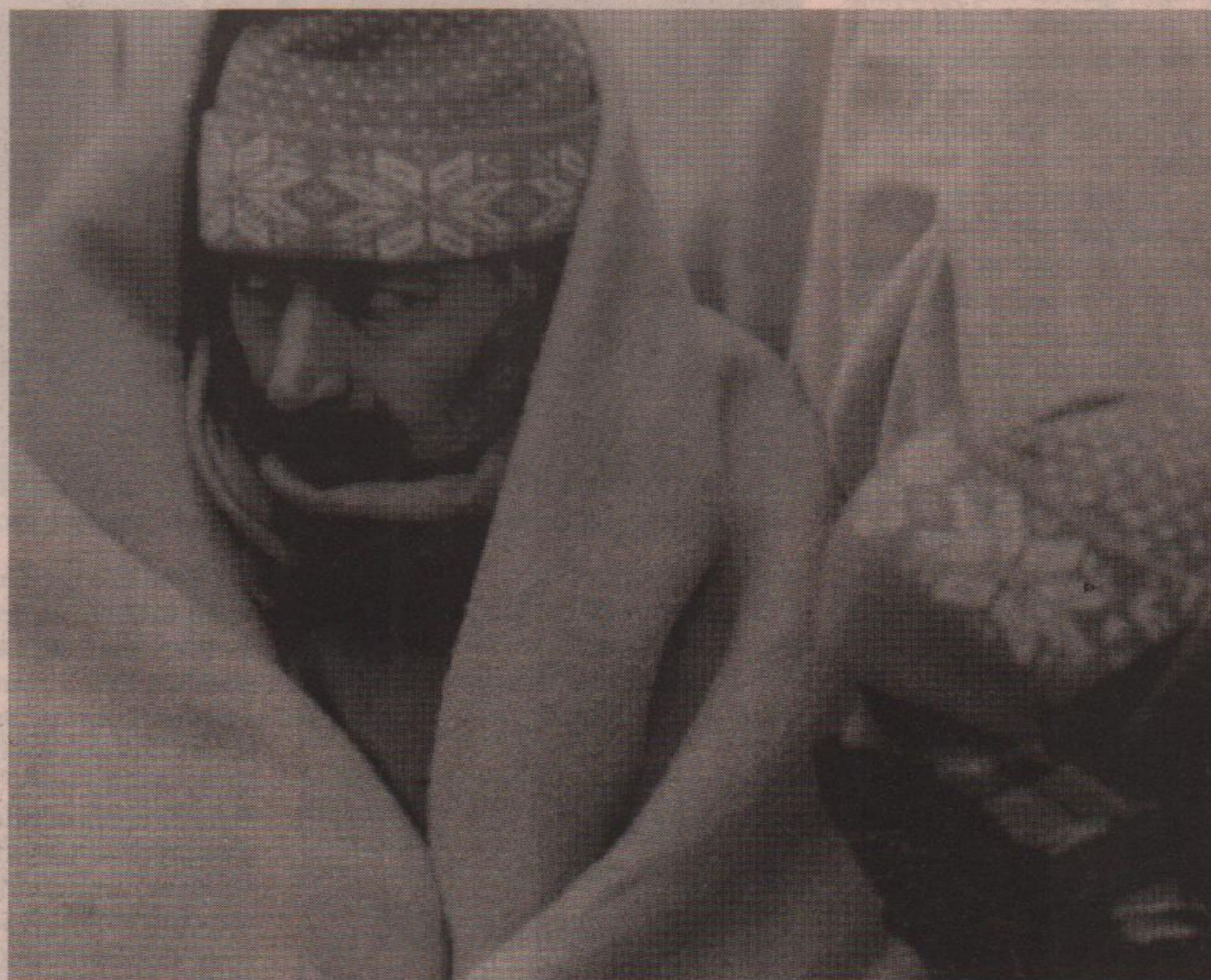
They want to turn that anger against a tiny and defenceless minority: the refugees and asylum seekers. They want to fan the flames of racism by placing all black

people under an internal system of immigration checks, carried out in schools, hospitals and council offices.

It is a desperate measure by a desperate government. And it can be stopped.

It is ordinary workers who will be asked to implement the racist internal controls. We can stop them by launching a mass campaign of non-cooperation. In every school, hospital, council and workplace we need meetings now to organise defiance. ■

● How to fight Howard's racist rampage: turn to page 2



**January 8th: 13,000 refugees face starvation**