

Workers power

Socialism, Internationalism, Revolution

British Section of the League for a Revolutionary Communist International

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Broken promises that spell

BETRAYAL

Class sizes soar NHS waiting lists up

NEW LABOUR has broken two of its five "credit card" election pledges. Instead of cutting NHS waiting lists by 100,000 as it promised, waiting lists have risen by 4.5% to 1.3 million. Instead of eliminating class sizes of 30 or more, 35% of six to seven year olds are now in overcrowded classrooms.

Health secretary Frank Dobson claims that £68 million of the extra £500 million for health in the last budget will be used to "unblock beds" of people who need care but not treatment. That will just reduce waiting lists at the expense of forcing families and social services do the caring. Dobson now says that the 100,000 reduction will be achieved by the next election.

Meanwhile Labour trotted out the lame old excuse for rising class sizes: the education spending cuts of the previous Tory government.

But this same government has pledged to stick within Tory public spending limits for the first two years in office and not to raise taxes in their first term of office. If the Tory spending limits have such terrible consequences for health and education why keep them?

The pitiful savings from cutting NHS red tape were never going to be enough to meet their

pledges. Big business, which has been invited into the health service through the Private Finance Initiative (PFI), is only interested in profits – not patients' health. The forthcoming Comprehensive Spending Review may announce new cash for health and education but only at the price of more privatisation and attacks on workers' jobs and conditions. So much for defending the NHS. So much for "Education, Education, Education".

Taxing the rich and big business is the only way to guarantee the health and education services we need. We need state-of-the-art hospitals with quick, effective treatment and no drug rationing. We need well maintained and fully staffed and resourced schools where kids can get lots of individual attention in small classes.

But taxing the rich to pay for all this is simply not on New Labour's agenda. It seems some pledges are more equal than others.

The trade union movement, with millions of members working to provide health and education services on minimal budgets and low pay should make its own pledge: strike action to force Labour to stop the cuts and privatisations that are ruining our children's education and forcing the sick to look after themselves. ■

Blair sticks to Tory spending plans



How Labour hides behind moral panics – page 3

University of East London occupation

Fighting against the cuts

Workers Power (WP): How did you get involved in the occupation?

John (J): I was directly affected by the cuts - one of my key lecturers is getting fired, my French tutor. I was there when she was given her "voluntary" redundancy. She's been here for years and is also an excellent tutor. They didn't publicise the cuts. It was only this way, by chance, that I found out about them. I heard about the occupation on Tuesday and have been here since.

WP: What was the reason for the cuts?

J: They're cutting many things - they're more interested in the Docklands site, this multi-million pound campus they're building. Why are they doing that? This is the great question.

Andre (A): But also there's no strategy for recruitment though it's a big university.

J: My theory is that Labour has introduced student loans and is taking opportunities off working class kids to study in universities.

A: Yeah, this university has a high proportion of non-EU students (about 30%) because they pay through the nose, about £6,500 per year. That's who they're after.

WP: How did the occupation start?

A: There was the emergency general meeting about the cuts.

J: That's right. Frank Gould the Vice Chancellor sat through the whole thing, smug-faced and lying through his teeth - he's a right politician. Students grilled

STUDENTS AND staff at the University of East London (UEL) in Barking, Essex have fought back against crippling cuts of £2.4 million. Faced with 80 redundancies and cuts, which include the axing of the whole of the Maths department, students have occupied two buildings.

A militant, mass picket on 21 May defied riot police intimidation and proceeded to occupy the finance and administration centre, the A-Block, under the noses of the cops.

Workers Power and the Revolution youth group have been involved in the struggle. We urge all our readers to send messages of support from student bodies and trade unions (Essex FBU and Ford Dagenham have already raised money for the students).

More importantly, students should spread the action. All colleges are facing cuts, tuition fees and the abolition of the grant. The Barking action must be the spark that lights a forest fire, if we are to defeat the cuts and win free education for all.

John, studying psycho-social studies and German, and Andre, a media student, have both been active in the Barking occupation from early on. WP talked to them about how the occupation of the A-block came about and what they want to do with it.

him and he didn't give any satisfactory replies. Most importantly, he refused to back down on reversing the cuts. So we kicked him out of the meeting and voted to take the building.

WP: How about the admin building?

J: It's the heart of the University and Gould's favourite - it's got his office with a shower in it! It was significantly more difficult to secure, it took three hours of struggling to barricade it, and get the security guards out. Police came round but couldn't get in.

Derek Fowler, the finance officer, actually struck a woman student coming out of the building. I saw it, and when she went out and challenged him, he was laughing about it. She said "This

man assaulted me". He just shrugged it off saying there wasn't a problem.

WP: Obviously no riot squad came round for him! What is the response of the students?

A: It's tricky - management closed the library on Friday - they said they were afraid we'd occupy it, though we had given a firm commitment not to, so that people could get on with their studying and we wouldn't get the blame for screwing up people's degrees. But we've been talking to students all day to explain who's really to blame, and they've actually been donating lots of money.

WP: What happens next Wednesday when the university has its court order



UEL Vice Chancellor Gould, fourth highest paid college boss; in favour of massive cuts - but not to his wages!

heard?

A: It's a difficult struggle, and we may have to retreat, but it'll take more than a few policemen with sledgehammers to open the A-block!

J: We've done this building like Castle Grayskull!

WP: How are you running the occupation?

J: We're trying not to damage stuff. We've knocked a few nails in some doors, and barricaded and padlocked any area we don't need, especially the computer area, to protect stuff we don't need. No one is allowed in pissed. Committees of people are doing work, like finance, media, liaison with other universities, etc.

A: We've got an education liaison desk outside the student union with staff and students, so third year students can get their lectures and tutorials sorted out.

WP: How about the lecturers and other staff?

A: They've been really supportive. Natfhe members put their jobs on the line and supported the occupation and our picket line. Along with our education, it's their jobs being cut. As one lecturer said in one of our meetings, any lecturer and staff involved will be victimised if we don't win, "It's either Derek Fowler or me."

Natfhe's come out in full support of the student union, and so essay deadlines, exam dates will be put back. Besides, lecturers and support staff have all been hammered by the university, so they have very short-term contracts, etc.

Cleaners have supported us, and another UEL campus, in Plaistow, the catering staff didn't come in on the picket day. Even the security staff consulted their union, the GMB.

WP: Have you got any support from other universities?

A: Long term, we need to look at our own university and what we're doing to get other students joining us in action, especially from the other campus, Stratford. And other universities need to start fighting. Barking should be an example to other universities. We began small, and in three days we've occupied the nerve centre of Barking. But taking buildings is easy! ■

Socialist Workers Party:

Where do they stand?

THE SOCIALIST WORKERS Party, Britain's biggest far left organisation, has broken its decades-long boycott of standing candidates in elections. It is set to stand in the forthcoming Scottish Assembly election and "other elections in the future" according to party leader Lindsey German.

According to *Socialist Worker* (23 May 1998):

"During the 1980s the SWP did not stand in elections. Workers' overriding feeling was that in elections they had to vote Labour to get rid of the Tories. But now Labour is in government and a significant number of people are dissatisfied with its performance. In addition we face a special situation in Scotland."

Explaining that the Scottish Assembly elections have created a new political ferment, in which the SNP is gaining from Labour by putting on a left face, *Socialist Worker* says:

"We should not abstain from the argument. We are in a position to put forward class politics and stand candidates on a class basis."

Workers Power believes there is nothing in principle wrong with revolutionaries standing for parliament or any other bourgeois elected body. But the reasons why revolutionaries stand for parliament should be clear. We do so to use the election and, if possible the parliament or council itself, as a platform for revolutionary propaganda. There is no parliamentary road to socialism, in Scotland or anywhere else.

The reformists do believe in the parliamentary road. The problem for the SWP is that they don't have a clear analysis of reformism, let alone a means by which to challenge it, especially at the polls where it is at its strongest.

The SWP has, for years, told its members that it is electoral work itself that drags left reformists like MEP Ken Coates, or SLP leader Arthur Scargill into compromises with the system. They have avoided and even opposed electoral work as a distraction from the "real struggle".

"Socialism from below", for many SWP members, has meant ritual calls to vote

Labour at election time combined with a studious abstention from any election work.

The new turn, therefore, is likely to disorientate SWP members, who will now be confronted point blank with the question of a party programme. The SWP is "against programmes". You don't need a blueprint for the struggle, you need the struggle itself, goes the argument.

As long as you can keep out of electoral tactics a programme can be represented as trying to impose an "unnatural" (and usually "too far advanced") blueprint on the spontaneous struggles in the workplace. But in elections, the first thing workers want to know is what you stand for. Platitudes about the socialist future will not suffice: workers want to know what you plan to do if elected.

Faced with this problem, the SWP will, we predict, produce a classic "maximum-minimum" programme of the kind Lenin and Trotsky used to attack from the reformists and pseudo-revolutionaries of yesteryear: some concrete basic demands for now, a damning critique of capitalism combined with a rosy picture of what international socialism could be like, and nothing to link the two.

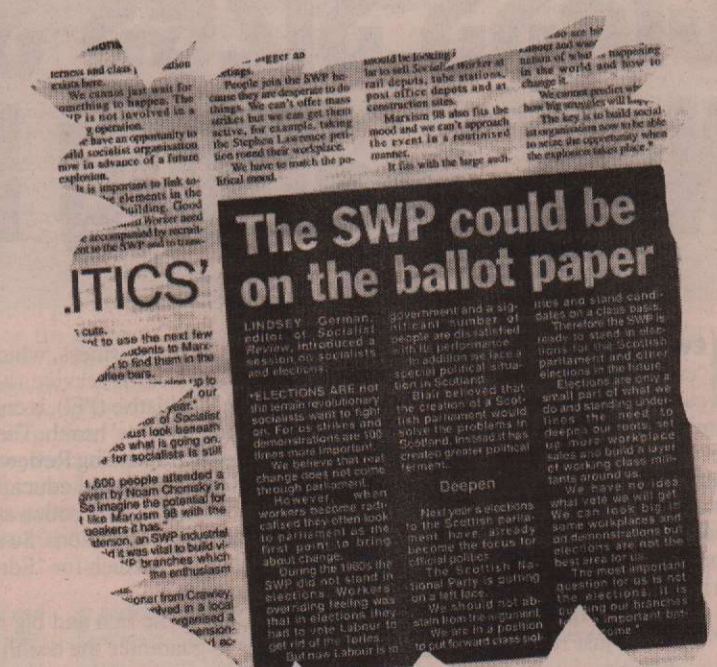
Indeed, this was exactly the type of programme the SWP advanced the last time they dabbled in elections in the late 1970s.

In addition, the central problem will remain: how to break workers from reformism?

Even if a large section of the organised vanguard of the working class is prepared to break electorally from Labour - and that is not the case at present - the problem remains what to do about the majority of workers' allegiance to Labour.

The united front tactic, in which revolutionaries call for a Labour vote and organise to put demands on Labour, remains the key to breaking workers from Labour under present conditions.

German's rationale for breaking from the 1980s orthodoxy that elections contaminate your politics is opportunist. It suggests that when and where the Labour vote is shaky the SWP



may not stand because the key task is still to get rid of (or keep out) the Tories. But a sizeable revolutionary party would not use the relative health of the reformists' vote as a criteria for standing. It would actually go out and challenge the reformists for leadership of the working class, at the polls as in other spheres of the class struggle.

Now that the SWP is committed to standing for the Scottish Parliament it will have to deal not only with Scottish Nationalism but also with the remnants of Scottish Militant Labour and the Scottish Socialist Alliance. Will it make an electoral pact with these already established centrist and left-reformist

forces or add its name to the growing list of fringe candidates? And will it transfer votes to Labour or tell workers not to vote Labour? And how will all this aid the building of a revolutionary party?

Most important of all will the SWP make clear, in the thousands of leaflets pushed through doors in the turn to election work, its commitment to revolution and the necessity of revolutionary overthrow of the capitalist state? Or will all that be buried, like much of the rest of the SWP's "orthodox" Marxism, in its theoretical journals and the fine print of "Where We Stand" columns? ■

New Labour: New moral panics

Whipping up the lynch mobs

BLAIR'S NEW Britain seems to be particularly prone to outbursts of emotion. From Diana's death, through paedophilia to Mary Bell, New Labour and their tabloid friends have orchestrated these outpourings for their own purposes.

Their chief purpose is to erode democratic rights, in the name of "family values", to strengthen the state's capacity to police the masses' daily lives. Labour is pursuing an authoritarian populist agenda to preserve the myth of New Britain and to exclude reason from public discussion on matters of morality, sexuality and state authority.

In the absence of any meaningful reforms, Labour must disguise the continuing decay with vacuous hype, sustained by appeals to emotion (in one case grief, in the other moral outrage). Mass grief and mass outrage are both convenient diversions from justified anger at the terrible betrayal of the masses' hopes that Blair is busily perpetrating.

The paedophile scares and the Mary Bell case have exposed the ugly side of supposedly "caring" New Britain. Riots in Yeovil and Bristol, whipped into a frenzy by the tabloids, took centre stage.

While Jack Straw may sit on his high horse and condemn the mobs at Yeovil and elsewhere, he is complicit in stirring them up. He is also complicit in the devastating effects resulting from this carnival of reaction.

Sydney Cooke is a repellent child murderer. But is the way to deal with him the publication of released paedophiles' names and addresses in the paper? When the *Manchester Evening News* named a paedophile a 67-year-old man was badly beaten and daubed with paint. He was a victim of mistaken identity. When a similar thing happened in the Midlands a child was burnt to death by vigilantes

This is how authoritarian populism manifests itself on the streets, and Labour are as responsible as the tabloids for fomenting it. For this reason socialists are duty-bound to resist the erosion of basic democratic rights that comes with the politics of irrationality. In the debate on paedophiles and Mary Bell, socialists must fight for the voice of reason to be heard.

Paedophilia, child abuse and the murder or torture of children are all different things. But you wouldn't know it from the tabloid press. In their bid to find targets of hate, Mary Bell, Sydney Cooke and a paedophile all become one. And the explanation for each becomes the lurking presence of "evil", or even the devil.

Rational

Against this hocus-pocus view of crime and evil, socialists and consistent democrats distinguish between categories of sexuality and categories of crime. We seek rational explanations and find solutions that can prevent abuse, torture or murder being the recurring nightmare it is for all too many children.

Paedophilia describes an adult who is sexually attracted to children. To condemn this as evil is to use medieval methods of analysis to understand the complex question of human sexuality in an age of enormous scientific advance,

including in the field of psychology.

The first task is to disentangle paedophilia from abuse. If we don't, then it becomes impossible to distinguish between consensual sexual activity involving a 14-year-old and an "adult" from the rape and murder of a toddler. It also, coincidentally, propels paedophiles towards abuse. As with all taboos, all involved are driven underground. The question cannot be discussed and dealt with rationally.

Abuse is based on two things. First, a lack of informed consent by the participants. Second, a recognition that forms of sexual activity, such as penetrative sex, between adults and pre-pubescent children are physically harmful to children. If a paedophile carries

from an early age.

Clearly, this approach needs to be backed up by protective legislation for children. It is amazing that in Britain – so morally indignant about child abuse – children's evidence has only recently been made admissible in courts. But this goes nowhere near far enough. In cases of abuse, it is vital that children are able to bring cases against the abusers and this can only be meaningful if children's tribunals are established.

Ignorance

If an abuser's ability to abuse relies on the deliberately maintained ignorance of children about sexuality, then the idea that the fate of their cases will be determined by geriatric judges,

any choice. The relations of the family or institution mean they have no rights.

An age of consent law categorically denies even the possibility of consenting sexual activity between children and adults. While such activity is not the norm in modern capitalist society, historically it has regularly featured in social life – usually to mark the progression towards puberty – without harming the children involved.

Under different conditions to those of today's class based society, in which the oppression of children via the family is deemed necessary, which generally transforms sexual relations between adults and children into abusive relationships, radically different patterns of sexual relations may emerge.

capitalist penal policies – will be rehabilitation and cure, and our justice system will be based on people's tribunals far closer to the scene and circumstances of the crime than the Old Bailey's wig-heads.

Indeed, the rehabilitation of Mary Bell, under the relatively progressive penal policies of the 1960s, shows the potential benefits of this approach. Of course, this aspect of the Mary Bell case was lost in the hysteria. And that goes to prove that the attitudes of New Labour to social issues such as crime, are marked by the moral reaction that began with Thatcher.

In the meantime, however, while we recognise that Sydney Cooke's actions were despicable, we locate the cause for this in the same conditions that produce abuse. They need to be understood if the likes of Cooke are to be stopped from raping and murdering other children.

There are other Sydney Cooke who must be stopped by society tackling the general conditions of repressed sexuality, family oppression and abuse that create such people. Meanwhile, however, Labour can exploit the lynch mob atmosphere to establish their undemocratic register of sex offenders.

This means that prisoners never "serve their time" but remain forever branded. It is also indiscriminate. Every sexual offence puts you on the register. Given the continued persecution of gays, this particular measure will ensure that the state increases its intrusion into people's private lives while actually doing nothing to prevent the murder of children.

Blair and Straw are once again demonstrating their pursuit of an anti-democratic agenda that can be used to divert attention from the material bankruptcy of their New Britain. Their overall policies on children's "rights" make this clear.

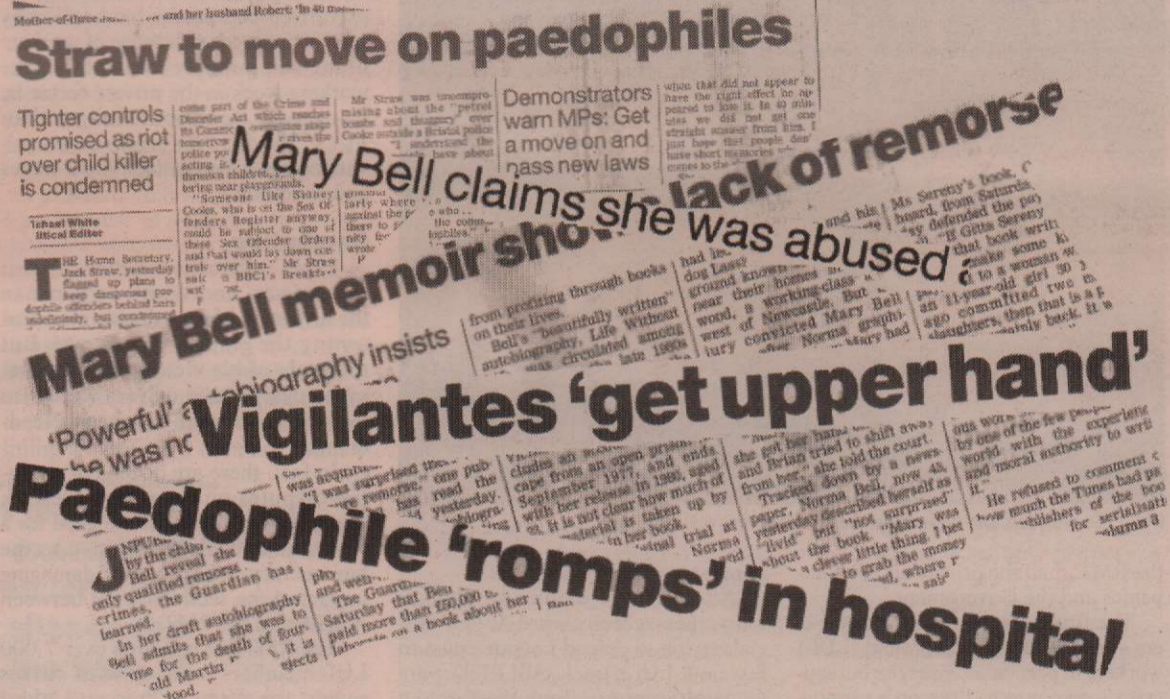
Their "concern" for children is manifest in the repressive measures they propose – curfews, driving children back into potentially abusive family homes, arresting truants rather than tackling underfunded schools, slashing lone parents' benefits and failing miserably to provide quality childcare. In short, Labour is increasing rather than relieving the terrible pressures within families.

Furore

With Mary Bell, they can utilise the furore to enact stricter censorship laws, shoring up the repressive attitude to sexuality that leads to the banning of books, films and plays, and that also leads to ignorance and unhappiness.

The recent moral panics have exposed the Blairites' reactionary social agenda. It is more subtle than John Major's ill fated "family values" campaign, but it pursues the same ends – a curfew on rational thought that can equip people to cut through the hypocrisy, prejudice and ignorance that gives rise to abuse and murder.

Sex education, protective legislation, children's tribunals and people's courts are the alternative to this. They are the best guarantees, not only of real justice but of exercising that justice within the context of a society in which social and economic freedom can create the conditions for sexual freedom – a socialist society. ■



TAMESIDE CARE GROUP STRIKE

Stop the scabs at source

AFTER TWO months of all-out indefinite action, the Tameside Care Group (TCG) strike has reached a critical stage.

In spite of the strikers' continued will to win, all of the care homes remain open, staffed by agency-supplied scabs and a handful of TCG full-time employees.

In January, TCG announced new contracts imposing pay cuts of between £0.85 and £2.05 per hour, along with cuts in sickness and maternity benefits. In response, the workers voted overwhelmingly for strike action against the new contracts.

By the time of management's 1 May deadline for signing the new contracts, the strikers had already been out for four weeks. The TCG bosses – clearly stunned by the workers' response – extended the deadline until 27 May but so far they have rejected overtures

from local and regional Unison officials to reach a negotiated settlement.

While the strike has remained solid, it has not escalated either. This is partly down to the hopelessly legalistic strategy of the Tameside Unison branch secretary, Noel Pine, a Socialist Party supporter.

The strikers generally have a good deal of confidence in Noel Pine's leadership because of his previous track record.

As a newly-elected branch secretary he ensured that an official ballot was called in the first place, a notable change from the previous right-wing officers. Noel Pine has undertaken much of the vital day-to-day administration of the dispute.

But to win, the current action needs to be built on and extended. So far, no branch meetings have been called to

fight for solidarity action among other Tameside Unison members who do TCG-related work, processing invoices, assessing clients and so on.

But any solidarity action would be illegal under the terms of the anti-union laws and so will not be supported by the union. Noel Pine and the rest of the branch leadership have repeatedly praised the police for their "restraint" (!) in the strike and thanked them for their work – hardly ideal preparation when it will be necessary to physically stop the police escorting the scabs to work.

Noel Pine has failed to delegate real responsibility over the extension and development of the strike action to the elected strike committee. When strike supporters around *Workers Power* and *Revolution*, occupied Apex Nursing and Care Services, a scab-herding agency, the Apex boss was quite clearly rattled.

Noel Pine, however, had instructed strikers not to attend or support the protest since such actions supposedly opened them up to victimisation.

This was a poor excuse at a time when strikers face a choice between swingeing pay cuts and the sack anyway.

But even worse has been Noel Pine's terrible weakness in organising the mass pickets. In an attempt to increase the profile of the strike and to unite the strikers around mass action, the strike committee organised a series of evening mass pickets, which rotated between the homes and which started to exert real pressure on both the scabs and their police escorts.

Incredibly, Noel Pine called off these evening pickets, arguing that to maintain the element of surprise the pickets should be moved to the afternoon. As a result they have been far smaller, less

militant, and the strike has been robbed of much of its impetus.

Even now the strike can still be won and won quickly. The key to victory is to cut off the supply of scabs. The evening pickets need to be reinstated immediately, to act as a focus for the strikers themselves and for solidarity from the left and other trade unionists. Action against the scab agencies should be stepped up.

Most importantly, the strike committee needs to take complete control over the strike and draw up a strategy to stop the scabs getting in, which means a recognition of the real role of the police in attempting to break the dispute. ■

Donations urgently needed, please send to: Tameside, 29 Booth Street, Ashton-under-Lyme, OL6 7IB. To invite a speaker phone 0161 308 2452.

ASLEF ELECTION

Labour's man hits the buffers

THE SOCIALIST Labour Party (SLP) has won its first major trade union election. In the ASLEF General Secretary election, SLP member Dave Rix beat the incumbent Lew Adams by 4,558 votes to 3,357 on a 55% turnout. At 35, Rix is due to become the youngest union leader in Britain.

As we go to press, the Labour-loyal ASLEF executive are going to court to get the election result annulled on the grounds that Dave took time off work to run his campaign. With typical dishonesty Lew Adams claimed:

"Obviously, he had a lot of resources behind him for this purpose. I am sad that, as a consequence, our union will not have the same relationship with the Labour government."

Labour tried to dismiss it as "a bizarre result in a small union".

To imply Rix won because of "a lot of resources" is plainly ludicrous. He is a branch secretary, based in Leeds – not even a full-time official. Rix's election victory is a conscious rejection of Adams' open collaboration with the bosses and failure to defend his members' basic interests.

Perhaps the most telling incident of Adams' reign was the formation of a joint training company for drivers with Virgin's Richard Branson – one of the new rail barons. As one ASLEF member said: "This deal made me angry. I joined a trade union, not a business."

Adams and his clique have spent more time fighting rival rail union,



Dave Rix won fair and square because of Adams' rotten record.

the RMT, than the privatised rail companies and the Government.

The final straw for most railworkers – and London Underground (LUL) workers in particular – was the bureaucracy's response to Prescott's proposals for LUL.

Mercy

Prescott will hive off LUL's infrastructure, engineering and rolling stock maintenance for at least 15 years. Some 5,000 workers will find themselves at the mercy of a private employer – most probably Railtrack which already rakes in £1 million a day from the bargain

basement sale of British Rail.

After years of waiting for Labour, railworkers recently heard ASLEF officials trying to defend Labour's plan to lease out LUL's track. ASLEF Deputy General Secretary, Tony West, told a shocked rally of 500 LUL workers on 30 April: "We need to see more evidence about Prescott's 'Third Way' plans for the underground before we can comment."

West claimed that ASLEF would need to examine the details of workers' pay and conditions before they could say whether the proposals were in their interests or not.

Yet pay rates for railworkers in the privatised companies have fallen by 19% compared with those of workers in the still publicly owned LUL; the working week in the private sector is, on average, four hours longer than LUL's. The drive for profits forces private companies to attack jobs, wages and conditions.

Combative

Many railworkers believe that it was Adams' and West's response to the hiving off of the tube facilities that swung the election Rix's way. But the scale of his victory implies that many overground drivers were also looking for a more combative leadership.

In fact, there are dozens of potential disputes on the rail at present. Together they highlight the need for a real rank and file alternative to the bureaucracy and expose the damaging impact of the sectional split between ASLEF and the RMT.

The RMT are balloting over 7,000 LUL members for a series of strikes against the effects of Prescott's "third way" on the tube, as well as up to 15,000 engineering and maintenance workers across several private companies. ASLEF are balloting members on Thameslink and South West Trains (SWT).

The SWT management recently conceded to the RMT over a threat to guards' jobs after the union won a 5 to 1 majority for strike action. Now

ASLEF are balloting 750 members over health and safety issues. But why not hold a single ballot and unified action across the whole workforce?

In France at the end of 1995, Metro and SNCF railworkers brought two million supporters onto the streets and won control over their pension and welfare fund by going on national, indefinite strike – together.

Railworkers – be they drivers, guards, engineers or station staff – are being hit from all directions. What we need is a united response, not a series of narrowly defined sectional disputes. Everyone knows that the attacks on jobs, conditions, health and safety and wages are directly connected to privatisation.

Rank and file railworkers must campaign for a national strike across all unions and all companies, overground and underground, for a fully nationalised rail network, run under workers' control.

Militants across the unions need to organise to stop their unions dragging left-wingers through the bosses' courts and to start co-ordinating the strikes. The clear and legitimate victory won by Dave Rix shows that railworkers have lost patience with Labour.

Rix must be defended against any witch-hunt, but to make his election the start of a real fightback we need an independent rank and file movement that can hold all officials to account and force them to start organising the strike action we need to win. ■

Coventry Contract Services

Privatisation equals victimisation

FOLLOWING THE sacking of five workers for allegedly taking "illegal tea breaks", more than 400 workers at two Coventry City council depots, Foleshill (building services) and Whitley (street lighting, sewerage, road and gardens) walked out and formed pickets, which other council workers refused to cross.

The workers were sacked after supervisors spied on them during tea breaks. They were charged with gross misconduct for the "theft of company time" and falsifying time-sheets. Another six workers were suspended but kept their jobs.

All the victimised workers are near-

ing retirement, have 30 years service and impressive work records. The sackings have already taken their toll on these men. Two of the five were reinstated after appeal, but one could not return to work due to a nervous breakdown and was admitted to hospital.

The workers are all employed by Coventry Contract Services (CCS), a company run on behalf of Coventry Council and currently under investigation for fraud, mismanagement and corruption by the police.

It has made a loss of around £6 million over the last two years. The sacked workers have been used as scapegoats to conceal management's

own incompetence.

In the name of "value for money" management have already imposed increases in the workload of up to 400% and want further "savings" to keep their sinking ship afloat. This is yet another example of how the so-called improvement of "service provision" with the privatisation of council services, can only be achieved through attacking the workers.

Unfortunately, the local union officials from UCATT, the TGWU and the AEEU do not share their members' anger. Unable to stop the walkout, they were forced to negotiate with their own members to hold a "legal" ballot with

only one question, "to strike or not to strike"!

The ballots for action in support of their fight for reinstatement took place in the last week of May, with any further action to begin this month. The workers cannot rely on the officials to deliver their promises for action. The delays caused by the process of the strike ballot have already taken the initiative away from the workers.

Any further delay must be met by an immediate, indefinite walk-out until all the workers have won their jobs back. Any official action must be extended until the workers' demands are won

in full. They must accept no deal which falls short of unconditional reinstatement.

It is vital to win this fight not only for the sacked workers but to turn back the management offensive and defend elementary trade union rights at CCS. It would also be a first step in taking the unions back from officials who appear incapable of defending their members' basic rights. ■

We urge all our readers to support the unconditional reinstatement of the workers. Send your message of support to: Nigel Salt, Union Office, 99, Foleshill Road, Coventry

UNISON CONFERENCE: Stop the retreat

Fight the witch-hunts

UNION DEMOCRACY is set to be the major battleground for the left at this month's Unison national conference.

After the bureaucracy started a witch-hunt against left activists and branches and against the Campaign for a Fighting Democratic Unison (CFDU) and the Socialist Workers Party (SWP) late last year, militants now face a sharp question: will a battle at conference breathe new life into the democracy struggle or are the main forces on the left just going through the motions?

Last year in Brighton, the queue of speakers at fringe meetings showed that more and more local branches and activists were under the attack by the bureaucracy: the victimisation of Faith Ryan and Tracey Twist in Birmingham; the effective closure of the Leeds local government branch; the long-running case of the Liverpool Four.

By the autumn it was clear that the left in Unison was facing a national offensive. An incredible red-baiting article appeared in the *Sunday Times* (see WP 217), accusing the left in Nottingham of setting up bogus fascist organisations in order to gain credibility for anti-racist work and so more branch money! The piece targeted the SWP and CFDU and announced an internal investigation.

Bullying

At the same time the Unison leadership were busy bullying branches into withdrawing support for the lobby of the Labour Party conference, called by the UCLH branch, partly because it originated from the SWP and partly because of their friendly relations with Blair.

Bickerstaffe had also written to branches warning about "illegal" contributions to the *Socialist Worker* Appeal, singling out Westminster and Sheffield for attack. A wider investigation by Yorkshire and Humberside Region started into Sheffield Metropolitan

branch's supposed crimes – centring on involvement in unofficial strike action and allegations of racism (refuted by

members). Other branches such as Newham and Lewisham were also subject to investigations, freezing of accounts etc.

On 10 December the NEC voted 2 to 1 in favour of accepting the findings of a report compiled by Brian Langstaff QC at a cost of £50,000. This effectively outlawed the CFDU or "any one group which seeks to change the policy of the union to accord with the wishes of that group". It also threatened disciplinary action against any branch refusing to comply with the ruling, stating that all retrospective affiliation fees or donations should be paid back. So while the union's leadership can use union funds to promote and argue for changes in policy, lay members organised via branches or otherwise cannot.

This year, Glenn Kelly, national secretary of the CFDU, was under attack from his bosses at Bromley Council because "they had received information that he was... using his Unison facilities to promote it" and that the CFDU was an "unlawful" organisation as far as Unison was concerned. A local and national campaign forced Bromley Council to back down.

In late March one of the Liverpool Four was expelled and two others

severely disciplined. The bureaucracy sought to dissuade branches from sponsoring the 21 March democracy conference, held in Newcastle, in response to the witch-hunt.

The witch-hunt is just the most extreme example of how far the bureaucracy will go in order to silence the left and break the back of militant resistance. With New Labour in power, reform of the welfare state on the agenda, no let-up on Tory spending limits and continuing privatisation via PFI and Best Value, Unison's 1.5 million members need to be kept in check to minimise resistance. Blair and Bickerstaffe know and fear our potential power.

Rodney Bickerstaffe's strength (and that of the rest of the bureaucracy) lies in their ability to keep the membership on board through softening the blows from cuts, attacks on conditions etc. and to deliver a certain amount too – so he blows rhetorical hot air at Blair over the minimum wage and union recognition.

Bickerstaffe appears substantially to the left of New Labour in order to prevent a really militant fight on these issues. Bickerstaffe and his leadership allies want to show Blair that they can deliver the Unison membership, if the government delivers the deals the union leaders want. Most particularly on union recognition, which the bureaucracy needs to halt the decline in union membership – and protect head office finances, their generous salaries and benefit packages.

The central bureaucracy wants to get its hands on branch finances – not least because of a fall in membership due to a mixture of privatisation, growing casualisation and demoralisation after years of cuts. Historically, local Unison branches have enjoyed considerable autonomy over their funds, giving the national bureaucracy another financial imperative for the witch-hunt. If bureaucratic streamlining is necessary, then left branch-

es must be brought into line first. The reality is that the witch-hunt has already succeeded thanks to the left's own capitulation before it. The

17 motions and an equal number of amendments about union democracy on the conference agenda are, of course, important but what use is a victory on paper unless the left is prepared to stand up to the bureaucracy when intimidated?

Last December's "Defend Sheffield Branch" rally and the March democracy conference in Newcastle both reflected the weaknesses of the left's response to the witch-hunt – neither of them was delegate-based and neither of them produced a strategy for a co-ordinated fightback. At Newcastle the fake consensus on the way forward has led to absolutely nothing in terms of unified action – in the idle hope that large numbers of bums on seats at the protest rallies were all that was needed to halt the witch-hunt.

Positions

Members of both the SWP and the Socialist Party hold important positions in several key branches but their response has been to keep their heads down. In Sheffield, since the rally in December, elections have seen the loss of branch officer posts by the SWP. The branch has been very quiet despite ongoing attacks from the Labour coun-

BY A UNISON DELEGATE

cil including a two-week delay in the workforce's pay day.

While the CFDU has been active in fundraising for the Tameside strikers, the Socialist Party supporter who is their branch secretary has not even mentioned the CFDU to the strikers. A campaign for democracy in the union could still be built as an integral part of local disputes, linking the inevitable fight against the bureaucracy when trying to take action with the campaign against PFI, Best Value and public sector cuts.

Instead, the CFDU has gone to ground – there hasn't been a National Steering Committee meeting for two and a half months and all the regional contacts are now reached via their home addresses, not their branches. The SWP has accepted the bureaucracy's hypocritical demand (given that Unison funds the *Morning Star*) that it stops seeking funds for the *Socialist Worker* Fighting Fund, Paper Appeal, Marxism or any other SWP

initiative and decided to try getting members elected onto the NEC instead.

The SWP has long criticised Socialist Party activists in Unison for an obsession with electoralism, now it seems they are taking a similar route with members battling for seats at all levels of the union – regional councils, service group executives etc. This is the same organisation that refused to contest shop stewards' posts in the mid-1980s for fear of members being "tainted" by holding union office.

Leadership

Of course, revolutionaries should take positions in the leadership structures of unions as a tactic in the process of advancing the struggle of workers, but not as an end in itself. They should be there to fight, not to protect their positions. There is no point having left activists on the NEC unless they are at the forefront of the battle to establish real lay member control, to smash the Unison bureaucracy and thoroughly democratise the union.

Branches where the left is strong

have failed to actively fight the witch-hunt among the membership. Their campaign has been limited to the lay bureaucracy. The membership are barely aware of the issue, let alone its importance. Such a fight might bring casualties. Left lay officers could lose their positions but there is no point being a leader if there is no one to lead. Instead of pretending nothing has happened militants must carry the fight out to the members.

The motions at conference are nevertheless important. Some on the left, such as the SWP, seem to have already accepted defeat in the fight to defend branch autonomy, branch donations and the right to affiliate to organised fractions. But there must be no capitulation to the union leadership.

Winning the membership to revolutionary positions on union democracy, smashing the bureaucracy and ultimately, the need for workers' control and socialist revolution will be achieved by consistency and honesty, not by wholesale retreat in the face of the bureaucracy's attacks. ■

Pall Mall admits unfair dismissals

Justice for the Hillingdon strikers

THE COURAGE and tenacity of the Hillingdon Hospital strikers has finally been rewarded. On 18–20 May an Industrial Tribunal in central London re-heard their case. The tribunal began with their employer, Pall Mall, admitting that it had "unfairly dismissed" most of the strikers.

It is now more than 30 months since the 53 Unison members, almost all Asian women, went on strike against the private cleaning contractor, Pall Mall, in response to a 20% cut in their already low pay.

The tribunal has yet to announce its ruling, but by securing the admission by Pall Mall of unfair dismissal the women have already won a key sym-

bolic victory. The tribunal cannot compel a boss to re-employ but will have to either recommend reinstatement or re-engagement in other jobs on similar terms and conditions. Alternatively, it may order compensation of up to £12,000 for each sacked striker.

An earlier tribunal in February 1997 had found against the strikers, shortly after Unison's bureaucracy had withdrawn official support and tried to impose a shoddy compensation deal, amounting to an average payment of £5,000.

Whatever the tribunal's recommendation, recent events have decisively exposed the Unison officials' argument, that they had obtained the

best possible settlement, as a disgusting and blatant lie. At last year's annual conference the platform used this lie to turn the vote against the Hillingdon women.

The strikers' victory – albeit at enormous cost to themselves – adds to the indictment of a Unison leadership which had stripped them of most of their membership rights, physically denied them access to union platforms and called the cops to stop them entering Unison headquarters. The victory is also a testament to the bravery of the women who continued their fight against the most terrible odds and finally achieved some justice for themselves. ■



Hillingdon strikers vindicated – but no thanks to the Unison leadership

1968: Prague Spring

The revolution betrayed

CZECHOSLOVAKIA IS now a country divided into two nation states, but 30 years ago it was at the heart of the so-called Eastern Bloc, where, after the Second World War, capitalism had been bureaucratically overturned. The Stalinists had seized power from the Czech working class and ruled with bureaucratic terror.

Across the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe the dead weight of bureaucratic planning was failing to deliver the economic goods. The Soviet Communist Party was considering ways of revitalising the economy. Some economists, such as Professor Lieberman in the Ukraine, were advocating a restriction of the power of Gosplan (the planning ministry), limiting its influence to heavy industry and the military, allowing elements of the market within the consumer goods sector of the economy. Such radical ideas were supported at the time by the Soviet leadership under Khrushchev.

The Soviets were keen to encourage Eastern Europe's sluggish economies to follow suit. The Czech economy was fairly buoyant until the early 1960s, but when it began to slow down the supporters of economic reforms moved quickly. As early as 1965 the Czech CP was considering reforms proposed by leading member, Ota Sik. These became official policy in 1967. But Sik explicitly linked the economic reforms with political liberalisation. This politicisation was encouraged by other factors within the Czechoslovak situation.

A very real national question existed within Czechoslovakia. The country, barely 50 years old, was made up of two distinct nationalities, and the national question found expression within the Czech CP itself. The vast majority of party members and leaders were Czech. Among the Slovak communists and intelligentsia, Slovak nationalist ideology was growing. Some saw political liberalisation as a means of challenging Czech dominance.

The Czech CP leader Novotny attempted a crackdown in early 1967. The first signs of resistance began with a vote at the Writers' Union Congress censuring the government. Then Novotny was challenged and replaced as party leader by a Slovak, Alexander Dubcek.

But from the beginning, this new reformist leadership was uncertain how far to go. Despite one of their first acts being to suspend censorship, they attempted to cover up the struggle within the party to get rid of Novotny.

Nervous

They were right to be nervous. The limited steps towards greater democracy were being eagerly taken up in both the party and the country as a whole.

The democratic demands increased. New political formations, alternatives to the CP, suddenly arose. Previously, this would have been unthinkable. In March, for instance, the K-231 group emerged, calling for the political rehabilitation of 128,000 victims of Stalin. Attempting to regain the initiative, the party leadership were forced to respond. In April 1968 Dubcek announced "the Czechoslovak road to socialism". The CP leadership agreed an Action Programme which committed the party to "socialism with a human face".

Whilst they may have favoured limited economic change, for the Kremlin leadership, the Action Programme was a step way too far. Brezhnev called it: "A bad programme opening up the possibility for the restoration of capitalism in Czechoslovakia."

Dubcek was summoned to Moscow. While Dubcek got a warning, the Czech CP agreed to bring forward the party Congress to September.

The momentum for political change accelerated further. In June Leonid Vaculik, a Writers' Union activist, issued an appeal for greater democracy. The

1968 - a year of great political change. It was a year of hope and of opportunities. It radicalised a generation of youth across the globe, revitalising the far left and shaking the confidence of the world bourgeoisie and the Stalinist rulers in the USSR and Eastern Europe. But the great opportunities were ultimately squandered by reformist leaders. The year was marked by betrayal as well as hope. One of the greatest betrayals occurred in Czechoslovakia. **Kate Foster** reviews the lessons of the popular uprising which became known as the "Prague spring".



Workers and students take action against Dubcek's sell out

"Two Thousand Words" appeal was carried in all the major newspapers. It warned against relying on the party to carry out reform, advocated setting up committees to monitor the party and warned that strikes might be necessary to ensure the party's new leaders stuck to their promises.

At a meeting which the Czechs did not attend, the Soviet bureaucrats and their Warsaw Pact allies demanded a halt to the reforms.

In mid-August draft statutes were published for discussion at the September congress. It was shocking enough that delegates were to be allowed to debate these in advance, but even more astonishing was the fact that they proposed limiting the CP's powers.

The Moscow leadership had seen enough and had probably been planning military intervention since February. It started on the night of 20/21 August. Within a week there were half a million troops and 6,000 tanks. They met no

organised resistance. The Czech army high command tacitly supported the invasion and troops were ordered to remain in their barracks.

In terms of its military objective the invasion was a total success, politically it was a disaster. The Czech people responded with passive resistance and defiance. While the invaders could wield military power, they were unable to run the country. Brezhnev had ensured that there were elements within the Czech CP who would support the invasion. But they turned out to be unprepared and without any mass support. Indeed, supply lines were so poor, after a week the invaders were barely able to feed themselves.

Support

Their failure to control the media exemplified their lack of planning. The conservatives had ensured that they would get support from some of the top brass at television and radio stations

but they were of little use to the invaders. Instructions to shut down all the country's radio transmitters were simply ignored.

Troops seized the central radio station but failed to realise that Czechs were still broadcasting on the third floor. Throughout 21 August technicians prevented the invasion forces setting up communication links with Moscow. When Soviet troops finally managed to occupy the radio and TV stations, the technical staff had already started underground broadcasts.

On 21 August Dubcek was able to broadcast a message condemning the invasion. Later that day he and several other leaders were removed to Moscow.

Again this backfired on the Soviets. If anything, Dubcek would have served to restrain the rising tide of anger. A secret congress, held in a working class area of Prague on 22 August, began organising a campaign of resistance. This involved removing street signs, withholding supplies and continual disruption of the invading forces.

The Czech TUC, the five and a half-million strong RTUM, called a one-hour general strike. It also instructed its branches to set up committees in order to keep supplies running and organise production. Further strikes were called, well-supported but brief. Tragically, the Czech workers missed the opportunity to seize control with an all-out strike, to use strike committees to establish soviet-style run the country and to challenge the power of the local CP and the invaders.

The demands for greater democracy continued. Historian Kieran Williams sums up the impact of the resistance: "Mass disobedience, however, did create a powerful feeling of total inclusion in political life: each citizen had the precious opportunity to play a part, no matter how small, in the fate of the country."

The Soviet leadership realised they had made a mistake and came up with a deal. Dubcek would be allowed to return and remain in charge, provided he could get the situation under control with the troops remaining. Dubcek's task was "normalisation" - meaning the re-establishment of the old Stalinist bureaucratic rule.

Dubcek agreed and returned to Prague on 27 August. His address to the country called for restraint. His message was: return to normal, i.e. bureaucratic control, and then perhaps the invaders would go away. At first, this was not kindly received. Some 40,000 workers at the Skoda Plzen plants demanded a referendum. But they did not threaten action. Dubcek's popularity was high. His sudden return and insistence that they could live with the invasion certainly provoked confusion, but finally paved the way for concessions.

The reintroduction of censorship was one of his first acts, done with the agreement of the Union of Journalists who were told it would be a temporary measure.

But in September parliament set up the Office for Press and Information. The censors were back. At the same time they voted to ban "anti-socialist" organisations and passed legislation allowing the forcible dispersal of demonstrations.

Resistance came with mass demonstrations, student activity and most importantly growing links between militant students and workers.

On the 50th anniversary of Czechoslovakia's birth, police attacked a demonstration in Prague. On the anniversary of the Russian Revolution demonstrators again took to the streets, building barricades. One hundred and sixty workers and students, some as young as 15, were arrested.

Throughout November students and workers organised strikes, occupations

and demonstrations. They began on 15 November with the occupation of the University of Olomouc. The following day they took the Agricultural College in Prague, the next day the occupations had spread to colleges and universities across the whole country.

Factories passed resolutions of support for the occupations and once again demonstration strikes, often very brief, were called. One of the student leaders at the time describes the significance of the student/worker alliance:

"In many cases students helped to arrange meeting of workers' deputies from various factories. On the grassroots level there was emerging an informal, spontaneous network of conscious workers, a network which could circumvent the trade union bureaucracy and exerted pressure on the latter."

But both the students' and the workers' movements were fundamentally flawed. They lacked a revolutionary leadership. Many began to argue against strikes and occupations, believing that it would be possible to gain greater democracy through negotiations with the Stalinists.

Manifesto

The student leaders issued a 10-point manifesto. While this document called for greater freedom to organise, to travel and for an end to censorship, it did not fundamentally challenge the bureaucratic state. Indeed, the authors make clear that they wanted reform, not a revolution. This limitation of the struggle was mirrored in the trade unions.

The retreat was spearheaded by the intellectuals, who rapidly fell in behind the party line.

The last sparks of anger blazed after the Czech ice hockey team beat the Soviet side in March 1969. Across the country people took to the streets and nine Soviet garrisons were attacked. Aeroflot's Prague offices were destroyed. But this was a last gasp of frustration rather than the birth of a new revolutionary upsurge.

The "outrage" following the hockey match gave the bureaucracy a pretext for a further crackdown and the opportunity to replace Dubcek with the hard-line Slovak leader, Husak.

The Czechoslovak experience of 1968 - a joyous spring, followed by the summer invasion and bitter autumn - had profound repercussions within Stalinism. Those who had called for limited economic reforms lost influence and Brezhnev became the clear leader of the Soviet party. The Brezhnev Doctrine on foreign policy reaffirmed the Soviet Union's right to intervene in its satellites' domestic affairs. But the hardliners' triumph triggered a reaction within the Western CPs.

Unlike the invasion of Hungary in 1956, which was greeted by a combination of silence and large-scale resignations, the 1968 invasion was condemned by many and bolstered those who were developing the ideas of "Eurocommunism".

The only reform of "normalisation" was limited federalisation, designed to buy off the Slovaks. While Dubcek was removed in April 1969, it took longer to purge the reformists. The conservatives waited until 1970 before launching a full-scale offensive. But once they had begun they were ruthless. Czech CP membership slumped by a third.

The fundamental weaknesses of bureaucratic planning and the Stalinists' fear of any form of democracy, however limited, were to remain and re-emerge with Gorbachev and glasnost.

The Prague Spring gives a vibrant example of how students and workers can organise and fight. But it is also a sharp warning of how they will be defeated in the absence of a revolutionary leadership and programme. ■

SOUTH AFRICA: After Apartheid

Still waiting for change

FOUR YEARS after the elections that swept the African National Congress (ANC) to power, South Africa remains a deeply divided society. In this period the coalition Government of National Unity (GNU) fell apart with the old party of apartheid, the National Party, retiring to opposition. But instead of this change ushering in a new period of radical and redistributionist government policies, it merely marked the fact that the ANC government could be entrusted with running South Africa for business.

As John Pilger's recent documentary revealed, post-apartheid South Africa retains some of the greatest inequalities of wealth anywhere in the world. Hein Marais's book begins with some of the grim statistics: the poorest 40% of South Africa's citizens earn less than 4% of the income circulating in the economy; the wealthiest 10% pocket more than 51% of income. The inequalities still divide up on racial lines with the most disadvantaged group being black African women – a clear legacy of the apartheid and homeland systems.

The South African broadcasting authorities were so scandalised by Pilger's programme they wanted to ban it from being shown, eventually relenting but prefacing it by a sharp disclaimer. Defenders of the ANC argue that the tasks are so huge, the legacy so burdensome, that no-one should expect miracles.

South Africa's poor didn't expect miracles. They expected improvements in their daily lives. But the improvements have turned out to be slow and slight. One pledge was to bring basic amenities to thousands of townships and schools: at the start of the electrification programme 60% of households were without power, that figure has fallen but is still running at over 40%; while 50% of schools still have pit latrines. The house building programme is way off target.

The ANC's tight spending restrictions have reined in many of the improvement programmes. The Growth, Employment and Redistribu-



Many in South Africa continue to live in conditions of extreme poverty. A lack of decent housing and education has yet to be addressed by the ANC government.

tion programme (GEAR) is actually designed to serve the needs of business. Budget cutbacks have starved local areas of much needed cash: hospital wards lie idle, class sizes are still appallingly high, schools are without books and public sector workers are being laid off.

Despite these problems, some layers of the black population have been able to flourish. This process, already underway before 1994, means there is now a substantial black middle class as well as a number who have joined the bourgeoisie proper. ANC National executive member Cyril Ramaphosa, has moved from heading the National Union of Mineworkers to heading one of the key black investment groups.

The cumulative affect of these changes is that, as Marais notes, "the

Lesley Day reviews
South Africa: limits to change,
by Hein Marais,
Zed Books 1998

country's maldistribution is increasingly shifting from being race to class-based". Poverty has replaced race as the gatekeeper of privilege. His book sets out to explain how this has happened, as well as to chart a way forward. But despite some useful accounts of developments before and particularly after the 1995 transition, Marais does not succeed in this aim.

Marais's view is that revolution was never on the agenda in South Africa. His perspective sees the class struggle as the "struggle between two hegemonomies" aiming at winning the battle

of ideas within society. The best hope for the future lies not in working class struggle but in constructing new social alliances which can work both outside and within the ANC.

Marais believes that Apartheid was an economically defunct mode of capitalism which was inherently doomed. He traces the crisis to the 1980s: the combination of the acute problems facing South African capital, the impasse of the guerrilla struggle of the ANC, the rise of the black working class, the insurrectionary phase of the mid-80s, the ending of the Cold War and the final endgame of the negotiation process.

His account is refreshingly critical of the ANC leadership and the way that it misdirected the radical upsurge of the mid-1980s. Marais traces some of the

debates within and around the nationalist movement and the way it swung towards an "insurrectionary" phase. He notes how the leftist rhetoric of that period enabled the ANC to swing the mass movement behind it. But he follows the popular line of radical commentary today in failing to see the difference between Lenin's tactics and strategy for working class revolution and the Stalinist politics of the dominant political force in the ANC, the South African Communist Party (SACP).

Marais dismisses the "formulaic models that hinged on Leninist models of rupture and seizure of state power". Noting that South African capitalism, while hitting severe crisis by the 1980s, had the ability to adjust itself to the reform process he concludes that the idea that a revolutionary situation was developing was "a corrupt reading of the dynamics at play".

This fundamentally misunderstands the role of politics in capitalist crises. This century, capitalism has repeatedly been able to adjust, restructure and reform. This does not prove that its revolutionary overthrow was an impossibility. In fact the events of 1985-6 did present revolutionary opportunities. The pro-bourgeois leadership of the ANC, and the inability of the working class leaders to chart a path to revolutionary socialism, meant that capitalism was able to weather the storm.

Marais' chapters on developments since 1994 are the most interesting and he provides a wealth of detail on the debates that have taken place in and around the Alliance on the way forward.

But ultimately Marais' book contains no way forward for the South African working class. He prefers his notions of constructing new alliances and platforms from within and outside the ANC and the state.

This leaves the working class still without an independent voice, organisation or programme. Only a revolutionary working class party can provide these – and that means a return to the real traditions of Bolshevism rather than the foul distortions that are the legacy of Stalinism. ■

FRANCE 98: World Cup

It's a game of two classes

MILLIONS OF people are eagerly awaiting the start of the World Cup in France this month. The greatest tournament of the globe's most popular spectator sport will be prime time television in homes, bars and hotels. The symbols and souvenirs of "France 98" will be worn by more children than the United Colours of Benetton could ever dream of mobilising for their lurid ad campaigns.

But it is not just the football teams who are preparing for the cup. Even now British commentators are rehearsing their patronising and racist routines about Africans being "naive", South Americans being "butchers" and Europeans being "actors". The "Hop off you Frogs" *Sun* has already worked its front pages out for the occasion. Meanwhile the British government brand travelling supporters as hooligans and thugs if they dare travel to France without a ticket!

For football lovers the spectacle of the game, the atmosphere of the crowds and the post-match debates are all important. The opportunity to meet opposing supporters represents a

chance to break down national barriers and cut against the absurd national stereotypes of the mass media.

But increasingly in both football in general and the World Cup in particular, fans are being overtaken by stockbrokers, accountants, advertising executives, sales managers and, above all, media tycoons. Ignorance of the offside rule among this commercial rabble goes alongside knowledge of the vast fortunes that can be made from the "people's game".

Of course, football has never been just the "people's game". The great mass of workers in the world may have been the bulk of the audience but football clubs have always been owned and run by capitalists for profit. The game has never belonged to the people. The football authorities have always come from the world bourgeoisie, or sometimes the aristocracy, and have never been accountable to the mass of fans.

While there has never been a golden age of capitalist free football, the sheer scale of commercialism associated with the modern game is a relatively new phenomenon. In Britain the

source of this development came from two factors.

First, the tragedy of Hillsborough in 1989, when 96 Liverpool fans were crushed to death at an FA Cup semi-final, prompted club owners and the Football League and Association to woo a respectable middle class following for the game.

The authorities showed little concern for the victims of the tragedy. They never apologised for the ugly and brutal fencing that crushed the fans to death. They colluded in the despicable police cover up and refused to help the victims and their families secure compensation.

But the tragedy spurred all of them to "clean up" the game. They introduced all-seater stadiums with massively inflated entrance prices; executive class seating areas were extended; expensive membership schemes introduced; plush lounges with CCTV for those who didn't want to get cold watching the game were constructed.

Along with this came a sudden literary renaissance as well educated "new lads" like Nick Hornby wrote of the

emotional and social sensitivity of football fans. Supporting a club became a fashion accessory to a new generation of middle class men and women – a development brilliantly observed in the BBC's comedy, the *Fast Show*.

Despite these efforts, football fans remain predominantly working class. The culture of watching football has become "respectable" as has the enormous expansion of the various clubs' money spinning operations – stock market launches, profit margins and share returns now matter more than cups and performances. Manchester United's off-field commercial ventures now account for more of their income and profits than either their gate receipts or their transfer dealings.

The new breed of football club owner cynically smiles at the enormous rip-off they are perpetrating on the fans, as the unguarded comments of Newcastle's two directors proved.

The second factor to transform football was satellite television. With the growth of a wider audience for the game came the possibility of charging people to see it on the box and re-organising

entire fixture lists to suit the needs of television.

Thanks to Murdoch's Sky empire it is now impossible to watch a live league game on public access television and, on top of fees for the satellite channel, we will have to pay extra to watch particular matches under the soon to be introduced "pay per view" scheme.

By denying public access television the right to screen games – effectively through offering the football authorities a massive bribe – Murdoch has cornered the market for himself. He doesn't care that a Monday night fixture means big problems for an away fan trying to get to a game on a work day. He knows that he gets big profits from scheduling the "big match" in advertising prime time land.

France 98 will exhibit not only world class footballing skills but also the skills of the footballing marketing men operating in a class divided world. This shouldn't stop us from enjoying the football. But it should alert us to the need to make sure that this is not the last World Cup we will be able to watch without lining Murdoch's pockets. ■

WELCOME TO

As the capitalists gathered to launch the European single currency last month, events in Denmark and Germany gave a stark warning as to the future of the class struggle in Europe. Hundreds of thousands of Danish workers struck to defend and extend pay and conditions. In Germany half a million marched on May Day: but in the shadow of the major electoral victory of the fascist front party the DVU and a new campaign of neo-Nazi violence. On these pages **Peter Olson** from our Swedish organisation **Arbetarmakt** looks at the lessons of the Danish general strike, **Martin Gross** from the German section of the LRCI issues a stark warning about the rise of fascism in Germany and **Bill Jenkins** analyses the birth of the Euro.

Eurostrikes . . .

DENMARK HAS often been portrayed as a successful model of class harmony and as an economy capable of escaping the vicious circle of unemployment and budget deficits. But a slight economic recovery has sparked renewed class struggle and demonstrated that the official portrait is highly inaccurate!

Negotiations broke down between the LO (the Danish TUC) and the private employers' organisation on the eve of May Day. Compulsory arbitration led to an offer that promised a 4% pay rise, a new system for pensions, and a paid holiday on Christmas Eve. Other union demands – most importantly the call for a paid sixth holiday week – were not met.

Compulsory arbitration is "balanced" by the right of union members to vote on the proposed contract. The union bureaucrats advised their members, overwhelmingly, to accept the offer. But 56% of workers voted to reject the deal. The No vote was solid in all the major unions – a result that surprised even the left.

Crisis

Half a million workers in the private sector went out on strike on 27 April in the country's second biggest strike ever. A further 60,000 were locked-out from 5 May causing a major crisis for Danish capitalism. Shops ran short of goods, stations ran out of petrol; the only thing not running short was the militancy of the workers.

At a mass demonstration outside the employers' federation building, TUC leader Hans Jensen said that the strike was 100% effective: "Support is solid. No one is wavering."

There were no significant attempts to bring in strike-breakers. But there are other weapons in the arsenal of the bosses' government – namely the union bureaucracy itself. The May Day demonstration in Copenhagen was exceptionally big. More than 100,000 workers took part. News telegrams sent out by Reuters quoted Jensen as saying that the demand for an extra week of holiday was "unrealistic". But when he spoke on May Day – in front of more than 100,000 strikers – he decided to keep that view secret from his members. Jensen's behaviour is typical of the record of the trade union bureaucracy: support the union's demands in public, but at the same time let the bosses know that you are ready to give in.

The Swedish transport union called on its members not to handle goods connected with the Danish strike. Scandinavian Airlines System (SAS) flights were re-directed from Copenhagen to Sweden, but airport workers refused to have anything to do with them.

Vulnerable

The union was immediately sued for compensation by the SAS, something that will be decided later on in the Swedish labour courts. Several big Swedish companies also ran into problems after just a few days. The system of so-called just-in-time-deliveries makes the factories of Saab, Volvo and others extremely vulnerable to strikes. In Denmark, meanwhile, the bosses

were desperate to settle the strike before the EU referendum on 28 May in which the government was hoping to win support for the Amsterdam Treaty. The government decided to enforce the original arbitration offer by law.

The decision of the government to intervene in the conflict came as a surprise. A couple of days after the strike started, Danish prime minister Paul Nyrup Rasmussen said:

"The government is not dreaming about lifting one finger to free the parties to the dispute from their responsibilities."

But pressure from their capitalist masters proved once again to be too much for the social democratic government.

The gains of the strike were reduced to a few days' extra holidays, which will not cost the bosses anything. The new



Eurofascism . . .

IN RECENT weeks Germany has witnessed rising support for the Social Democratic Party (SPD) both in the polls and by the participation of around half a million workers in the May Day demonstrations calling for the downfall of the ruling coalition.

It has also witnessed the growth and mobilisation of the far right: a massive electoral gain for the fascist front party, the German People's Union (DVU), in Saxony-Anhalt (13% in the district elections) and a 6,000 strong fascist march called by the German National Democratic Party (NPD) and its youth organisation (JN) in Leipzig on May Day.

Society is polarising. There is a growing social base for racist and fascist forces in Germany and a real danger of a mass fascist party being built in the coming period. There is also every possibility of the workers' movement crushing this threat.

There may be a few who were fooled by the DVU's advertising campaign, not knowing what it stands for and that it is run by an outright fascist media-capitalist, Frey. But overall the vote shows that significant numbers, particularly in the former GDR, are prepared to vote for a "legalist" fascist-front. It shows

that 13% are prepared to vote for a party whose main slogan is the racist call for "Jobs for Germans first".

The excuses of the "respectable" parties and their media, that the DVU voters are only "badly informed protest voters", are rubbish. The DVU won votes because of its racist solution to the most burning problem facing the vast majority of the population: unemployment.

A large proportion of DVU voters are unemployed, some are workers who are immediately threatened with unemployment (most importantly building workers) and the youth. The DVU was the strongest party amongst first time voters, taking 30%.

Gains

With average unemployment rates of around 20% in the area that used to be East Germany, and with the leadership of the workers' movement not acting to defend jobs, it is not surprising that the far right has made most of its gains there. But this is not just an "eastern" problem.

The NPD mobilisations are, in the short term, an even bigger threat than the electoral success of the DVU. The DVU poses as a hard-line conservative,

contract – enforced by law – is "cost neutral" according to Rasmussen.

The lessons of the Danish strike are clear. Despite the fact that pickets were organised locally by the rank and file, the strike was controlled throughout by the union bureaucracy. Opposition to the government's legal intervention was widespread, but unorganised and lacked focus.

The latest strike wave threw up two obstacles which the Danish workers have to struggle to overcome. The first was the social democratic government. It was seen as the government of the workers – as "their" government – by an overwhelming majority of strikers. Many workers were taken unawares by the treachery of the government. They didn't expect their own party to betray them.

The second obstacle was the absence of an alternative leadership. During a major strike wave in 1985 there was a shop stewards-like organisation in the unions (the *tillidsmænd*). But the crisis of the Danish Communist Party after the collapse of Stalinism has disoriented many rank-and-file militants and eroded this movement.

Conservative

Danish social democracy has proved itself to be one of Europe's most conservative bourgeois workers' parties. During world war two they even governed during the German occupation. This traditional conservatism gave Stalinism a strong position inside the Danish labour movement after the war. Without any major electoral successes Danish Stalinism nevertheless built a significant following inside the unions.

But the crisis of Stalinism has weakened the opposition to social democracy in the unions. And those rejecting Stalinism often simply tried to re-build left reformism.

The left remains divided and weak. When 500 union representatives gathered on 7 May, the day after the intervention of the government, only a minority were ready to continue the fight. This weakness was also shown at a demonstration which followed the meeting. Only 4,000 showed up to protest against the government outside Parliament.

There were clear signs of the immense potential power of the working class during the strike. A general strike halts all the necessary services in society: so the unions started to make plans for handling the situation.

Prepared

Activists on bicycles were prepared to deliver essential services; the electricians' union announced that they would take care of special cases despite being locked-out, and several unions declared that they were prepared to keep up deliveries for the co-operative shops.

A day of protests and demonstrations on 5 May was successful, but the co-ordinating executive who organised it – and who also had the potential to step forward as an alternative leadership – in the end backed down in front of the union and social democratic party bureaucracy.

The key problem was the confusion created by a "workers' government" acting against the interests of the workers. This split the potential workers' opposition and shows that political clarity about the nature of social democracy, and the bourgeois workers' parties in general, is urgently needed in the Danish labour movement.

Socialists and militant trade unionists must learn the lessons of the general strike in order to create a solid basis for the building of a new leadership in the unions and a revolutionary alternative to reformism. ■

rely on a demagogic "anti-capitalism", which includes a relatively positive evaluation of the former GDR as the "better German state". They also try to organise disillusioned former Stalinists in the east.

How far the NPD and JN are already rooted in the east was shown by their demo in Leipzig on May Day. Around 6,000 supporters marched: the biggest fascist mobilisation since the Third Reich and the highpoint of a campaign of demos against an exhibition on the war crimes of the Wehrmacht.

To choose such highly symbolic issues to mobilise around reveals two things: one, the growing strength of the NPD; two, its desire to appeal to the right wing in the "respectable" bourgeois parties, war veterans, army officers etc.

The NPD and the JN are also responsible for a series of attacks on immigrant hostels, and for terrorising immigrants and the left – particularly in the countryside in former East Germany, where they have almost created so-called "liberated zones".

Threat

The anti-fascist mobilisations around May Day give a clear picture of the failures of the workers' movement in the face of this threat from the far right. The leaders of the SPD, among them the mayor of Leipzig, together with the Stalinist PDS and the trade union leaders tried to ban the demonstration.

EUROLAND

Euromoney . . .

THE EURO has arrived. From the 1 January 1999 the franc, mark and peseta will be subsumed within an international currency. The Maastricht treaty and its famous "convergence criteria" have done their work: only Greece failed to meet the economic conditions for locking international exchange rates.

The currencies of the 11 founder members of Economic and Monetary Union (EMU) will be fixed until the notes and coins are replaced in the year 2002. Those who said "it will never happen" are having to eat their words.

The Euro will operate in a vast market encompassing 65% of the transactions of 290 million consumers. It will speed up the pace of economic integration and provide an alternative to the dollar, which at present holds 70% of the world's pension fund reserves and remains the world's main trading currency. The capitalist architects of EMU hope that the single currency will enable the European Union (EU) to compete on the world stage with the giant US and Japanese economic "blobs" – minimising national competition within Europe and massively reducing costs.

Only three of the 14 qualifying member nations have declined to enter the first phase, the UK, Denmark and Sweden. But the impact of the Euro has already become evident: the pound, which soared against other currencies before EMU, is falling toward what the markets anticipate will be its single currency entry rate – around DM 2.70.

Fact

In Britain you can already open a Euro bank account; major companies like Marks & Spencer are starting to do their internal accounting in Euros; bonds and loans calculated in Euros are being traded in the City of London; and the recent two-year Vauxhall wage deal incorporated an interest rate clause directly linked to the value of the pound against the Euro in two years' time.

When the courts overruled the ban by the city-council – providing an object lesson in the "anti-fascism" of the bourgeois state – the workers' leaders did nothing to stop the fascists marching. They called on workers and immigrants not to let themselves be "provoked" and



Romano Prodi, Jacques Chirac and Helmut Kohl synchronise their watches for the launch of the Euro

So the Euro is a fact. But from the launch of an international currency of account to the creation of an integrated European imperialist economy, currency and central bank is a very long road. Unlike the USA, Europe is composed of competing imperialist countries, with their own national ruling classes. It is not language or culture that hinders the emergence of an integrated Euro-imperialism but economics and class structure.

Each of the national bourgeoisies of Europe use their national state as a means not only to repress the working class and to regulate the production of profit but also as a key source of profits; through state subsidies, sweetheart deals with "national" private companies, the arms industry, compensated nationalisation and cut

price privatisation.

The launch of the Euro does not signal the end of inter-imperialist competition in Europe but sets the stage for a new round of that competition, the ferocity of which will intensify when the recovery turns to recession.

Weakness

The president of the European Central Bank, Wim Duisenberg, announced a Europe-wide inflation target of between 0-2%. Here we see the real weakness that lies at the heart of the EMU project: the uneven convergence of the European national economies; the potential contradictions between strong national economies and their institutions and weak pan-European ones; and the potential of recession to blow the whole system apart.

many, with only 3,000 participants. The union leaders refused to lead the union march to the fascist rallying point to stop them.

There was a counter-demonstration however, this was attacked by the 6,000 strong police presence with water-can-

For in spite of the optimism of the European imperialist powers, who predict a saving of 5% of GDP as a result of more efficient currency transactions and trade, there remains real unease that the single currency will not cope with the varying needs of the member states. The creation of the Euro prevents national governments from deflating their currencies and embarking on reflationary budgets if this is not sanctioned by the European Central Bank.

It was the need of the French government to guarantee the readiness of the economy for the single currency that led to the French strikes in November-December 1995 when the Juppé Plan sought to dismantle many of the historic gains won by the French working class in one go. The need to confront the working class across several fronts led to the largest strike wave and demonstrations since 1968. The French bosses failed to secure their full objectives. In any future recession the French government, or any of its European single currency partners, will have even less room for manoeuvre.

Lumbered

Unlike the USA, the single currency will have no central government to decide on spending, debt, taxation and foreign policy. The EU will not even have a single policy on these issues. It will be lumbered with a legacy of the most "expensive" workforce in the world, the highest rates of social security spending, the most comprehensive welfare states and strong and established trade unions and reformist workers' parties.

The European imperialists hope that the increased transfer of capital across the EU and the newly established "transparency" of labour costs will assist the process of attacking the working class begun under the convergence criteria for the single currency. The European stability pact of 1996 – which introduced fines for any nation exceeding the agreed level of public debt – or a new recession, combined with the deflationary policies of the convergence criteria, could provoke a rapid rise in class struggle and cause real problems for the integrity of the EU.

Any real confrontation with the European working class also threat-

ens to generalise across borders and out of the control of the national governments, as workers compare their standards of living and recognise their interest in establishing international links. This is the threat to the single currency from the left.

But the Euro is also challenged from the right. The rise of nationalist parties like the Front National in France and the DVU in Germany threatens the creation of a pan-European identity (see "Eurofascism" below). Bourgeois internationalism, despite its fine phrases, its heavily subsidised firework shows and art exhibitions, must always remain hollow because it is based on the "goodwill" of the privileged middle class bureaucrat. It can never put food on the table and remains vulnerable to the right wing politics of national pride and racist prejudice.

Surrender

The capitalist way forward for the EU remains an ever increased pace of integration and the forwarding of ever greater national powers to the new European centre. The surrender of national control over currency movements and interest rates already cedes enormous power to the European Central Bank.

But for a really coherent economic policy to be developed the remaining powers of taxation must be handed over as well. Until they are there remains the risk that national governments could, under the pressure of their own national situations, adopt policies radically at variance with the European centre and this remains a powerful obstacle to the assumption of real power by pan-European political institutions.

The road to a European imperialism will not be a smooth one. The workers' movement can take advantage of the continuing splits and divisions within the European ruling class and press home the attack against our class enemies. As Euro-capitalism restructures, merging companies across the continent, we demand a generalisation of the best wages, hours and conditions across the European working class. Instead of xenophobia and nationalism we demand internationalism and solidarity – for a Socialist United States of Europe. ■

combined with a constant call on the mass organisations of the working class, most importantly the unions, the PDS and SPD to support such action and mobilise their members.

Policy

This does not mean we have to wait for these leaders to implement a policy of "no platform for fascism". But it must be clear to every militant anti-fascist that a refusal to call on the workers' movement and its organisations will lead to political suicide sooner or later.

A policy of "pure" anti-fascism is itself a bourgeois myth. The fascists claim that they have the most "radical" solution to the problems of the unemployed. The reformist workers' organisations and their leaders give utopian, reformist answers but refuse to fight even for these. A large part of the "far left" writes off not only these leaders, but the working class as whole: it is a product of demoralised middle class intellectualism that is part of the crisis not the solution.

And overall this is part of the crisis of working class leadership and the political impotence of the left, which are a major reason for the strength of the far-right.

The fight against fascism has to be combined with a struggle for the most pressing demands of the working class as a whole, and directed against the source of fascism and exploitation – the capitalist system. ■



nons. This counter-demo was about as big as the fascist march. It was mainly composed of youth. Whilst it was directed and led by the anarchists and the far left it clearly attracted youth from beyond the organised left. Even some from the trade union youth organisations joined in and tried to break through the police lines.

It is clearly possible to smash the fascists. The youth are not all in the hands of the DVU or the NPD – there are a growing number who want to fight fascism and capitalism. Likewise the workers are not overwhelmingly racist, nationalist and about to become fascists – as the autonomes and the middle class left claim. Even the elections in Saxony-Anhalt have shown a growing vote for the bourgeois workers' parties, the SPD and PDS. The parties that really collapsed were the Greens, the CDU and the liberal FPD.

Mobilisation

Leipzig demonstrated that the fascists have grown to such a size and influence that a mobilisation by the far left alone cannot stop them. But the mobilisation of the millions strong workers' movement can.

We need to build self-defence organisations for immigrant hostels, youth clubs and left meetings, and to prevent fascist and racist demos. We need to go on the offensive, attacking the neo-Nazi meetings and youth clubs where possible. The policy of physically denying the fascists a public platform has to be com-

INDONESIA CRISIS: Tapol calls for solidarity

Stop arming the dictatorship

Tapol is a long established campaigning organisation for Human Rights in Indonesia. *Workers Power* spoke to a member of Tapol, **Carmel Budiardjo**, about the current situation in Indonesia. The interview took place on Tuesday 12 May. This was just before the Jakarta demonstration that led to mass destruction of shops and commercial establishments linked to the regime, and before the forced resignation of Suharto. **Carmel Budiardjo** spent three years in detention without trial in one of Suharto's prison camps in the late 1960s.

WORKERS POWER (WP): The Suharto regime now looks shakier than at any time in the last 30 years. Is that your opinion?

Carmel Budiardjo (CB): I think it is shaky to the point of teetering on the brink of collapse. It could happen any day or any week now. The reasons are economic but more importantly, political. There has been a growing pro-democracy movement in Indonesia for several years.

In 1996 there was a big upheaval around one of the official parties which fell under the leadership of Megawati Sukarnoputri. There was a lot of unrest at that time but that died down. In 1997 there was the Presidential election and there was a huge boycott. But the thing that has precipitated the current political crisis is the economic crisis.

Indonesia was hit very hard by the Asian crisis which led immediately to a very drastic fall in the value of the rupiah and created all kinds of very serious economic problems for big business, but more importantly, for the workers, the Indonesian people in the urban and rural areas.

WP: The recent riots in Medan were reported in this country as being as much anti-Chinese as directed against the regime. Is this true?

CB: What actually happened last week was that under pressure from the IMF, the Indonesian government cut subsidies. A number of basic commodities, essential goods, had been subsidised for many years and it was one of the conditions of the IMF credit loan that was released last Monday that these subsidies should be cut.

What happened in Medan was that people came out onto the streets. They were saying "we cannot cope any more". Because prices had been going up so much and now fuel has gone up, and kerosene and all these other products that have an impact either directly on peoples' cooking and so on, or indirectly when goods carried by trucks also go up.

So what happened in Medan was an outburst of anger, it is really not right to call this an anti-Chinese riot. The fact of the matter is most shops are Chinese and so if they started looting shops, the Chinese were the ones who got it. But I don't think that it was an anti-Chinese demonstration, it was just about the economic situation and the Chinese were on the receiving end of that because a lot of the commerce is in the hands of the Chinese.

WP: The student-led protests seem to be shaking the regime. There have even been statements by some generals admitting the need for reform. How has this come about?

CB: This has been precipitated by the student demonstrations. The student demonstrations started in mid-February, even before the election of Suharto in March. These demonstrations showed a very significant staying power; they spread from university to university; from city to city. The students' main

demands are for political and economic reform. The emphasis being on political reform because everyone realises that the economic reform which is necessary, you know, getting rid of corruption, collusion, monopolies and so on, cannot be achieved unless there is political reform. And political reform means changing the whole political system.

In many places the students are demanding that Suharto should stand down. Effigies have been burned, they have had mock trials, sentenced him to death. The students often have the support also of the professors and lecturers, so it is not just a student thing. University staff and intellectuals are also speaking at these rallies, in fact in some places they started the rallies. They called on the students to take action.

This has helped to create this whole atmosphere of the need for change. And in this atmosphere everyone joins on the bandwagon, even generals. Even the Commander in Chief of the armed forces came out with a statement last week: "Oh yes, we understand what the students want, we also recognise that there's need for reform." Of course he didn't say exactly what reform he wanted, but the reform must be slow, it must be gradual and constitutional. These were the words that he used, so he is obviously trying to ride on the back of the students and trying to curb their enthusiasm, but I don't think this means anything to anybody.

WP: Do the students represent a new generation of opposition? Are the traditional parties involved, or is it a spontaneous movement?

CB: I don't think there is any central command in the movement, it is

just that people have followed the example of students in other places, because all these events are being very widely reported in the Indonesian press, so people know about them. I don't have any evidence that there is any kind of centralised leadership. The students for nearly 20 years have been pretty well dormant, not doing anything, so this is a completely new generation of people.

WP: And you don't see any links to any of the opposition figures or parties?

CB: The person who has quite a strong position in academia is Amien Rais. He is a lecturer at one of Indonesia's most prestigious universities so almost by default he is part of the university community. When he came back from a trip to Europe he made a very strong statement against Suharto saying he must go now and the students have responded to that. So they are probably beginning to see him as the man who will lead the way towards a transitional government of some kind.

WP: What is Rais' background?

CB: There are two very big Muslim organisations in Indonesia. Rais heads one of them, an organisation called Muhammadiyah. It has a huge membership, something like 28 million and it is rather like a social organisation running schools, colleges, orphanages and so on. It doesn't have any pretensions to be a political organisation. He was also a member of an organisation of Muslim intellectuals called ICMI which was set up with the endorsement of Suharto, but they got rid of him recently because he was getting too outspoken.

WP: The student movement is obviously the heart of the opposition at the moment. Have you any idea what's happening within the workers' movement?

CB: Workers are confronted by horrific survival problems. Everybody is trying to cling on to their jobs. The government also decided a couple of months ago that the minimum wage would not be increased this year. Normally it is increased every April but they decided that would not happen and so the workers are in very bad economic straits. Many of them have been laid off or told to stay at home, suspended indefinitely.

But there are now actions of workers coming out onto the streets. One of the reasons the army insisted on the students remaining within the campuses is because they knew that if they came out everybody will join in and that will include the workers.

There have been events in the last week or ten days where workers have actually gone and demonstrated outside the universities to express their support for what the students are doing. So there is now increasingly workers' involvement in this wave of unrest.

WP: What's happened to the Megawati Sukarnoputri, who appeared to be at the centre of the challenge to the regime in 1996?

CB: I don't know. I find it difficult to size up her strategy. She made two statements recently: one was on 10 January when she announced that she would put herself forward as a Presidential candidate. That got a lot of interest. Then nothing happened. Recently she came out again and made

a statement calling on the US congress to stop training the Indonesian Army's Special Forces.

These are kind of disconnected acts and she hasn't really responded to the students. She has lost many opportunities which Amien Rais is taking advantage of, for better or worse. He's not necessarily my chosen politician because he's a populist. He could be anti-Chinese. The thing about him is that he represents a lot of small Muslim businesses who feel very much hemmed in because the economy is so controlled by the Chinese and he might have a policy of discriminating against the Chinese in favour of the Muslims.

WP: In terms of helping the opposition in Indonesia is there anything that socialists and workers in Britain could be doing in relation to Indonesia? For example it is well known that Britain supplies military equipment to Indonesia, including water cannon and gas.

CB: I think there are two issues. First of all we should stop arms to Indonesia. It's not only the water cannon - stop selling all arms. We need an arms' embargo on Indonesia, a demand which the Labour government has refused to listen to.

Only last week somebody in the Foreign Office told an Indonesian activist who went to see him, "it's no use you showing us photographs of a water cannon being used, we want to know the circumstances under which it was being used". In other words, if the security forces were using it for their own defence, that's okay by us and you have to prove it on a case by case basis, so "we're not going to take a general position, water cannons should not be used, because in certain circumstances we believe they should be used".

The second thing is to oppose the British government's support for the IMF programme which is basically bailing out Suharto. The IMF programme is not aimed at helping the poor of Indonesia, in fact it is only increasing impoverishment. It's basically bailing out the banks, trying to make sure the Indonesian economy and state reserves are used to repay private debt. It is a kind of a debt collector.

WP: What do you think is the most likely outcome of the current wave of struggle?

CB: I'm not all that happy about the ways things may turn out because we have a situation where it is possible that the army will come out strengthened by getting rid of Suharto.

So we won't necessarily see the end of the dictatorship. I think we're coming towards the end of the Suharto era, but we're not necessarily coming to the end of the military regime, because the military can possibly emerge as the "saviours". So we could move from one kind of Suharto regime backed by the military to a military regime without Suharto. ■



Labour must stop arming these thugs.

INDONESIA CRISIS: After Suharto's resignation

Workers must lead the revolution

Indonesia is in the midst of a revolutionary crisis. The forced resignation of Suharto and his replacement by Vice-President Habibie is a desperate attempt to head off a revolution. But, as **John McKee** explains, it will take more than cosmetic changes to demobilise the masses.

EARLY MAY saw a rapid escalation of the economic crisis in Indonesia. Inflation, estimated at 70%, was ripping through the economy. Food prices in the markets were soaring and subsidies on basic goods and fuel were cut under conditions the International Monetary Fund (IMF) has imposed to "solve" the economic crisis.

Then the students challenged the restriction placed on them to keep their protests on campus. The regime was desperate to limit the protests to university campuses, knowing that once the students took to the streets many others would join them. Serious clashes took place with the army in some areas.

The students demanded the removal of Suharto. They were supported by the "alumni" of the universities, the associations of graduates, consisting of professors, lecturers, professionals and even civil servants. Amien Rais, head of one of the large Muslim organisations, took an increasingly militant stand, calling for Suharto's removal.

When troops shot dead six students from the elite University of Trisakti in Jakarta the capital exploded. The Jakarta poor from the massive slums surrounding the city took to the streets in a mass riot of looting and burning.

While Chinese shops and businesses were often the target so were symbols of the regime, especially those belonging to Suharto's family. Car showrooms displaying "Timor cars", manufactured as the national car by one of Suharto's sons, were put to the torch. The toll road from the airport, a major money spinner for the conglomerate Citra Marga controlled by Suharto's eldest daughter, was blockaded. The mansion of Liem Sioe Liong, a major Chinese capitalist and crony of Suharto, was ransacked and burned to the ground.

Within days even the stooge parliament of Suharto appointees, called for Suharto to go. Sensing the ruling class was deeply split the students occupied the Parliament building.

But the resignation of Suharto and his replacement by his protégé Jusuf Habibie represents only a partial victory and the students know it. The student-led movement is demanding the dismantling of the regime, the trial of Suharto and investigations into the corruption of the regime. They are also demanding democratic liberties and new elections.

They knew Habibie would not agree to such demands. The students tried to continue the occupation, demanding his resignation. Habibie used his sup-

port in the ICMI, an Islamic organisation set up by Suharto, to send students from one of the Islamic universities to oust the occupying students. While the army intervened to prevent a serious attack, they also used the pretext to remove the students.

Habibie will stay in power while he has the support of the military. His advantage for them is that he represents continuity with the old regime while removing the hated Suharto. Habibie has made no promises about elections. Neither does he promise any break from the repression of the past.

But Habibie cannot survive for long. The movement for democratic reform has shown its power on the streets, combined with the growing anger of the masses at their impoverishment. The revolutionary crisis will continue.

Habibie cannot rely on the army to crush a new upsurge of protest. With the removal of Suharto, divisions in the military will increase. Suharto's hardliner son-in-law, Lieutenant-General Prabowo Subianto, has already been removed from his command because of opposition to the army chief, Wiranto. A revolutionary movement can take advantage of these divisions and the obvious sympathy shown by rank and file soldiers with the student protests in the capital.

But there are real weaknesses in the mass movement. The students and their middle class supporters have distanced themselves from the workers' movement and expressed distaste at the uprisings by the urban poor. Yet it is precisely the organised workers' movement and the masses that hold the key to real change.

Where students have invited workers to join their demonstrations they have responded. Three hundred factory workers from east Jakarta, wearing red armbands, joined a medical school demonstration in early May. The main trade union, the SBSI, held a demonstration of several thousand to protest against the IMF attacks.

But the students have looked to figures like Amien Rais to lead the struggle against the regime. Rais is a fickle friend of democracy. He demobilised the mass demonstration called for 20 May, allowing the army to change the Presidency while leaving the regime completely intact, something they could not have done if Suharto had been driven from office by mass demonstrations.

The weakness of the student movement lies in its programme and class composition. At the moment it limits itself to a struggle for "democracy". But as the experience of the "people's power" revolution in the Philippines shows, this will not end the poverty and misery that afflicts the masses. Neither does it challenge the IMF programme which will cause even more hardship for the masses.

Real change in Indonesia will only come about by transforming the "democratic" revolution into a socialist revolution. Neither the national capitalism



Aiming for Suharto

of Suharto nor the international capitalism of the IMF can solve Indonesia's economic problems: it is at the centre of an international crisis of profitability that also threatens to engulf Japan and much of South East Asia.

The student movement must unite with the workers' movement. The workers' movement – comprised essentially of the SBSI and other unions – must find its own, independent political expression. The most radical left party, the People's Democratic Party, is in fact a coalition of radical petit-bourgeois and Stalinist activists: it is not committed to socialism, although it does demand the nationalisation of crony capitalist companies and rejects the IMF reforms.

An open party of socialist revolution must be built, with a programme that can address the catastrophe ripping through the Indonesian economy.

This would include the following key demands:

- Reject the IMF programme and retain subsidies on food and fuel.
- Cancel the debts run up by Suharto and his clique with the imperialist banks. Demand the return of the looted \$6 billion salted away in the western banks.
- Nationalise the Suharto clan's property along with all his crony capitalists who benefited at the expense of the masses.
- Put Suharto and his military cronies on trial before a people's tribunal for their crimes against the masses.
- Treble the minimum wage and link wage rises to inflation.
- Form committees of workers and housewives to monitor prices and prevent hoarding of food by distributors.
- Immediately reinstate all work-

ers made redundant or laid off. Nationalise without compensation any firm which refuses to re-employ sacked workers, or declares itself bankrupt.

- Place all nationalised industry under workers' control. Remove all industry from army control.

- Address the land hunger in Java by promoting an agrarian revolution: cancel the peasant debt to the money lenders, expropriate the big landlords and redistribute the lands to the peasants and rural labourers. Introduce a massive aid programme of loans, fertilisers and machinery to increase the productivity of the land. Expand and promote co-operative production.

- For the immediate right of East Timor and Irian Jaya to independence. Full democratic rights to Chinese people: the mass movement must drive reactionary pogromists from its midst.

- Abolish the standing army: arm the people. For the election of all officers in the army. Form a workers', students and poor peasants' militia to defend the mass movement against repression.

- Form delegate action councils of workers, peasants and students to coordinate the overthrow of Habibie. Organise a nationwide general strike to cripple the regime.

- Immediately convene a constituent assembly through democratic elections based on universal suffrage and votes at 16. Draw up a new constitution which guarantees the right of self-determination to national minorities.

This programme could unite the rural and urban poor behind the workers and students, but its implementation needs both a new revolutionary socialist party and new forms working class organisation. The universities and the colleges, the factories and the shanty towns need to become centres of struggle, with councils of action that can unite the struggles on the streets and in the workplaces and draw in rank and file soldiers.

This way a revolutionary struggle can be organised that can finally settle accounts with the regime and establish a workers' and peasants' government that acts in the interest of the masses and not the capitalists and the IMF. ■

IMF and the West

Enemies not saviours

NERO FIDDLER while Rome burned. While Jakarta burned Bill Clinton and Tony Blair decided to play golf. The G8 Summit in Birmingham studiously refused to play the role of "world leader" in Indonesia. Both the man they hoped would sort out the crisis and their IMF plan seemed doomed.

There is much criticism of "crony capitalism" in Indonesia and throughout Asia. What the western economists are criticising is the South East Asian bourgeoisie's propensity to get rich quick by borrowing way beyond their means to ride an economic boom.

Falling profitability across South East Asia burst the bubble of the Asian boom. This led to a massive collapse in the value of local currencies and

exposed that both the state and the private sector had borrowed beyond their means.

When western capitalists do this and get into trouble, the G8 governments simply bail them out. But Indonesia, Malaysia, Thailand and South Korea are semi-colonial countries and the price of a bail out is twofold: the economies must be opened up to greater western imperialist ownership and control, and the local working class and peasantry must be made to pay in the form of reduced state spending.

Suharto managed to negotiate an easier deal with the IMF than Indonesia's neighbours because the country, with its 200 million people, is the epicentre of struggle in the region. But the economic problems are vast. Its

foreign currency reserves were so low that, on the day of Suharto's fall, it was "one week from insolvency".

Western capitalists are frustrated by Indonesia's move in the 1980s and 1990s away from simple cheap labour manufacturing into large scale and relatively hi-tech production (oil, aerospace and automobiles) and big infrastructure projects. According to US economist Albert Fishlow Indonesia should move "back to the roots of its success, using cheap abundant labour to power a fresh export boom".

Planes, trains and automobiles are fine for the west, is the subtext of much of G8 "expert" opinion, but for the people of South East Asia it must be hunger, bankruptcy and sweated labour.

Tapol has been campaigning for human rights in Indonesia for many years. It produces a regular and informative bulletin.

Annual subscriptions £16.00 for individuals (£8.00 unwaged) from Tapol, 111 Northwood Road, Thornton Heath, Surrey CR7 8HW.

IRISH REFERENDUMS: Blair gets his "Yes"

Not the end of the national struggle

The referendums on the Good Friday peace agreement delivered a "Yes" vote north and south of the Irish border. Here members of the Irish Workers Group, the Irish section of the LRCI, give their response to the peace vote and describe the choices facing Republicans who opposed the deal.

THE IRISH people have voted Yes. In the North, Yes to a power sharing Assembly that gives the anti-unionist minority a say in the running of the Six County statelet, but guarantees the continued division of Ireland by an imperialist-drawn border. Yes, in the South, to translate the dead words of the Irish constitutional claim on the north into a vague and timeless aspiration.

Is this the signal for the end of the Irish national struggle? Does it mean peace and prosperity for Northern Ireland, with the Orange sash and the Republican mural destined to become harmless symbols of cultural identity? No.

The peace deal is a reactionary attempt to demobilise the 30 year long mass struggle by the anti-unionist population in the only way possible: by engineering a sell out on Republicanism's strategic aim – a united Ireland – in return for Unionist concessions.

Workers Power and the Irish Workers Group urged a No vote, not out of any sympathy with Paisleyite Unionism's pathetic attempts to preserve its privileges but because we believed, and still believe, that this deal solves nothing.

The border drawn in 1921 will stay in place, dividing the Irish working class and ensuring the survival of sectarianism. The Northern Ireland state will now be run by a power-sharing executive where the "power" to be shared can only be generated by religious based sectarian head counting.

The Agreement ensures that working class politics will remain subsumed in the confessional definitions – Nation-

alist, Unionist or "other" – built into the power sharing arrangements. Despite the fact that the Irish population went to the polls, North and South of the border, for the first time in 80 years, self determination and democracy were not on the ballot paper.

Nationalists in the North voted Yes overwhelmingly. Support for the deal gained strength precisely as the Unionist opposition to it grew: if the Unionist bigots hated the deal so much, many Nationalists must have figured, there must be something good in it.

There is not: the deal demands IRA decommissioning – or a commitment to it – before Sinn Fein can have a minister in the cabinet. But significant reform of the sectarian, Protestant dominated RUC, is years away and its extent ill defined.

The deal denies national self determination. It forces Republicanism to sign up to the principle that the artificially created Protestant majority has a veto over the removal of the border. It does not bring democracy but a rigged, dysfunctional Assembly where, to be heard, you have to deliver your confessionally defined mass base to a compromise that will secure majority support, on any issue, from both Unionists and Nationalists.

Major crises lie ahead. There is the possibility of severe obstruction of the Assembly by Protestant No voters – especially the Paisleyite DUP. However, the likelihood of this, on its own, rendering the Assembly inoperative is low.

The prospect of the Protestant working class using mass action to topple the Assembly – as happened to its predecessor the power-sharing Sun-

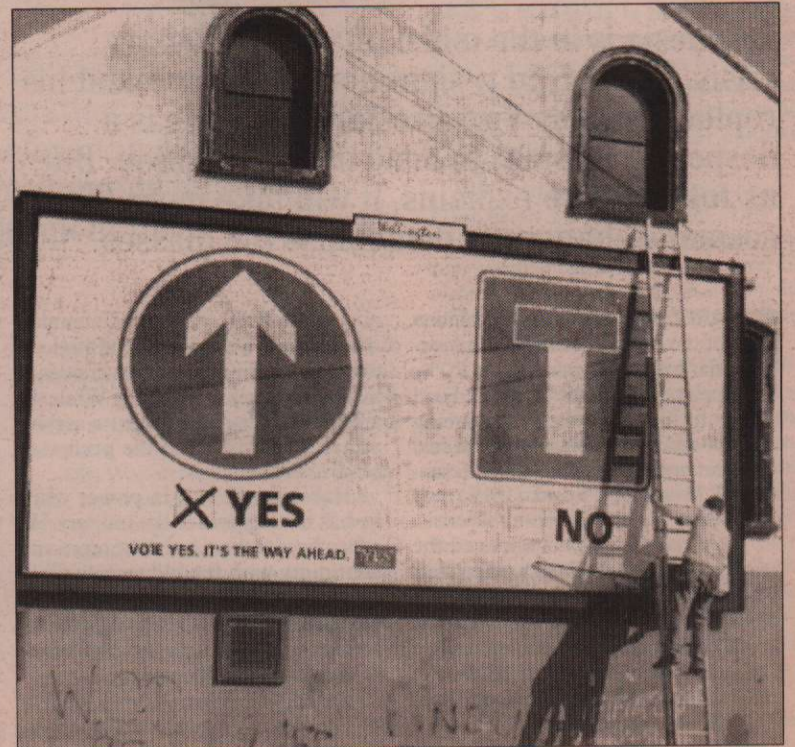
ningdale Assembly in 19974 – is even lower. First, because of its declining size and power. Second, because the working class-based Loyalist paramilitary parties are keen to make the Agreement work. They hope to use the imperialist peace to supplant Paisleyism as the voice of grass roots Protestant sectarianism.

Also, under the agreement all paramilitaries are to decommission over the next two years. However they are to send delegates to the Chastelain Commission for decommissioning arms by June. The Loyalist paramilitary fronts, the PUP and UDP, have already decided their delegates.

Trimble and the Unionists cannot accept a Sinn Fein member in the Executive of the new Assembly unless Adams has sent delegates and the IRA started decommissioning. This will be a source of major friction. There is the added contradiction that all the main IRA dumps are, reportedly, in the South where opposition to the deal within the Republican movement is strongest.

To make decisions in the Assembly needs a majority of both Protestant and Catholic members. This spells trouble for Trimble in delivering his side of any vote, because there is likely to be a large No minority on the Protestant side.

An immediate crisis will come with the looming Orange parades season. It has already been leaked that the Parades Commission has given the go ahead for the Orange Lodges to march through Garvaghy Road in July. And even though Trimble will not be marching with them this summer, they represent a serious problem for the peace process.



In the longer term, the Patten Commission on reform of the RUC must deliver its verdict. Only if there are real reforms of the RUC will Adams back serious decommissioning. But it is precisely any attempt at such reform that could blow apart the Unionist Yes camp.

Finally, if a major economic contraction hits Southern Ireland then one of the key pillars of the peace deal – a strong and modernising Republic, capable of bolstering the Northern economy and exerting powerful reformist ideological pressure on Northern nationalists – will crumble.

Socialists characterise this as a reactionary deal because it achieves little for the oppressed but hands the political initiative and the military supremacy to the British state. It does nothing to free the Northern Irish class struggle from the grip of sectarianism but copperfastens the border: the source of

Contradictions behind the Yes votes

IN THE NORTH there was an enormous turn out of 80% at the polls. In some Catholic areas it was an unprecedented 99%. 71% voted for the agreement and 29% against. Within the Protestant community a slight majority voted Yes, with 75% of UUP voters following party leader Trimble to back the deal.

The exit polls also show the SDLP's vote improving while Sinn Fein's vote fell 3% from the last election.

Constitution

In the South the referendum was one to replace Articles 2 and 3 of the Constitution – which laid a territorial and constitutional claim to the North – by innocuous formulations of "aspiration". The turnout in the South was 56% – a disappointing result for the Southern Irish ruling class.

The main reason for the low turnout was the feeling that the outcome was a foregone conclusion. However, the Yes vote was a massive 94% – with only 6% voting No in the whole of the 26 Counties.

An exit poll in the North showed up two primary reasons for voting Yes. First the voters wanted peace, political stability and, through these, economic development. Second, as they saw it, there was no alternative.

Causes

As to the South the massive 94% to change Articles 2 and 3 had two main causes. The Southern workers felt themselves to be voting for the peace agreement by voting Yes to the change and voted for the same reasons as Northerners. Second, they knew the articles would remain virtually always empty statements – as they had over the last 60 years – and were persuaded they were a hindrance rather than an aid in resolving conflict in the North. ■

Republicanism in crisis?

IN THE wake of an overwhelming Yes vote from nationalists for the Stormont agreement, the voices of the Republican rejectionists were hardly heard. The main forces to reject the agreement amongst the nationalist community belong to Republican Sinn Fein (RSF) and the 32 County Sovereignty Committee.

RSF maintains a guerrillaist strategy, which places the focus on the military action of tiny elitist bands cut off from the masses. As they see it, the bomb and the bullet alone will deliver the goods.

The 32 County Sovereignty Committee was formed in autumn 1997 when a number of prominent Republicans around Bernadette Sands McKeivitt, sister of martyred hunger striker, Bobby Sands, rejected Adams and McGuinness's endorsement of the peace talks – in particular, the signing of the Mitchell Principles which commits Sinn Fein to accepting a peaceful road to united Ireland. The Committee has its military wing – the "Real IRA" – which reportedly includes some highly skilled and experienced activists and access to serious military materiel.

They argue – correctly – that the Stormont Agreement means abandoning what the IRA fought for 30 years – a united Ireland and British Troops out of Ireland. They correctly claim that the Stormont Agreement is partitionist to its core.

However, they have no programme that differentiates them from the Provos. It is the Real IRA – the military wing – that is the decisive factor at the moment. Their number has reportedly grown to 150 and they are regarded by the Southern bourgeoisie's state machine as a more serious threat to the peace process than the Continuity Army Council (linked to the RSF).

But like RSF the Committee look set to assign the military wing the decisive role and turn any mass membership they may acquire into its passive supporters. A smaller scale guerrilla war waged by dissident Republicans, with depleted forces and with ever declining popular support, would be doomed to failure sooner rather than later. It would waste hundreds more brave republican fighters. This strategy failed the Provos – a much bigger organisation. We are against a return to the guerrilla struggle by the Republican movement.

However, socialists remain absolutely opposed to the Republican movement surrendering arms to the British or Irish governments: these arms are still needed to defend the anti-unionist community against the Loyalist death squads, the army and the RUC. What is needed is to organise a mass community-based militia to defend these communities against all these threats.

Irish PM Bertie Ahern and Tony Blair have made it clear that there will be zero tolerance for dissidents: that they will be will determinedly crushed. Already, the increased Garda finds of bomb hauls, and the ruthless shooting dead of Ronan McLochlainn – a dissi-

dent IRA member involved in a robbery in Wicklow – show that the process is well under way.

We are calling for a conference of anti-imperialist republicans and socialists who reject this reactionary deal to draw the lessons of the last thirty years of struggle and particularly of the dead-end of the guerrillaist strategy. We also call for a launch of a mass anti-imperialist united front North and South based around the key demands:

- British Troops Out Now,
- Disband the RUC & RIR,
- Release and amnesty for all anti-imperialist prisoners,
- Mass struggle against day-to-day repression and against Orange parades.

Those on the left who hoped that the peace deal would once and for all remove the national question from the Irish class struggle will be proved wrong. Socialists have to place themselves at the centre of opposition to the counter-revolutionary Agreement.

If they do they can win the anti-unionist masses and the most determined anti-imperialists to a revolutionary communist alternative leadership, that puts the class struggle at the centre of the fight for national self determination and democratic rights: a new revolutionary workers' party, North and South. ■

In Kosovo, the Serbian occupation force has stepped up its campaign of attacks against the ethnic Albanian majority over the last months. While imperialist emissaries tour Yugoslavia, urging negotiations for a compromise, in the regions of Drenica and Decani villages are regularly encircled and attacked by Serbian special police and army units.

Michael Gatter (of the Austrian section of the LRCI) examines the current situation.

THE SERBIAN leader, Slobadan Milosevic, has a two-pronged strategy for defeating the Albanian uprising. He has begun talks with Ibrahim Rugova, the leader of the main political party of ethnic Albanians in Kosovo – the LDK.

But at the same time the Serb military have moved to stop any logistical and material support for the guerrilla movement, the Kosovo Liberation Army (UCK), coming across the border with Albania. This is possibly a prelude to a Serb offensive against the UCK.

Milosevic hopes to integrate the bourgeois, pro-imperialist wing of the national movement, led by Rugova, and crush the more militant, petit-bourgeois led forces at the same time.

There are several factors behind Milosevic's strategy. First, a social crisis is looming and with it political unrest

KOSOVO: Albanians fight for self determination

Breaking the Serb stranglehold

and instability. The Serbian parliament adopted a new privatisation law last summer which will lead to the sale of 80% of public assets in the next two years, undermining the last vestiges of planned property relations.

At the same time the economy is heading towards recession: any growth is largely financed by debts. The budget deficit and the current account deficit are close to 10%, higher than both Mexico and Thailand when their economies imploded. Enterprises are running at just 25-30% of the capacity and real unemployment has reached 40%. As in 1989 the pro-capitalist bureaucracy aims to pacify social protest in Serbia by promoting chauvinist hysteria.

Kosovo has enormous economic importance for Serbia. It supplied the much larger Tito-led Yugoslavia with roughly half of all its coal, lead, zinc and nickel reserves, 36% of magnesium and nearly 20% of chrome reserves. Kosovo's mineral resources mean that the Belgrade bureaucracy will do everything in its power to maintain control and smash the independence movement.

The attempt to integrate the moderate bourgeois forces around Rugova fits in exactly with imperialism's plans, which fears Kosovan independence because it would further destabilise the entire region. Independence for Kosovo

could strengthen the struggle for national self-determination amongst the Albanians in Macedonia. It could also serve as a model for further national liberation struggles: the Sandjak Muslims, the Hungarians in the Vojvodina and also those in Romania.

But the imperialist powers also know the dangers of simply ignoring national grievances in the Balkans.

Immediately after Milosevic met Rugova, the Contact Group – made up of the major imperialist powers and Russia – lifted the ban on foreign investment. The big powers want to integrate Rugova in order to undermine the struggle for real national self-determination. The USA favours the constitution of Kosovo as a third republic inside Yugoslavia, while the EU would prefer limited autonomy inside Serbia.

Either way it's a risky gamble. The Albanian workers and peasants are fed up with pseudo-solutions. Rugova has already risked his leadership when he started negotiations at the same time as the Serbian forces were attacking and murdering ethnic Albanians in Kosovo. Already two of his colleagues have quit the negotiation team and opposition figures like Adem Demaci have condemned his policy. It is likely that negotiations will break down if there is a new major clash between the police and the UCK or a new massacre like Drenica.

The danger for the Kosovan struggle lies not only in the treason of Rugova's LDK. It also lies in the cul-de-sac of a protracted low intensity guerrilla struggle. While all socialists must support the UCK in its struggle against Serbian oppression, guerrillaism is a dead end. In spite of the intentions of the best guerrillas this strategy replaces the struggle and self-organisation of the masses with the brave, but ultimately isolated, acts of a few fighters.

The organisation of mass worker and peasant self defence units is the central task of the moment. There are already indications that several villages have established self-defence groups to protect their homes against the Serbian police. But as long as villages remain isolated they are in danger of being defeated one after another.

Alongside such defence organisations, however, it is of paramount importance to the future struggle for national liberation that the workers and peasants establish their own direct organs of struggle – workers' and peasants' councils. Through such bodies the political independence and leadership of the working class over the bourgeois and petit bourgeois forces, can be established and the road to an armed uprising of the masses to secure liberation opened.

In the fight for such organisations the independent trade union movement

– BSBK – remains of central importance. In spite of opposition from Rugova it has already tried to organise two strikes against Serbian occupation. Its leadership around Hajrullah Gorani is said to be more independent of Rugova. This may or may not be the case, but reports and rumours don't win major class battles.

The workers must organise their own, revolutionary party. It is certainly the case that Kosovan youth could be rallied to such a party – 52% of all Kosovo Albanians are under 19 and it is no accident that it was the youth who started the wave of mass protests in October last year.

A revolutionary socialist party can unite the workers and poor peasants in the fight for a socialist alternative to national oppression and war. Such a party can, in the present crisis, lead the workers and take advantage of the growing splits between the liberation movement and the national bourgeoisie and fight to make the revolution permanent. It can raise the banner of genuine workers' internationalism around the slogans:

- For the national liberation of Kosovo!
- UN/NATO forces out of the Balkans!
- For workers power in Kosovo and throughout the Balkans!
- For a socialist federation of the Balkans!

NUCLEAR WEAPONS TESTING

India falls out with the West

AS NEWS spread of India's first official tests of atomic weapons in 24 years, the western media responded with a chorus of righteous condemnation.

In Washington the Clinton administration voiced its horror at the prospect of a new nuclear power upsetting the subcontinent's delicate balance of power. The world's leading death merchant wagged its disapproving finger at the latest pretender to great power status.

The USA proceeded to impose a range of diplomatic and economic sanctions. European governments have more or less followed suit. There is, of course, more than a bit of hypocrisy to the public declarations of anguish and anxiety from western politicians.

The USA remains the only power to have actually unleashed the absolute terror of atomic warfare, bombing Hiroshima and Nagasaki in 1945.

Despite signatures on numerous test ban and non-proliferation treaties, the major powers have seen fit to maintain enormous nuclear stockpiles, capable of destroying humanity many times over. The French state under the "socialist" presidency of Francois Mitterrand authorised the murder of Greenpeace activists in Auckland harbour in order to safeguard its ongoing programme of nuclear tests in the South Pacific.

The Australian government, among the first to jump on the sanctions bandwagon against India, allowed Britain to test its nuclear arsenal on Aboriginal land throughout the 1950s, poisoning

it for generations.

In sharp contrast to Washington's punitive measures in response to Delhi's weapons testing, successive US administrations have maintained a deafening silence over Israel's nuclear capacity and in the 1980s turned a blind eye to evidence that apartheid South Africa possessed "the bomb".

The initial impact of the US-led sanctions campaign has enabled the Hindu chauvinists of India's BJP-led coalition government to pose as daring anti-imperialists, sticking two fingers up at the exclusive nuclear club. But in the longer term sanctions, which block hospital modernisation programmes and slash international funding for drives to eradicate polio, will only compound the misery of India's impoverished masses. The case of Iraq since 1990 gives tragic confirmation of the real effect of imperialist sanctions on the lives of ordinary people.

Since mid-May Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee's fragile coalition has temporarily bolstered its credibility across a wide section of Indian society. The large demonstrations supporting the tests in many parts of the country – some orchestrated like neighbourhood fireworks displays in Delhi but others spontaneous – highlight a widespread contempt for imperialist domination of the "Third World" as well as the poisonous influence of anti-Muslim chauvinism.

So even as socialists in the west denounce the hypocrisy of imperialist politicians, revolutionaries in India and



elsewhere in the semi-colonial world must expose the cynicism of not just the BJP politicians but their Congress Party opponents who have largely rallied behind the government. Indeed, Indira Gandhi's Congress was responsible for launching the country's original nuclear weapons programme in the early 1970s, immediately following the 1971 war with Pakistan.

The tests at Pokharan in the Rajasthan desert – less than 100 kilometres from the Pakistani border – took place at the same time as a heatwave killing dozens of people, gripped several states. As the *Hindustan Times* noted, the Delhi government carried out its five nuclear explosions while more than 10 million had no access to drinking water in temperatures approaching 40°C.

The Indian tests will almost certainly spur Pakistan to pursue its own Chinese-assisted nuclear programme and stage an explosion of an atomic device within the next few months. Some media commentators have suggested that, having flexed their muscles, both India and Pakistan will soon sign up to the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty and expressed the naive hope that this will be the end of the story.

The far more likely scenario involves an escalating arms race between the neighbouring semi-colonies with the working classes and mass of poor peasants as the certain losers in both countries.

Any nuclear arsenal developed by India or Pakistan is far more likely to be used in a fratricidal war of aggres-

sion than in defence against an imperialist power. In complete contrast to the weapons programmes of the BJP, Congress or any other bourgeois nationalist, pro capitalist party, a real anti-imperialist programme would begin by throwing off the burden of debt slavery.

India's debt just to Britain's Export Credit Guarantee Department amounts to well over £700 million. This is only a small fraction of the total "owed" to imperialist institutions.

India's workers and peasants must fight around a programme that starts with a cancellation of all the debt, includes the nationalisation of all imperialist holdings without compensation and under genuine workers' control and addresses the land hunger of the peasant masses.

The programme for permanent revolution in the subcontinent must not only build class unity between the exploited classes of both India and Pakistan but also across the border left by British imperialism's partition of the subcontinent.

- No to the nuclear weapons programme!
- Cancel the debt to imperialism!
- Expropriate the multinationals!
- Down with Hindu chauvinism!

In the imperialist world the labour movements should fight for the lifting of the sanctions against India, the cancellation of all Third World debt and opposition to all military spending, which ultimately defends the domestic and global profits of our own bosses. ■

AUSTRALIA: Docks dispute bogged down in courts

Will bureaucrats turn victory into defeat?

AFTER A massive picket line confrontation drove back the Australian bosses' attempts to smash the dockers' union last month, the struggle moved to the courts, and dropped out of the headlines. We spoke to **Lloyd Cox** of our sister organisation, Workers Power Australia, for an update on the state of the dispute and the effect it has had on Australia's right wing coalition government.

WP: What has been happening since the High Court ordered the reinstatement of the dockers, pending the conspiracy hearing against the government and Patrick Stevedores? (see WP 222)

LC: The first thing to note is that the euphoria surrounding the workers' reinstatement has well and truly worn off, as the consequences of the Court's ruling have begun to be felt.

The day after the ruling, Patrick gave notice that because of "commercial considerations" it was closing down seven of its regional operations, which would mean no work for 600 hundred Patrick employees, even if the court ruling had reinstated them.

The stevedoring work at the ports Patrick pulled out of has been transferred to the other main stevedore company P&O. In Newcastle (New South Wales) and Adelaide, Maritime Union of Australia (MUA) employees of P&O have refused to unload ships that had previously been Patrick clients. In response, P&O is threatening to sack those workers for violation of their employment contracts. In addition, P&O is also using current circumstances to turn up the heat on the rest of its workers.

While P&O has said that it will continue to negotiate collective work arrangements with the MUA, it has signalled that it wants significant changes in staffing levels and work practices, which would include making 450 of its workers redundant - around a third of the workforce. Hence it is possible that the coming weeks could see a second front opened up in the dock war.

To sum up, despite the High Courts' "reinstatement", 600 hundred of the Patrick workers are still not working, and those that are, are working for free. They are being paid \$250 per week out

of the MUA strike fund and this arrangement will continue until at least 4 June.

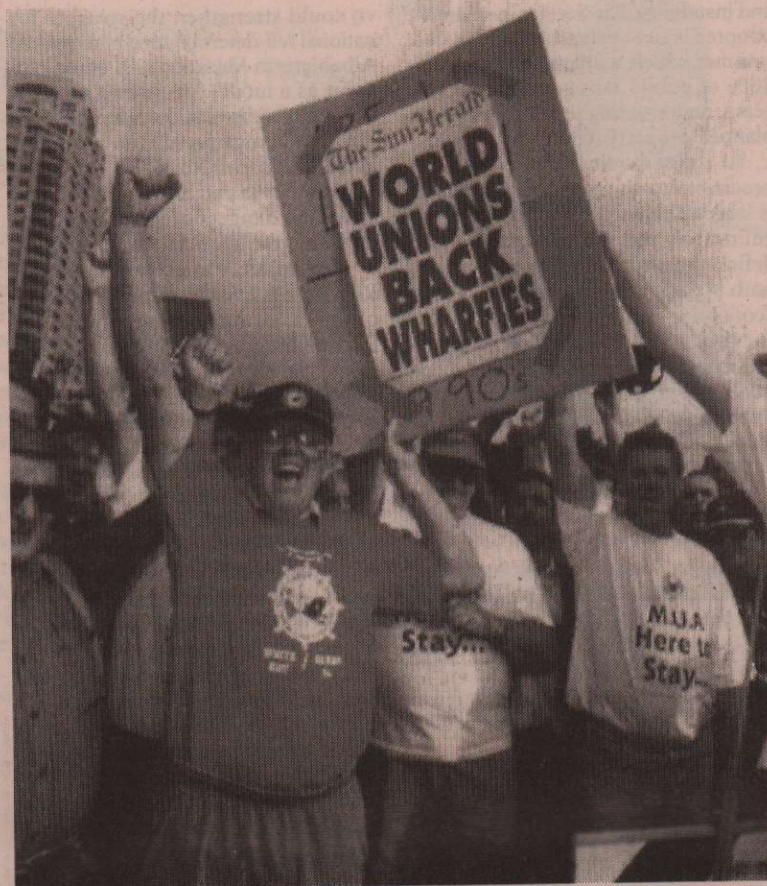
WP: What does the rank and file think about this deal? What's happened to the militancy displayed during the days of picketing and blockading the ports?

LC: I think that many workers are now questioning just what sort of a "victory" was won in the High Court back in early May. At the time, all of the union officials in the MUA and the ACTU were claiming that they had taken on the combined might of Patrick and the Government and had won. But you didn't have to be a very astute observer to see what a pyrrhic victory it was. The workers would be working without wages for an unspecified period, and all power was invested in the official administrators of the insolvent Patrick companies. These business accountants are now able to decide how the companies are run and how many workers are needed. The main criteria guiding their decisions are commercial ones.

Some or all of Patrick's MUA workers are going to be made redundant, if the administrators are calling the shots. The reinstated wharfies are now painfully aware of this, and their initial jubilation has turned to anxiety and frustration about the position that they are in: a position which their own union leaders have contributed to by relying on the Courts.

WP: Are there any signs of the rank and file rebelling against the legalistic strategy of their union officials?

LC: There are wharfie militants who are critical of their officials, and there is a lot of anger and frustration at developments since the High Court ruling. But I think that most of this anger is aimed at Patrick and the government rather than the union bureaucracy. On the whole, rank and file workers think the MUA officials have done a reasonable job in difficult circumstances. "Coombsy", as



the wharfies affectionately call the MUA Secretary John Coombs, still has the loyalty of the vast majority of his members, despite the fact that he has conceded the need for productivity improvements and some redundancies.

If there have been any overt signs of dissatisfaction with the union hierarchy, it has been aimed at the ACTU

leadership, which is seen by many militants to be dragging their feet and rather remote from the rank and file.

On several occasions there were audible murmurs of discontent when ACTU President Jenny George

addressed the picket at East Swanson dock. During one speech she was heckled by the wharfies for not doing enough. As the full consequences of Jenny George's faith in the courts are revealed we have to step up the fight for rank and file independent organisation,

Some or all of Patrick's MUA workers are going to be made redundant, if the administrators are calling the shots

WP: At the time of the High Court ruling, it seemed that the Liberal-National coalition government was on the defensive. What is their position now?

LC: Only days after the workers were reinstated, the government's position worsened. On 8 May, documents and affidavits were published in Melbourne's *The Age* newspaper, which were the strongest evidence yet that the government had known all along about the plan to provide military personnel with stevedoring training in Dubai.

Mike Wells, a former director of the company who organised the Dubai project, stated that he had been approached by one Steve Webster who said that he was "doing a special job for John Howard" (the Prime Minister). Webster was at the time a government consultant on waterfront reform, who was subsequently employed by the office of Industrial Relations Minister, Peter Reith. These allegations were backed up by the evidence - including letters, diary notes, and records of telephone conversations - which clearly show the government for what they are:

liars who have been set on smashing the MUA from the outset.

Although the documents caused the government acute discomfort, it seems that they have for now ridden-out the storm. Their problem however, is that with the MUA's conspiracy court case against them pending, all of this material will again become the focus of public scrutiny, which could be extremely damaging in an election year.

WP: Do you think it is possible that the dock war will be reignited?

LC: Actually, I think that it is inevitable. Patrick and the government have unfinished business on behalf of the entire Australian ruling class, and they are manoeuvring to complete the job.

In the last few days, both the administrators and Patrick have presented deeds of arrangement: documents outlining how the labour hire companies (front companies set up by Patrick) are to proceed up until the main court case.

Both deeds recommend: the shedding of hundreds of jobs; wage cuts of up to 30 percent; the outsourcing of "non-essential" services on the wharves (cleaning and maintenance which is still controlled by the MUA); the introduction of non-union labour; and the dropping of all court proceedings against Patrick!

The creditors meeting at which these deeds were to have been debated and voted on was to have been held on 25 May. At the request of the MUA, the Federal Court has postponed this meeting for two weeks. It is likely that when that meeting does take place, the MUA will reject the deeds, which will then give the administrators a pretext for liquidating the companies and the wharfie's jobs.

Should this happen, and I think that it is probable, the dispute will be back to the picket lines, but with the MUA in a weakened position.

WP: Why would the MUA's position be weaker than at the time when the workers were reinstated?

LC: Firstly, because the MUA and wider union movement has invested so much moral authority in the ruling class legal system that it will be politically much more difficult to defy court rulings than it was while the workers were locked out. The government and Patrick will claim that the MUA only accepts the referee's decisions when it benefits the MUA. This will help isolate the MUA, and give the government much greater latitude to use maximum violence to smash the picket lines.

Secondly because much of the active support that had been generated before the reinstatement, will now have been dissipated, and will need to be built afresh. This is certainly possible, as hundreds of thousands of trade unionists in Australia rightly see that the attack on the MUA is an attack on all unions. If this support can again be rallied to the cause of the MUA, and if the strategy of meandering through endless Court hearings is abandoned in favour of generalised industrial action, it is still possible that the workers could have a real victory - not the pseudo victory represented by the High Court's ruling. ■

Solidarity with NZ firefighters

Recent weeks in New Zealand have seen a welfare bashing budget, the mass sacking of the country's 1500 professional firefighters and continued attacks on the public education system, writes **Carlene Davies** of Workers Power, New Zealand/Aotearoa.

FOR SEVERAL years now there has been a budget surplus - an indication that the New Zealand economy has seen a small recovery. But it is a recovery gained on the backs of the working class. Sick leave benefits have been cut and entitlement to this, and invalidity benefit, tightened. Everyone receiving a benefit will be required to be part of the Community Wage scheme - a euphemism for workfare.

Slave labour

The Community Wage is the dole plus \$25 per week for twenty hours work. It is little more than slave labour and will be applied even to single parent claimants, with no provision for

childcare. Tertiary students have not escaped the attacks. They will no longer be able to claim Emergency Unemployment Benefit - a fallback for many students over the summer break. With summer jobs becoming increasingly scarce this will massively increase the drop out rate.

The government is also trying to mimic its Australian counterparts with the 1500 professional firefighters in the country have just been given their notice. They are to be offered their jobs back on "volunteer" contracts - with lower rates of pay and worse conditions. The Fire Service is also being restructured with the number of firefighters on an appliance being cut from

four to three. This means job losses and safety problems.

Support

Firefighters' support committees have sprung up and the Council of Trade Unions has developed a national action plan. The firefighters themselves have talked about occupying stations once their old contracts expire and there may be strike action. Much of the campaign relies on an amorphous notion of public support. The fact that the union movement has flown into action at all is in part due to the recent MUA dispute in Australia.

For the past seven years workers in New Zealand have lived under the

union busting Employment Contracts Act. This has pushed union membership down to less than a third of the workforce and crushed the power of many unions. Only workers in a few public sector unions, like the teachers, retain national collective contracts. The latest attacks are a clear sign that the government is ready to up the ante. The response from the union movement and the working class needs to be swift.

The rebuilding of the union movement under rank and file control is what the New Zealand working class needs to do to defeat the governments attacks. The cross union committees formed to support the firefighters are a good start. ■

SCOTLAND: Socialist Party crisis

Breaking up along national lines?

THE SOCIALIST Party – formerly known as the Militant Tendency – has had a large and politically significant base in Scotland for some years. In the late 1980s, as a result of leading the campaign against the Poll Tax, *Militant* leader Tommy Sheridan won widespread respect and popularity from the working class of Glasgow. An autonomous Scottish wing of the Militant Tendency was established, called Scottish Militant Labour (SML).

Yet now, reports reveal that the organisation is in deep crisis. Its April 1998 *Members Bulletin* – which has been leaked to the *Weekly Worker* – reveals that the SP could be on the verge of losing its Scottish organisation altogether.

The immediate reason for this is a proposal from SML to dissolve itself completely into a new Scottish Socialist Party. This party has emerged from the looser network of the Scottish Socialist Alliance, through which SML has been campaigning for several years. It will call for the full independence of Scotland from the United Kingdom. It will also, by definition, involve a final organisational break from the Socialist Party (SP) by SML, which would hope to become a fully functioning “Scottish Section” of the SP’s international organisation, the Committee for a Workers’ International (CWI).

The development of this crisis is not surprising. SML has for years been accommodating to the rise of nationalist consciousness among sections of the Scottish working class. Now nationalism is having a disintegrative effect on its organisational integrity.

This follows a long pattern for the SP and its predecessor.

Throughout the 1970s and 1980s Militant adapted to Labourism, committing itself to the Utopian illusion that the entire Labour Party could be transformed into an instrument for overthrowing capitalism. This led it to advance a thoroughly reformist programme for peaceful socialist change in Britain through parliamentary legislation, the so-called “enabling act”. It also led Militant to back down time and again in the face of attacks by Labour’s right-wing.

In 1987-88 Militant passively accepted the abolition of the 12,000-strong Labour Party Young Socialists, which it controlled. In 1984-5 it demobilised the struggle of Liverpool City Council against the Tories – putting up the rates by 18% – rather than risk a split with Neil Kinnock’s Labour leadership.

Minority

The result of this opportunism? A split in its own ranks. In 1991, when Militant was forced to recognise the failure of its strategy and decided to stand its own candidates against Labour, a minority, led by its former chief theoretician Ted Grant, split away. This minority refused to abandon the former perspective.

Another split ensued from a short-lived attempt to accommodate to black nationalism. A paper for black and Asian workers and youth was launched under the name *Panther* in the early 1990s. Quasi-separatist language and unclear goals quickly gave rise to a fully fledged split – “Independent Panther” – with a programme and methods even more explicitly influenced by separatist ideology.

In Scotland today the increase in support for the Scottish National Party (SNP), as a result of disenchantment with Blair’s New Labour, is accompanied by a sharp growth in support for

BY RICHARD BRENNER

national independence. One recent poll even showed the SNP ahead of Labour for the first time. SML’s legitimate concern is therefore to relate to mounting dissatisfaction with Labour and to build an alternative that can prevent the SNP from capitalising on it. But the methods they have used and now wish to deepen are of a piece with the past errors of the Militant/SP brand of centrism: liquidationism.

Marxists uphold the right of all nations to separate and establish independent states if they so choose. We fight against any attempt to retain a nation within a state against its will as a fundamental denial of democratic rights. But, at the same time, we have no positive interest in the break-up of larger states into several smaller ones or of actively promoting independence where a majority of the nation in question do not desire it.

Lenin explained the attitude of revolutionary communists to the national question with characteristic clarity: “Marxists are, of course, opposed to federation and decentralisation, for the simple reason that capitalism requires for its development the largest and most centralised possible states. Other conditions being equal, the class conscious proletariat will always stand for the larger state . . .”

Independence

At the same time, without positively advocating independence, Lenin upheld the right of nations to self-determination, including the right to form independent states if they wished. This would be the only way to prevent nationalists monopolising the mass movement.

In 1918, when the Ukrainian national assembly proclaimed a republic, but still did not declare separation from Russia, Lenin declared:

“We now see a national movement in the Ukraine and we say that we stand unconditionally for the Ukrainian people’s complete and unlimited freedom . . . We are going to tell the Ukrainians they can go ahead and arrange their life as they see fit. But we are going to stretch out a fraternal hand to the Ukrainian workers and tell them that together with them we are going to fight against their bourgeoisie and ours.”

The organisational conclusions to be drawn from this approach were straightforward and direct. The revolutionary party exists to overthrow the state. It therefore requires a centralised and disciplined structure across the state in question. Thus, the Bolsheviks in 1918 did not establish a separate Ukrainian party but sought to organise right across the former Russian empire.

In Scotland today the majority of the population do not wish to separate from the UK. There is no positive reason why socialists should campaign for independence. Indeed, it would be a retrograde step for the unity of the working class in the struggle against the British capitalist state.

Lenin’s method applied to Scotland today means that revolutionaries should support the *right* of Scotland to separate if a majority wish it, whilst at the same time campaigning unequivocally *against* national separation and for the closest unity of working class struggle against Blair’s government and the capitalists who stand behind it.

Until now, SML has shied away from clearly calling for separation, perhaps aware that this is a break with the

established method of Marxism, perhaps constrained by their relations with the SP. It has, nevertheless, often tentatively suggested that the break-up of the UK would create more favourable conditions for the working class, without ever giving a convincing reason as to why this should be the case.

But now the Rubicon is set to be crossed. The new Scottish Socialist Party would represent the logical conclusion of the slow but sure nationalist degeneration of SML in two ways: by calling for the break-up of the UK and by abandoning the idea of a single democratic centralist party of the working class to fight the capitalist state.

Do we see a last-minute recognition of the need to combat this accommodation to nationalism from the SP leadership in London? Not a bit of it. With a typical combination of opportunist appetite and bureaucratic self-preservation, SP general secretary Peter Taaffe fails to fight against the slogan of national separation or to challenge the SML’s unprincipled accommodation to Scottish nationalism. Instead, he has been spurred to oppose the SML leaders only on the issue of their organisational liquidation into the new Scottish Socialist Party and the organisational threat that this represents to his apparatus.

That is why, despite insisting that SML must continue to hold meetings and collect its members’ subscriptions, Taaffe accepts and reasserts that:

“Scottish Militant Labour is an autonomous part of the Socialist Party.”

Worse still, he goes so far – at this of all times – as to downplay the need for a centralised political organisation:

“. . . today the capitalists and reformists, both left as well as right, have linked the idea of ‘democratic centralism’ to the experience of Stalinism. It is, therefore, better now to use the term ‘democratic unity’ to explain the character of the CWI and its different national sections or parties.”

Capitulation

Quite apart from the idea that there is anything new about the bourgeoisie trying to discredit the idea of centralised organisation (though only when the working class attempts it), this is a major capitulation to the SML’s main point – that there is no need for a party which can unite and centralise the action of the workers against the capitalist UK state and for the construction of a working class government in Britain.

Taaffe and the SP leadership are obviously floundering. They cannot attack the core political and methodological errors of SML because they are responsible for them – for accommodating their programme repeatedly to whichever force assumes influence over sections of the working class, for adapting to the slogans and prejudices of Scottish nationalism, for tactical cowardice and opportunism in relations with other forces, and for abandoning the Leninist principles of centralised organisation.

The consequences are leading Taaffe and his centrist tendency to an inevitable conclusion: a new and immensely damaging split. Militants who want to avoid a further cycle of political accommodation and organisational collapse should contact Workers Power and the LRCI to discuss building a principled Trotskyist alternative to the wreckage of the SP/SML. ■

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.



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 the imperialist 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 revolutionary documents of the first four congresses of the Third International and 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. If you are a class conscious fighter against capitalism; if you are an internationalist—join us! ★

Workers power

INSIDE:

- Prague Spring 1968
- Is Scottish Militant going its separate way?
- India and the bomb

Socialism, Internationalism, Revolution

British Section of the League for a Revolutionary Communist International

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Recognition: Union rights... Labour's wrong

Fight the bosses' workplace tyranny

LABOUR'S WHITE Paper on rights at work leaves Britain with the most restrictive laws on union rights in Europe. Even Tony Blair says so - in his introduction to the proposed new law.

Blair reassures the bosses that Thatcherite labour flexibility is alive and well. There will be no return to flying picket line or strikes without ballots under the new law. The "third way" - sweatshop labour, workplace bullying, compulsory overtime, and summary sackings - will remain the norm for "cool Britannia".

The bill contains a few gestures calculated to calm the anger of the union bureaucrats and - just maybe, if we organise from below - provide some respite to workers on the receiving end of the bosses' anti-union offensive (see summary, right). The employers have got much, but not all, of what they wanted on recognition ballots. Meanwhile the workers have got the removal of some of the most vindictive aspects of the Tory laws.

The law defines New Labour's project perfectly. It keeps the key laws that limit strikes, picketing and rank and file organisation - laws that the union leaders have themselves

used to control the membership and head off strikes they do not want. But it also gives the full time officials back their "respectability" and their place at the negotiating table in industrial relations.

The recognition law is a classic fudge that leaves everything to play for on the ground.

For the employers there is the ridiculously undemocratic rule that, no matter how big the ballot majority in favour of recognition, it must be more than 40% of those eligible to vote, counting abstentions as no votes. The agreement also excludes five million workers in companies employing less than 20 workers.

For the unions there is the right to define the "bargaining unit", i.e. who will vote. Another concession, apparently wrung from Blair by the threat of backbench revolt, is the right to automatic recognition if you can prove 50% + 1 union membership.

The law is designed to minimise class struggle in the workplace. Money is even being set aside to train managers and union reps to work in peace and harmony. But Blair's legal fudge may open up the opportunity to rebuild trade unionism from below.

In the firms where derecog-



Critchley labels workers sacked over recognition

niton has reduced unions to the status of underground guerrilla fighters, the law will be the signal to come down from the hills and launch the offensive. The 50% + 1 concession gives us the best ever argument for mass recruitment campaigns. The union leaders should be forced to nominate lists of target firms and offer cut price membership deals to every worker there.

Where recognition ballots are necessary, the rank and file in the workplace must take control. This is vital. Recognition will be won from within. We need a welter of workplace bulletins, stickers, posters and

web sites, paid for by the unions but controlled by the members in order to win the ballot votes.

The fight for recognition must go alongside the fight to rebuild the strength of the unions. Unless unions are strong enough to demand and win an end to individual contracts, a return to recognised pay structures, and to stop the endless erosion of conditions in the public sector through Best Value privatisation, a "recognised" union will have no power.

So it is up to us: the rank and file must seize control of the recognition struggles, using the law where possible to

strengthen union organisation. The bosses will stop at nothing to sabotage this struggle and the union bureaucrats only want a return to the quiet life around the table.

To end the regime of employer tyranny at work means forgetting "fairness". Under Blair, the employers will always get more fairness than the workers.

What we demand from Labour is control: the right to veto management decisions that affect our lives, decent pay and conditions and, in the words of the late Labour leader John Smith: employment rights from day one. ■

The Fairness At Work White Paper pledges include:

□ Forcing employers to recognise and negotiate with unions where either 50% of the relevant workforce are union members or where 40% of the total workforce vote for recognition in a ballot.

□ The legal right to union representation at disciplinary hearings and grievance procedures.

□ Reducing the qualifying period for unfair dismissal - which employers often use to sack then re-employ workers to deny them workplace rights - from two years to one.

□ Abolishing the upper limit on compensation for unfair dismissal that means employers can victimise you for the price of £12,000.

□ Outlawing "blacklisting" and workplace discrimination against trade union members.

□ Outlawing contracts that require you to sign away legal rights and also "zero-hours" contracts where your rest breaks are unpaid.

□ Removing employers' right to sabotage strike ballots with legal technicalities over membership lists.

□ Sacking strikers taking part in lawful industrial action will become unfair dismissal. ■

SOLIDARITY WITH INDONESIAN WORKERS

WHILE SOLDIERS supporting the Suharto dictatorship in Indonesia were shooting down students in the streets, the British Labour government was approving more arms sales to Indonesia.

What are these arms? The government refuses to say. But you can see them in action on the streets of Jakarta.

Water cannon and gas regularly used against demonstrators - supplied by Britain. Alvis and Scorpion light tanks guarding the Presidential Palace - made by GKN, in Britain. Armoured cars, "designed

specifically for internal security and public order roles" racing through the streets, terrorising demonstrators - made by GKN, in Britain. The first of 16 trainer/attack Hawk military jets due to be delivered this month - made by British Aerospace, in Britain.

Robin Cook once declared that he would pursue an "ethical foreign policy". Rarely has the hypocrisy of Labour in government been so quickly revealed. As with all capitalist governments, Labour's ethics come a poor second to the profits of the British arms industry.

Robin Cook was forced to reveal

in parliament that 56 military export licences had been granted since Labour came to power last year. This is on top of all the arms approved by the Tories that last year Cook said it was neither "practical nor realistic" to stop being exported.

But Labour's lack of concern for the Indonesian people does not stop here. Gordon Brown set off recently to lecture Suharto on the need to get on and implement the IMF austerity package agreed by the dictatorship. The package was designed to save the dictatorship while making the masses pay for the crisis and endure yet more

poverty and hardship.

Trade unionists and Labour Party members should denounce the government's trade in arms and demand a halt to all exports of military weapons to the Indonesian regime. We should also demand Labour ends all support for the IMF deal and sends unconditional aid to the workers of Indonesia.

The Labour leaders will resist. But they should be hounded with resolutions, pickets and demonstrations until they are forced to abandon their disgraceful attacks on the Indonesian people struggling against a vicious dictatorship. ■

Stop all arms sales to Indonesia!