



Euro-MPs snub for Labour leaders

CLAUSE 4 BLOW FOR BLAIR

THE campaign in defence of Clause Four is gaining ground. The Labour Party leadership's hopes of an easy victory at the coming 29 April conference are fading into the background.

The 32 Labour members of the European parliament who this week signed a statement — published in the 'Guardian' on Tuesday — rejecting the attempt to scrap the clause committing the party to the common ownership of the means of production is the latest blow suffered by the Blair-Prescott leadership.

Alex Falconer, MEP for Mid-Scotland and Fife and one of those supporting the statement, said:

'Many more MEPs are unhappy with the way the whole thing has been handled.

'With Britain and the rest of the world in crisis, this is no time to jettison this powerful weapon for social and economic justice.

'We oppose privatisation and believe that common ownership should remain part of Labour's core beliefs and values.'

The stand by the Euro-MPs comes amidst growing opposition to Blair and company from constituency Labour parties and trade union branches and bodies.

The question of the renationalisation of those industries privatised by the Tories is also becoming a major issue in the working-class movement.

Last week Blair, Prescott and shadow transport spokesman Michael Meacher all pointedly refused to pledge a Labour government to the renationalisation of the rail industry.

A simple pledge that the railways would be renationalised without compensation would stop the Tory plans dead in their tracks.

Yet Blair's refusal to make any such pledge comes hard on the heels of the clearest evidence that rail privatisation will mean the break-up of a national railway system, the loss of thousands of jobs, and the destruction of many services for the travelling public.

Slashed

■ The number of stations able to issue tickets for the whole of the privatised network will be slashed to 300, under a fifth of the present 1,500-plus.

This announcement by rail regulator John Swift was met with a storm of protest and forced a hasty retreat by the Tories.

This would mean a 50 mile journey for some travellers if they want to take advantage of the range of tickets currently offered by British Rail.

■ The privatisation scandal gets worse every day. The chairmen of Britain's ten privatised water companies have received salary rises of up to an incredible 571 per cent and benefited from multi-million-

BY THE EDITOR

pound share and pension packages, it was revealed last week. The top 25 senior water company bosses became at least £500,000 each better off after privatisation, including five new millionaires as a result of executive share-option schemes and enhanced pensions totalling £20 million.

The overall pay of the chairman of Midlands Electricity, Bryan Townsend, increased by almost 50 per cent last year to as much as £290,000, despite his decision to step down to a part-time role.

And while the Labour leaders allow this 'Old Corruption' to go almost unchallenged, 150,000 jobs have been lost in the former public utilities — with ever-more calls for pay cuts for low-paid workers in the name of 'greater efficiency'.

Millions

It's millions for a few and the sack for thousands.

■ Press reports last week indicated that the leaders of the biggest unions want to strike a deal with Blair in which they would back his re-writing of Clause Four in return for a promise to renationalise the water industry and any parts of British Rail that might be privatised.

It was further rumoured that some union leaders would support Blair's dumping of Clause Four in return for a pledge of greater regulatory control over the privatised industries on the part of a Blair cabinet.

■ This behind-the-scenes horse-trading must be rejected out of hand. Clause Four is a principle, not something that can be bought and sold.

In any case, is the labour movement to abandon the miners and other workers whose industries have been sold off to City sharks for a pittance? The Labour leaders have already reneged on their earlier promise that the coal industry would be renationalised.

There must be no retreat on Clause Four. A movement must be built throughout the working class, including Labour Party members, trades unionists and public service workers to defeat Blair, Prescott and commit the Labour Party to the renationalisation, without compensation, of all the industries sold off by the Tories.



YOMI IGBO, a 48-year-old Nigerian, was attacked in his own home last November by eight police and immigration officials — as a result of his campaigns on behalf of refugees and unregistered migrants. State officials went to his home on the pretext that he was an illegal immigrant — despite the fact that he has been resident in Britain since 1956, and was a Lambeth councillor for eight years. Igbo was not charged with breaking immigration regulations — but with assaulting the police, and his case came before Lavender Hill magistrates' court on 6

January. 'Yomi is not guilty,' said his wife Sonia Igbo, who was at the court. 'He is a victim of police harassment.' Yomi Igbo's two daughters, aged 13 and 15, saw the police attack their father. 'My daughters were very distressed,' said Mrs Igbo. 'It happened right in front of them.' Mrs Igbo thanked the Amnesty Campaign for Refugees and Unregistered Migrants' (ACRUM) for organising a picket of the court (above) on the day. 'It is good support for my husband, and help for his cause', she said. The case was postponed until 21 March. Photo: Maggie Nicol

WORKERS INTERNATIONAL
To Rebuild the Fourth International
PO Box 735, London SW8 1YB. Telephone: 071-582 8882

DEFEND CHECHNYA!

Public Meeting
Friday 20 January

7.30pm, Amadaeus Centre, Maida Vale, W9
(cnr of Shirland Road and Sutherland Avenue. Nearest tube: Warwick Ave)
See page 3 for details

Workers Press

Britain's disappeared

MORE than 2 million people 'disappeared' from the 1991 census, including a third of young men aged between 20 and 30 in some inner city areas, a new analysis of the census returns has shown.

These people are what bourgeois sociology calls 'the underclass' — the homeless, the unemployed and those who have dropped out of 'normal' society: 'non-people'. According to such thinkers, those in the so-called 'underclass' are there either by choice — they have opted for a different 'lifestyle' — or they are there out of fecklessness. It is obvious that even if the homeless were willing to fill in the census form the question: 'What is your normal residence?' has no meaning.

Also missing were 4 per cent of people over 85 and a significant number of infants. Ethnic minorities were more reluctant to take part: 4 per cent of the Pakistani community and 5 per cent of the black community were missing, compared with 2 per cent of all whites. At the last general election, 700,000 eligible people were missing from the electoral register.

While much of this can be explained by attempts to avoid being registered to pay for the poll tax, Steve Simpson of Manchester University, who helped carry out the study, says that this is only part of the story: there is widespread resistance to authority and the filling-in of forms.

* * * * *

THE census figures themselves — which undoubtedly would show a far worse picture if the 'missing' were included — are a graphic indication of the social crisis that now exists in Britain.

But Britain reflects the same pattern of crisis that emerges from looking at all the big capitalist countries — let alone the colonial and semi-colonial countries where millions live every day in grinding poverty, starving or facing the prospect of starving, without access to housing or elementary sanitation.

The United Nations estimates that one in six people in western Europe live below the poverty line and in New York a quarter of the city's population have been forced to stay in shelters at some point in the last five years. In the US as a whole, one in ten people — 26 million people — receive food stamps to supplement their low or non-existent incomes.

The depth of the social crisis revealed by the British 1991 census is not the result of 'Tory policies'. It arises from the very nature of the capitalist system at the end of the 20th century. Increasingly capitalism has no use for millions of people: it offers them no hope of a job, no prospect of a decent place to live, no future in its own terms. Capitalism has only one interest in people: as a source of profit. From this point of view more and more people are 'surplus to requirement'.

* * * * *

THE growing ranks of the officially 'disappeared' is causing concern to sections of the ruling class. 'People who do not register with the state may lose many of the rights of citizens,' said the 'Guardian' in its 6 January editorial. 'But they also drift free of a sense of duty too.'

Behind the 'Guardian's' concern is the ruling class's fear of the social disorder engendered by its own capitalist system.

This is even more clearly expressed when the 'Guardian' says that the non-cooperation with the census 'speaks of a growing breakdown both of the working and the trustworthiness of the state. It is tangible proof of weakening of civic bonds of Britain today.'

The state is in danger of not being able to carry out its task of protecting the ruling class's interests. Growing numbers of young people have either no interest in or contempt for all the 'official' political parties that in one way or another play their part in the state's task.

These young people have no time for the Labour Party or its leader Tony Blair. And the leaders of the trade union movement have in the main turned their backs on this most oppressed section of the working class.

The labour movement will continue to ignore the homeless and the unemployed at its peril. The racists and fascists are already at work amongst them, with their usual filth: blaming the problems that millions of young people face on easily-targeted groups — black and migrant workers.

Only a socialist programme based on the common ownership of the means of production can lay the basis for a society which will guarantee everybody a job and a home as a right. That is why it is important to fight to defend this principle in the labour movement — as represented by the fight to keep Clause 4 in the Labour Party constitution.

Pointers to a state break-in

BY PAUL DAY

THE OFFICES of the Colin Roach Centre (CRC) and the Hackney Community Defence Association (HCDA), in east London, were burgled just before Christmas.

Equipment was smashed and stolen, files were removed and graffiti was scrawled on the walls. There are indications of state involvement.

The thieves broke into the basement offices of Sheba Feminist Publishers, then smashed their way through three sets of bolted doors. Even the uniformed police called for insurance purposes agreed that CRC was the target.

The computer and fax were taken. Other word processing and video equipment was smashed. The printer and computer leads were left, as were photographic equipment and a portable typewriter.

The thieves took tapes of a private meeting with a Sinn Fein councillor, along with posters advertising events organ-

ised by the CRC and organisations based there. HCDA files were scattered around the room. It is not yet known whether any are missing.

Graffiti included 'Keep clear queer', (on a Lesbian and Gay poster), and 'Fuck!', (on a poster advertising a picket of Stoke Newington Police Station). On the corridor to the front door, where the burglars exited, were the words 'Hard luck matey'.

Uniformed officers took some details, but made no effort to fingerprint a spraycan and pen which had been left behind.

The timing of the raid, early on 23 December, itself suggests state intervention. Later that day a picket was held outside Stoke Newington Police Station demanding an account of the beating to death of Oluwashiji Lapite in police custody.

Support

Such campaigns have frequently received support from the HCDA. For this picket, however, the main support work came from the Newham Monitoring Project, with some

assistance from the CRC and HCDA. The CRC arranged for solicitors to be present, and agreed to assist with stewarding the 200-strong demonstration. Because of the break-in they arrived late.

There was broad press coverage of the picket. Television and radio reports had announced it beforehand. A number of stations carried reports as it happened.

This was surprising given the complete lack of coverage of Oluwashiji Lapite's death. The HCDA said: 'the implication seemed to be that there was going to be a riot'.

Had that happened the HCDA and CRC, which have been at the centre of exposing police corruption in Stoke Newington, could not have responded because of the theft of their computer.

Again, had there been a riot, people would have been taken to the CRC to make witness statements and obtain help. The graffiti seem to have been intended to foster divisions between users of the centre.

Apart from the provocation

against the HCDA's work that day, there seems to have been another main target. On their way out the burglars dropped a bank statement for DIS. This new service stores information on police officers involved in crime, violence, frame-ups and corruption.

Solicitors

DIS has already attracted state attention — letters from solicitors have ended up in Stoke Newington police station and the Data Protection Office made inquiries to discover 'if the software was pirated'. It is likely that the computer was taken in an (unsuccessful) effort to obtain DIS files.

All workers' organisations must be aware of the threat of such state activities.

■ The HCDA is appealing for donations, (both financial and computer equipment), to assist it with continuing its work. They can be sent to: HCDA, Colin Roach Centre, 10A Bradbury St, London N16.

■ Phone 071-249 8086/0193 for further details.

Where have all the letters gone?

An appeal from the editor to Workers Press readers

IT'S always been an uphill struggle to get correspondence going in Workers Press. There have been notable exceptions to this — debate on 'the Scottish question' is one example. However, even then, it seems to be the same small group of letter writers who seem to contribute.

I am writing here because in the past couple of months the plaintive cry 'We welcome letters', with no letters actually received, has been far too common an occurrence.

If you've been reading Workers Press for some time you'll know that we go out of our way not to suppress views we disagree with but which are seeking to build a movement in the interests of the working class — that is views that aren't obviously fascist or in support of the ruling class.

On the other hand Workers Press is the weekly paper of the Workers Revolutionary Party and we're not going to hide what we're doing and thinking.

What this means is that this paper is among the most open to YOUR views, opinions, news, etc. If you don't write in you are missing a big opportunity to express the needs of that section of the working class in which you are operating. I'm not saying this in a sense of arrogance of the superiority of our paper. This paper needs such a response and to have such an injection of working-class life.

What I'm really asking for is a response from every reader. You may think that we're trying to build up the status of the paper in the working-class movement so that at some later stage the 'WRP' can bring out its secret agenda and ram that down the throat of the readership that's built up.

If we were trying to build a political 'sect' that could well be true — but I am confident that's not our agenda. WRP members are all trying to build the necessary consciousness in the working class for it to overthrow the current capitalist ruling class — the bourgeoisie — and for that class to take power in its own hands. We believe that needs a 'revolutionary party' and the building of a workers' state to suppress the bourgeoisie.

There are many questions on what this means, how to get from here to there, and so on, which cause many discussions in the WRP and on which there are disagreements — but that's part of the rough and tumble of life. How boring it would be if even two people agreed on everything!

But hopefully not all Workers Press readers agree with the idea of a revolutionary party or a workers' state and we can have a lively and interesting discussion on how we can achieve a freer and better society. However, during this discussion, we are going to take part in working-class actions on the road to 'socialism' and 'communism'.

So, now the 'bottom line'. This confused appeal is an attempt to stir every reader of this paper — whether they agree with its 'line' or not. Write to us about Workers Press.

If you agree that we need Workers Press send regular reports of what's happening in your area. Don't worry about spelling or grammar — we can sort that out. Encourage others to send in reports and letters and to read the final result.

But if you don't like Workers Press tell us why. What sort of paper do you want? Is the Workers Press wasting its time? What can improve it?

I believe that the Workers Press can play a significant role in building the working-class movement of the world. But it needs to come into a living relationship with that movement. On a very basic level the working class itself needs to come into a relationship with itself, it needs to communicate with itself. Are political papers the way to do this? Is there some other way?

Whether you support or like Workers Press or not I want you to write and tell us why — it'll only cost 19p for the stamp!

Is anybody out there?

**WE WELCOME LETTERS!
SEND THEM TO: WORKERS
PRESS, PO BOX 735,
LONDON SW8 1YB
— OR PHONE 071-582 8882**

Coming Soon

SATURDAY 21 JANUARY: Scottish Coalition Against the Criminal Justice Act demonstration. Assemble 11.30am, Kingstables Road Edinburgh.

SATURDAY 21 JANUARY: NUJ march for trade union rights at Wapping/News International: 'Build a

Wapping union'. Assemble 9.45am, Tower Hill, London. Bring banners.

SATURDAY 11 FEBRUARY: Hounslow Trades Council anti-racist march and rally. Assemble 12.45pm, Thornbury Playing Fields, London Road, Isleworth, London. Details: J.R. Patrick, 081-891 4482.

WORKERS PRESS £3,000 FUND

BY POPULAR demand the 'fund column' returns! 'Hanging-on' and 'fingernails' would be appropriate words to use in describing the financial state of Workers Press over the whole period of absence of this column.

This has been going on for a long time and is not just the result of this column not being written. I have talked before of why it's important not just for the work in Britain or for the publication of Workers Press that we have money. There are comrades in other countries — South Africa, Hungary, Namibia, and others — who look to us for financial help. We give when we can and we also have regular commitments to some of these comrades.

Our financial crisis is not that Workers Press supporters are giving less money, in fact they are giving more. But more demands are being made as our work develops. It's hard work looking around for new sources of finance — but look we must. Help us look. Send money and ideas. Try to raise money for us with others. We must cast our nets wide.

The £400 from the Midlands that came in this morning just as we were at our wits end was much appreciated. (I'm told that a special safety net's been set up outside the window of our office.)

Mike Cooke
Send money payable to 'Workers Press', PO Box 735, London SW8 1YB.

From the Circulation Department:

EVERYONE had some time off over Christmas and the New Year, so you should now be refreshed and ready for the drive to get Workers Press into the hands of all those campaigning to defend Clause Four.

Many trades unions and trades councils, as well as local Labour Party branches, will be holding special meetings to discuss the Blair proposals.

Some trades union leaders believe the Labour leaders will do a deal that in exchange for their votes to scrap Clause Four a Labour government will renationalise the water industry.

Even if the Labour leaders kept their word, what about the railways, the buses, the docks, the mines, gas, electricity, the NHS and housing and all put out of work by privatisation?

So you need to think about people you know in various organisations and how you are going to call on them and get them to take Workers Press each week.

Make sure you know when meetings on Clause Four are to take place, and make sure the Workers Press is on sale.

All those people discussing Clause Four need Workers Press. We must make sure they have it!

Urgent appeal for books and journals

OUR comrades in South Africa, Namibia and India are crying out for basic Marxist books.

Immediately we want copies of: 'Revolution Betrayed' by Trotsky; 'Theories of Imperialism' and 'Trotskyism the Marxism of Today' by Tom Kemp; and 'The Young Trotsky' by Max Eastman.

We also need copies of 'Tasks of the Fourth International', 'Fourth International' and 'Labour Review'.

Please send all books and journals to Workers International, PO Box 735, London, SW8 1YB.

South East London

Christmas quiz

South East London WRP have asked us to publish the answers to their Christmas quiz. Here they are:

- 1: The Olympic Games
- 2: Anthony and Cleopatra
- 3: Napoleon Bonaparte
- 4: Sir Christopher Wren
- 5: Alice in Wonderland
- 6: For Whom The Bell Tolls
- 7: The Royal Tournament
- 8: Lennon and McCartney
- 9: Charles the Second
- 10: Good King Wenceslas
- 11: Bird of Paradise
- 12: Tristan da Cunha
- 13: The Elgin Marbles
- 14: Margaret Thatcher
- 15: Treasure Island

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Irish workers resist longer hours

A SECTION of Irish workers has once again demonstrated that it will resist the attempts of the bosses and the state to produce a cheap-labour economy more amenable to exploitation by monopolies.

BY JACKIE VANCE

The workers at the General Motors subsidiary, Packard Electric, at Tallaght, Dublin, have rejected company proposals — rubber-stamped by the government established Labour Court — which included extending the working week by two unpaid hours, a pay freeze until 1995, and the elimination of a ten-minute tea break.

This follows protracted disputes last year at Irish Steel and the air maintenance section of Aer Lingus when the wages and conditions of skilled craftsmen were savagely attacked.

Packard management had been seeking cost savings of £4 million per year from the workers. Following the ballot which rejected the longer working week and the pay-freeze attacks, the company said it would now proceed with a redundancy programme as a contract which would have secured the jobs for the next five years would now go to another Packard Europe plant.

During the negotiations prior to the ballot it also suggested that it was seriously considering the closing of the Tallaght factory and its relocation in Hungary.

It has factories in Portugal, Spain and Turkey which also supply the same car components that are produced at Tallaght — wiring harnesses for Opel cars, another General Motors subsidiary.

Last year General Motors cut 2,500 jobs in Germany and 300 in Belgium in automotive component plants similar to Tallaght.

The workers' decision to fight the company's proposals was made in two separate ballots despite the recommendations to accept by the trade union officials and the shop stewards' committee.

The unions involved are the Amalgamated Transport and

General Workers Union (the Irish section of the British-based TGWU) and the largest union in Ireland, the SIPTU general workers' union.

Already earning below the national average wage, and in the face of a concerted propaganda onslaught from the government and the media to save the jobs with much-worsened conditions, they have demonstrated a fighting class-consciousness.

Their conditions have been under attack since the ending of a 15-month dispute and a bitter six-week strike in 1987. On that occasion, because of the solidarity of the pickets, the management had to use helicopters to move essential equipment to Britain.

Today the Packard workers in their fight against increased — and unpaid — productivity have to face a coalition government which includes the so-called 'socialist' parties of Labour and the Democratic Left.

Remnants

Democratic Left is one of the ex-Stalinist remnants of the Workers Party — which had its origins in Official Sinn Fein and the Official IRA.

The role of these parties in government is to try to persuade workers that employment can be maintained and new jobs created only by ensuring that labour costs in Ireland do not force the monopolies to invest elsewhere.

This same argument is used in every country by the apologists for imperialism. In their defence of hard-won wages and conditions the Packard workers are striking a blow for internationalism.

DEFEND CHECHNYA!

THE heroic defiance of the people of Chechnya against the Russian tanks, guns and planes demands the unconditional support of workers everywhere. As in the imperialist-backed slaughter in Bosnia, this is a real test of internationalism that demands more than sympathy or token resolutions.

The Workers International to Rebuild the Fourth International supports the Chechen people's right to self-determination, as we did when the country was part of the former Soviet Union. This right was guaranteed by Lenin and the Bolsheviks. It was only with the usurpation of power by Stalin and the destruction of soviet democracy that the peoples of the Soviet republics became imprisoned in the 'prison house of nations'.

To go beyond sympathy, the Workers International has called a public meeting to discuss what the working class can do internationally — please make every effort to attend.

■ **DEFEND CHECHNYA! Public Meeting, FRIDAY 20th JANUARY, 7.30 pm, AMADAEUS CENTRE, Maida Vale, London.** (Corner of Shirland Road and Sutherland Avenue.) Nearest Underground Station: Warwick Avenue. **CHAIRMAN: Geoff Pilling (Workers International Executive Cttee.). SPEAKERS: Lee Bryant (Researcher for Bosnia and Herzegovina Information Centre), Peter Fryer (eye-witness to the 1956 Hungarian Revolution and author of 'Hungarian Tragedy'), Simon Pirani (Workers International Executive Cttee), Jackie Vance (Workers International Executive Cttee).** Invited: Chechnyan living in Britain. **TIME FOR QUESTIONS AND DISCUSSION.**



Chechen women ready to fight against the Russian tanks and planes that attack Grozny

Tribute to eight-year strike

FROM TOM OWEN
IN SHEFFIELD

ON NEW Year's Eve the Keaton's engineering strike was called off. This strike was one of the longest in the history of British trade unionism.

The strike started on 1 July 1986 over the issue of new rotas forced through by management. These were unacceptable to the workers not just because of the deterioration of working practices, but also because of their serious consequences for health and safety.

The membership of the engineering union, the AEU, voted by a two to one majority for

strike action. Management's response was to sack the work-force and offer them new contracts on even worse conditions.

The strike was widely supported in the Sheffield area with trade union levies and pub and street collections. These continued for over eight years.

The Keaton's tent outside the town hall became an institution. Sheffield trades unionists visited it every Saturday to give financial and moral support.

There is no questioning the courage, dedication to principle and combativity of these Sheffield engineering workers. They acted in the highest traditions of the workers' movement. Nor was there a lack of support in the population at large.

So why were this group of heroic workers allowed to be industrially isolated? The answer can only be political. The 'left' and Stalinist-dominated local leadership of the AEU were terrified of the consequences of the Thatcherite laws on secondary action and mass picketing. This fatally damaged any blacking campaign.

Ravages

Keaton's is only a small engineering outfit. Despite the ravages of recession in the Sheffield steel and engineering trades, there are still thousands of engineers in the city. With the political will and leadership this strike could have been wrapped

up very quickly. After one year the AEU withdrew strike pay, and the strikers were left to their own devices.

The lessons to be learned from this sustained dispute can only be political. The Keaton's workers did everything they could in terms of trade union militancy. They have eloquently given the lie to those spin doctors who tell us that the working class has no stomach for a fight, or that those who are prepared to struggle are the last of the Mohicans.

It is Stalinism and reformism who are making their last stand. The determination of the Keaton's strikers should be a death knell to them and an inspiration to us.

'Medieval' sickness tax for driving examiners

BY PETER GIBSON

DRIVING TEST examiners face yet more stress on top of having to travel around with not necessarily the safest drivers in Britain. When they go sick it could mean they lose £30 out of their pay at the end of the month.

'Medieval' is how the management of the Driving Standards Agency is described by Brian Sturtevant of the Civil and Public Services Association.

Management

The agency management, a privatised section of the Department of Transport, is seeking to impose a £30 per month fine for staff who go sick — even for a day.

More than 1,000 staff have voted for an overtime ban and a

work-to-rule following a management walk-out from negotiations. Management was seeking to impose without agreement wage levels including the £30 per month attendance 'bonus'.

Principle

The 'bonus' would be lost for any time off sick during the month. Management refuse to discuss the principle of the 'bonus' and say they will only talk about it is to be implemented.

Tony Gallagher of the National Union of Civil and Public servants said: 'The job is stressful and dangerous and this unfair sickness tax will only lead to greater levels of absence, not less — it is based on the false premise that examiners can be bribed into good health and improved performance.'

Britain's 400 Driving Standards Agency carry out around 7,000 tests each day.

National Workers Aid for Bosnia Committee Meeting
Saturday 21 January
1pm, Manchester Town Hall
Come and plan the next convoy to Tuzla, and the visit of the Tuzla trade union delegation to Britain

Defend Clause 4! Defend socialism! Campaign's open steering committee meeting
Manchester town hall
Sat. 28 January 1995, 11am

Open to all who want to fight for socialism and the retention of Clause Four of the the Labour Party's constitution. Make sure you are delegated by a workers' organisation so that you can vote.

For further details of the campaign and this meeting contact: the NUM, Miners' Offices, 2 Huddersfield Road, Ramsay, Yorkshire G70 2LS

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Inside left

Money matters

ON 11 December, the 'Observer' reported how Labour MP Ken Livingstone had avoided paying too much tax on his extra-parliamentary income — £53,000 in 1993. He received this on top of his MP's salary of £31,687. By having it paid through a private company, LocalAction Ltd, he had paid corporate tax at 25 per cent on it, as opposed to 40 per cent income tax.

That evening, as Tory tabloids gathered like seagulls round a tip, Livingstone explained that he uses his company to finance political research and activity, such as the 'Socialist Economic Bulletin'. He claimed to have spent £35,000 on a computer system to challenge government figures, and up to £7,000 a year on postage.

Livingstone's directorship of LocalAction — a 'company formed', he said, 'to cover the publication of my books, "Socialist Economic Bulletin" and other writing and media work' — is declared in the register of MPs' interests. Paul Halloran and Mark Hollingsworth quote this in their book 'A Bit on the Side: Politicians — Who pays them?', published last year. It's odd the 'Observer's' intrepid investigators missed it. But it might have detracted from the 'news value' of their story, and the suggestion of 'embarrassment' for the Labour MP.

I don't like Livingstone's sources of income — he earned £38,000 writing for Rupert Murdoch's 'Sun'. But I'm sure we'd all like to have suitable tax deals to support our political work. And it doesn't quite rank with Tory MPs' directorships, hidden perks, and private fortunes.

Still, once he'd fended off the tabloids, the member for Brent East might have reflected on the way he has lent himself to scurrilous newspaper attacks on socialists. There was his likening of Labour councillors in Brent to the dictator Pol Pot, and his use of Murdoch's anti-union 'Sun' to attack the Anti-Nazi League and the Socialist Workers Party.

More recently, he used the 'Guardian's' literary page, courtesy of its then editor Richard Gott, to repeat claims that members of the Workers Revolutionary Party who ousted their discredited former leader Gerry Healy were doing it for MI5.

Some of these comrades have been in the Trotskyist movement since well before 'Red Ken' was heard of. And none of them has hidden bank accounts, or the kind of income Livingstone enjoys even from his daytime job.

Trip wire

AFTER last week's horrifying report on slave camps in China (Workers Press, 7 January), does anyone fancy a trip? The Women's International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF) has a competition with a first prize of two tickets to Beijing for the United Nations Women's Rights (sic) conference.

Last year, a friend approached members of the WILPF asking them to sign a petition on Bosnia. They told her they weren't interested. Rape camps, ethnic cleansing, torture? 'There's plenty of women raped here', was their facile comment.

Maybe the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom (no prizes for guessing its political pedigree!) should visit China's Guangzhou No.1 'Re-education through labour' camp? But they might say it's a holiday camp, with keep-fit and hobbies classes.

Charlie Pottins

Young thrown the dustbin

BRONWEN HANDYSIDE looks at recent reports which expose the plight of the young homeless

A SOCIETY that increasingly abandons thousands of its young people to the streets is a society in terminal crisis.

An explosion in homelessness amongst young people in Britain over the past decade has prompted two recent reports by CHAR, a campaigning organisation for single homeless people.

Since the mid-1980s, and especially since the social security changes in 1988, which abolished their benefits, homelessness has grown fastest among 16- and 17-year-olds, and more quickly among young adults generally than people over 25.

Among the group of homeless 16- and 17-year-olds, young women outnumber young men by six to one.

As many as 40 per cent of these young women have been forced to leave home as a result of sexual abuse, and as many as six in ten have also been physically abused.

CHAR reported that young black people are far more likely than whites to be homeless — 51 per cent of the homeless in inner London are black, and 42 per cent in all London boroughs — and that one-third of all homeless or newly homeless young people have been in the care system.

These three groups — young women, young black people, and young people leaving care — are all particularly vulnerable.

Starkest

According to CHAR, the increase in youth homelessness is directly related to the reduction in affordable accommodation, rising levels of unemployment, and the 1988 cuts in benefit levels for under-25s, which have resulted in the starkest poverty for many young people.

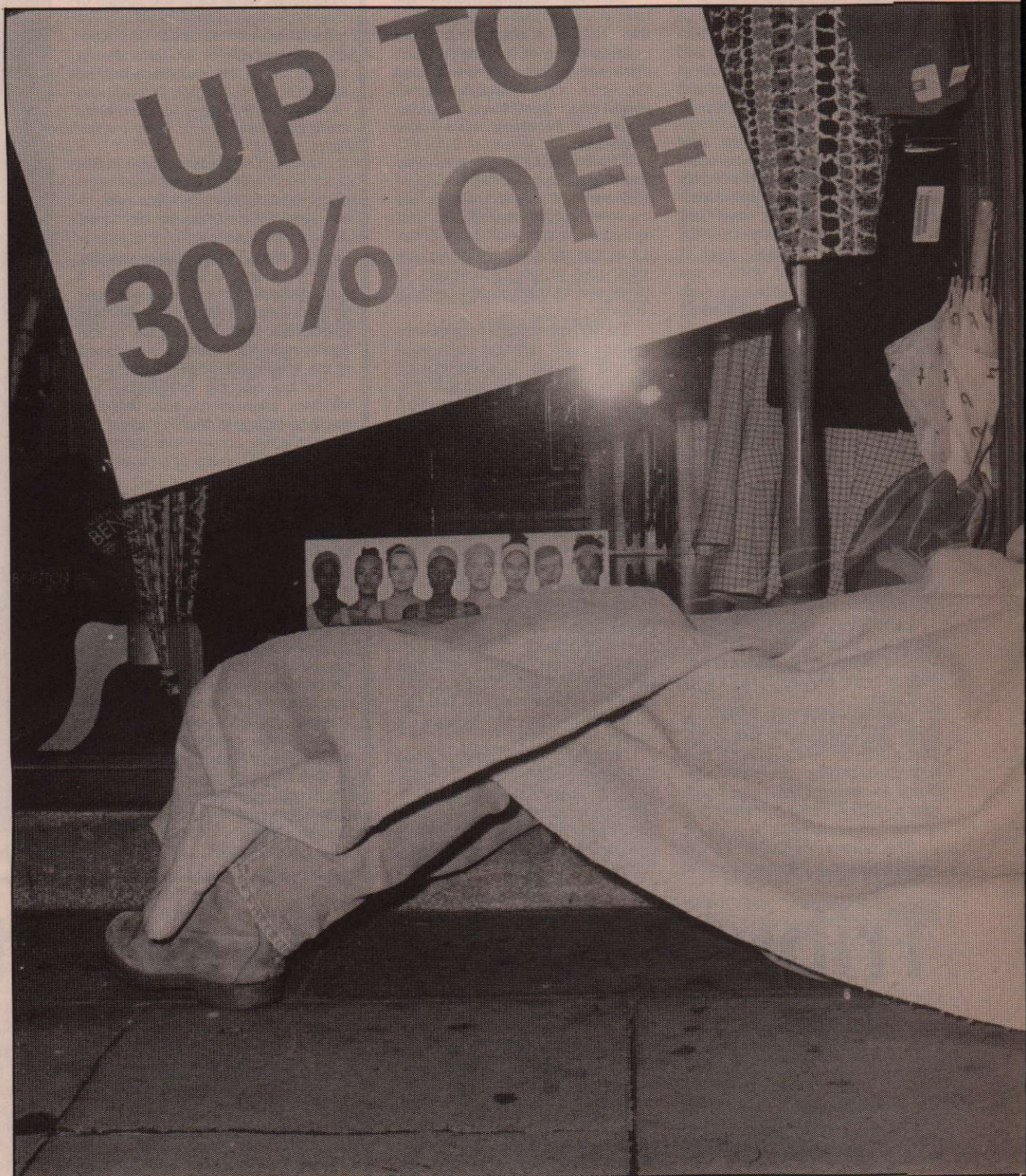
In 1988 new social security regulations meant the adult rate of benefit would not be paid until the age of 25. Income support for 16- and 17-year-olds was abolished, on the basis that they would be guaranteed a place on a training scheme. There is increasing evidence that that guarantee has not been fulfilled.

The massive increase in 16- and 17-year-olds applying for severe hardship payments — numbers leapt from 17,921 in 1989 to 76,957 in the first nine months of 1992 — is some indication of what benefit cuts have meant for young people.

Even more frightening is the huge increase in the number of young people who have **no income whatsoever** — from 70,000 in October 1988 to 93,700 in October 1993.

The rate of youth unemployment starts higher and rises much faster than unemployment in general. While the overall unemployment rate in January 1993 was 14.5 per cent, the rate for unemployed males aged 18-24 was 24 per cent.

CHAR reports: 'Recent government policy has stressed that young people should remain in the parental home. Ironically a direct



Homelessness is directly related to the decline in housebuilding under the Tories

effect of these policies has been a rise in youth homelessness. Young people are either forced to remain within the family longer than they would like or else, due to the resulting conflicts, have no option but to move out.

One CHAR researcher found that 'a direct result of benefit changes was that young people had to leave home due to the extra financial burden they placed on their families'.

Young unemployed people are most likely to come from a background of poverty where family members are also unemployed.

Centrepoint, an organisation running homeless hostels, has also identified increased conflict in the home as a major reason for young people leaving.

'Push' factors (such as being told to leave or being evicted), family arguments, and violence were the reasons for homelessness for 87 per cent of the young people Centrepoint dealt with. The two most common reasons for leaving home was being told to leave or being evicted (32 per cent), and family arguments (26 per cent).

Researchers Stewart and Stewart (1988), quoted in the CHAR report, are convinced that current policy on young people in the areas of social security and housing amounts to systematic discrimination.

'Targeted age groups of young people are being hidden from the unemployment statistics; kept on reduced benefits or low wages, or taken off benefit altogether; told to live with their parents; denied access to independent housing. Leaving home, which should be an ordinary development in adolescence, is being turned into a problem for many, if not most, young people.'

The housing shortage, according to CHAR, is the 'root cause of homelessness'. Government policies in the 1980s and 1990s cut local authority housebuilding programmes, and sold 1 million council houses under the right-to-buy scheme. Along with an increase in the number of people accepted as homeless, there has been a massive reduction in public housing stock.

The risks that young homeless people face are many. According to

research done in 1988 and again in 1992 they suffer from:

- bad physical health
- deterioration of mental health
- anxiety and depression
- alcohol and drug misuse
- turning to crime and/or prostitution
- loneliness
- lack of money, leading to hunger and then to begging or petty offences
- increased loss of self-esteem and feelings of worthlessness
- risk of violence and abuse (physical and sexual)

Unless they are unusually strong and resilient individuals, these young people risk having most of their potential as human beings destroyed.

They risk their very lives — added to the depression that drives them towards suicide, are the killers like Dennis Neilsen and Frederick West, many of whose victims came from among these lost youngsters.

Both CHAR reports blame 'Tory policies' for the crisis in young single people's homelessness. But the three causes of homelessness

n in



Behind the financial worries on the stock market — reality for Latin American poor

Alarm bells in Latin America

PETER JEFFRIES comments on the recent financial turmoil in Mexico and Argentina

QUEUES of people waiting anxiously outside banks is a sight that perhaps more than any other epitomises the financial instability that has marked capitalism during this century.

Such queues formed in Buenos Aires last week as hordes clamoured to change their Argentinian pesos into US dollars, fearing for their own currency after the Mexican peso plunged 40 per cent in value in the space of a few days.

And it was not just the peso's collapse that set the alarm bells ringing in Latin America. In a two-week period US-backed Mexican bonds lost nearly a quarter of their value.

The lure of Latin American markets for the speculators is being rudely shattered.

As the old year ended the Argentinian central bank was forced to sell over \$353 million, its biggest single loss since the launch of the so-called convertibility plan for the Argentinian peso.

According to this plan the value of the peso in terms of the US dollar is fixed by law and the government is prohibited from printing money unless it is backed by foreign reserves.

The 'Tequila effect', as the fall-out from the Mexican crisis is being called, wiped more than 17 per cent from the Buenos Aires stock exchange, sent bonds plummeting and interest rates spiralling.

The seriousness of the financial crisis in Mexico was reflected in Brazil, where over a two-week period share values nosedived on the Sao Paulo stock market as fears about the stability of the Brazilian banking system mounted. Even before the Mexican crisis erupted the Brazilian govern-

ment was forced to take two big state-owned banks under its direct control.

Last week the Mexican government set out an emergency economic plan before the international bankers which they hope will stop the rot. It had been drawn up with the 'help' of the International Monetary Fund.

The crisis that has hit Mexico came only days after the inauguration of president Ernesto Zedillo. After lengthy consultations with the leaders of big business and the unions, Zedillo announced a one-off devaluation of 13 per cent, before reimposing tight limits on the peso's daily movements.

The move failed to work. One reason was the renewed activities of the Zapatistas, the peasant movement in the southern state of Chiapas. Panic-stricken foreign investors joined Mexicans in the stampede into dollars. And the foreign investors are crucial, holding as they do about three-quarters of the country's bonds.

Emergency

Zedillo's emergency measures aim to deal with Mexico's growing external deficit, now running at 8 per cent of national income.

The plan demands 'sacrifices from all', but inevitably the burden will fall on the working class and the poor. The government predicts that inflation will run at 16 per cent in the coming year — many think it will top 30 per cent — but demands that wage increases be limited to 7 per cent.

Even on government figures this means a 9 per cent wage cut. If inflation does reach the higher levels predicted then cuts in real

wages of a fifth will be typical.

Even the normally acquiescent trade union leaders took days to accept this measure, fearing a backlash from the rank-and-file members of the unions. With the government's resources almost depleted, its scope for awarding public contracts to union-owned companies and its room for manoeuvre are seriously reduced.

It was only after an impassioned speech from finance secretary Guillermo Ortiz that the unions agreed to sign the emergency plan. Even then the electricity workers' leaders failed to sign.

The Mexican government has assured the foreign financial institutions that its budget will be balanced by cutting government spending still further and speeding up the sale of nationalised industries. Zedillo claims that the savage devaluation will give a significant boost to Mexico's exports. But expansion will be limited by productive capacity.

The high interests rates that will be needed to protect the currency will curtail productive investment, and the squeeze on the domestic market will hit many firms and send unemployment rising sharply.

Although the government secured an \$18 billion stand-by credit, this came more from self-interest than enthusiasm for Zedillo's measures.

The US does not want to see its markets flooded with cut-price Mexican goods, and Citybank and other international banks want to see their bond and stock portfolios regain some of the value they have lost as a result of the crisis.

In any case most of the \$18 billion will disappear within the next six months as Mexico is forced to repay many of its outstanding debts. Some \$15 billion worth of bonds are due to mature over this period, with \$3.6 billion due for repayment this month alone. The

Mexican central bank holds a paltry \$6 billion in reserve.

The bankers and fund managers know that Mexico still owes \$3.8 billion from the loan it secured from the *International Monetary Fund* in 1989.

The financiers are not convinced that the attacks on Mexico's poor are severe enough. With their eye on the rich pickings to be had, they also want to see the whole of the giant electricity monopoly privatised, as well as the important parts of the oil industry.

As the 'Financial Times' reported last week ('Mexican nerves on edge over wage pact tightrope'): 'The Mexican government's capacity to keep labour unions under control may be slipping away at the very moment it is most needed.'

Pledge

Even more pertinently, it added:

'Some are suggesting the real problem may not be between the government and the unions but between union leaders and the rank-and-file.'

'Labour leaders delivered votes to President Zedillo on the promise of a rise in real wages and additional job creation, a pledge now added to the growing number of broken promises.'

Mexico was the bench-mark of Latin America. It had signed the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) and joined the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development. But the Mexican crisis has put a large question mark against NAFTA, which only a few weeks ago President Clinton boasted was his biggest achievement.

The peso devaluation will certainly mean a big cutback in US exports to Mexico, and dent Clinton's claims that he has brought back prosperity to the US.

Photo: Rex Dunn

indicated by CHAR — lack of affordable housing, unemployment, and reduction of benefits — will not be overcome by the election of a Labour government. The Labour Party has been making this abundantly clear.

Labour councils have been more than happy to collaborate with Tory policies on housing, and have privatised the direct labour organisations which previously built and repaired council homes. The Labour Party has made no promises to embark on a programme of housebuilding if it forms the next government.

The Labour leaders have not indicated guaranteeing the restoration of full benefits to young people, refusing to promise universal benefits.

And they are making no promises about the restoration of full employment.

They are making their preparations for the continuation of the destruction of the welfare state. Their aim, like the Conservatives', is to force the majority to labour to pay for the privileges of the rich few.

A congress to remember

A GHANAIAN friend reminded me a few days ago that next autumn sees the 50th anniversary of one of the most representative — and certainly the most important and influential — international gatherings of black people ever held.

This was the fifth Pan-African Congress, held in Chorlton Town Hall, Manchester, five months after VE Day.

There were altogether 90 delegates and 11 fraternal delegates. Twenty delegates represented 15 organisations in West Africa; six, organisations in east and southern Africa; 33, the West Indies; and 35, various organisations in Britain.

In striking contrast to the previous Pan-African congresses, held in the 1920s, which brought together only a small élite of intellectuals, the Manchester gathering reflected, in George Padmore's words, 'a mass movement intimately identified with the under-privileged sections of the coloured colonial populations'.

Unions represented included the Gold Coast (i.e. Ghana) railway workers' union; the Sierra Leone teachers' union; the Trinidad oilfield workers' union; and the St Lucia seafarers' and dockers' union.

The whole of the first day's proceedings was devoted to 'The Colour Problem in Britain'. Discussion was opened by the Ghanaian Eddie Duplan, representing Liverpool's Negro Welfare Centre, who said that between the wars most black workers in Britain had lived below the subsistence level.

A.E. Moselle from Cardiff, 'an area which had the largest coloured population in Great Britain', said young black people there found it hard to get work; the labour exchange was not keen to place them; and it had been strongly suggested that — though born in Britain, with mothers and grandparents here — they should be got rid of.

One of two delegates from the African National Congress, the young South African writer Peter Abrahams, spoke of the injustices suffered at the hands of the police by black people in the East End of London.

When black and white men were arrested for gambling, 'the white men were dismissed and advised not to associate with coloured men, the latter being sentenced to fines or terms of imprisonment'.

Alma La Badie, representing the Universal Negro Improvement Association of Jamaica, spoke of the unwanted babies fathered by black GIs stationed in Britain and abandoned by their mothers.

A resolution on the 'Colour Bar Problem in Great Britain' demanded that discrimination on account of race, creed or colour be a criminal offence.

Later sessions discussed 'Imperialism in North and West Africa', 'Oppression in South Africa', 'The East African Picture' (the discussion was led by Jomo Kenyatta, afterwards president of Kenya), 'Ethiopia and the Black Republics', and 'The Problem in the Caribbean'.

Two short, militant statements summed up the essence of the congress resolutions. 'The Challenge to the Colonial Powers' declared:

'We are determined to be free. . .

'We are unwilling to starve any longer while doing the world's drudgery, in order to support by our poverty and ignorance a false aristocracy and a discredited Imperialism.

'We condemn the monopoly of capital and the rule of private wealth and industry for private profit alone. . .

'We shall complain, appeal and arraign. We will make the world listen to the facts of our condition. We will fight in every way we can for freedom, democracy and social betterment.

The 'Declaration to the Colonial Workers, Farmers and Intellectuals', drafted by Kwame Nkrumah, called on colonial workers to be in the front of the

PERSONAL COLUMN

battle against imperialism; assured them that 'your weapons — the Strike and the Boycott — are invincible'; and called on 'educated Colonials' to assist in organising the masses.

The Manchester Congress was virtually ignored by the British press. But it was, as one historian of Pan-Africanism puts it, 'a landmark . . . in the history . . . of decolonisation' since it gave a fillip to the anti-imperialist struggle in Africa and the British West Indies.

Fifty years on, much water has flowed under the bridges of Africa. Much blood, too.

Many high hopes have been dashed; many fine working-class fighters have been tortured and killed, and other foul crimes committed, under the stolen banner of socialism.

Despite decolonisation, world capitalism and its profit-greedy multinationals retain their grip on millions of African workers and peasants.

Despite decolonisation, nearly 30 African countries are in perpetual danger of famine. One in three of the population of sub-Saharan Africa never gets enough to eat.

The struggle against starvation in Africa is also the struggle against foreign domination, the struggle against rich rulers and their hangers-on who serve imperialism and despise and oppress their own peoples.

And it is also the struggle for socialism, which alone can end the barbarism that is a daily reality for millions of Africans.

The 1945 Pan-African Congress should be commemorated in some appropriate way: a meeting or a conference, in Manchester perhaps, to salute past and present African freedom-fighters and, above all, draw the political lessons of the past half-century.

It's high time to 'complain, appeal and arraign' once more.

Tippett and Trotskyism

THE composer Michael Tippett's recent 90th birthday attracted its share of press comment, but I have seen no reference anywhere to his early connection with Trotskyism. (See Sam Bornstein and Al Richardson, 'Against the Stream: A History of the Trotskyist Movement in Britain 1924-38' (Socialist Platform, 1986).

According to one of his biographers, Meirion Bowen, Tippett joined the Communist Party of Great Britain in 1935, but left after a few months 'when he failed to convert his party branch to Trotskyism'.

According to another biographer, I. Kemp, Tippett had been reading material from the Communist League (the British section of the International Left Opposition), which became the Marxist League in 1934.

Reg Groves remembered Tippett attending several of their meetings and taking part in the discussions. He was part of the Musicians' Group of the Militant Group, otherwise known as the 'Bolshevik/Leninist Group in the Labour Party', founded in 1936; and he wrote an anti-militarist play, 'War Ramp', which was performed at several Labour Party meetings.

Ted Grant remembered Tippett being recruited by Betty Hamilton as a supporter of the Workers' International League.

'But in 1940', say Bornstein and Richardson, 'despairing of the ability of Trotskyism to halt "the barbarities of Nazism and Stalinism"', he joined the Peace Pledge Union and registered as a conscientious objector.

'He spent three months in prison for resisting the terms of registration.'

Peter Fryer

Greek students carry on protests

FROM JOHN MANIATIS
IN ATHENS

THIS is the fourth successive year in which students have mobilised in protest at the Greek educational system.

Despite the election promises of the new 'socialist' PASOK government led by Papandreu to abolish testing and to renationalise technical education — measures brought in by the previous right-wing Mitsotakis government — nothing has happened after it having been in office for two years.

This, combined with a reduced education budget, sparked off the student movement again this year. Schools have been occupied to demand:

- An increased education budget;
- The unification of technical with general education — a pre-election promise of PASOK; and,
- A series of other changes to the educational system.

The inadequacy of the old education system to meet the needs of students along with the general crisis of the Greek economy and the government's 'austerity measures' have created a dynamic movement against the government.

Strength

The main strength of this movement remains the radicalisation of a large number of young people. This strength must be built on in the fight against the reactionary and anti-working-class policies of the political representatives of the Greek ruling class — currently the PASOK government.



Greek students have been marching for education and against the government for four years

The recent student movement began in 1990-91 when the right-wing Mitsotakis government announced legislation designed to 'abolish' school absenteeism, make compulsory school uniforms and prayers, control students through a points system (like in the US) along with a number of other reactionary proposals.

In that year, students occupied schools and after a month of demonstrations and marches with five people dead, the education minister resigned and the legislation was shelved.

The five dead consisted of four burnt to death in a shop as a result of inflammable liquids

used by the police to smash a demonstration, and, in a separate incident, a left-wing professor who was killed by an ultra-right gang linked to the Mitsotakis government party.

This was a unique victory by an anti-government movement. Since then, the student movement has fought several times against the political policies of the government in education.

In 1991-92, students occupied schools, again in opposition to proposed government legislation to set up testing in elementary and higher education. Unfortunately this movement didn't this time manage to defeat the government and many

students have left education as a result of depression caused by the new tests.

But the student movement came back the next year! Again there was more legislation — to privatise technical education thus denying access for the poorest layers of students. Despite the dynamic features of that movement, the intransigence and harassment of the government succeeded in pushing through the privatisation.

Since then the PASOK party was elected but nothing has essentially changed in education despite its election promises.

Workers' video festival in California

IT may not be Hollywood, but California's Golden Gate is open for your videos about working-class life and struggles around the world!

As part of LaborFest '95 the Labor Video Project is organizing an International Labor Video/Film Festival in San Francisco from 5-9 July.

'Videos about the struggles and issues of all working people in the US and around the world are important for international solidarity,' say the organisers.

Unions sponsoring the festival include the important International Longshore and Warehouse Union (ILWU), which represents workers on San Francisco's waterfront among others, and the AFM Musicians Local 6. The festival is also supported by Yerba Buena Arts Centre.

If you think your video is suitable, send it in VHS or 3/4 inch in NTSC, Pal or Secam. If it is not in English or Spanish, a voiceover or sub-titles would be appreciated. All videos sent to the festival will be listed, whether or not they are included in the programme. They will also be posted on LaborNet-IGC-APC, the West Coast-based union computer network.

■ Videos should be sent to: Labor Video Project/LaborTech PO Box 425584 San Francisco, CA 94142 USA. Phone (415) 255-8689 Fax (415) 695-1369. E-

Help support Tunisian political prisoner on hunger strike

HAMMA Hammami, a Tunisian political detainee, is reported to have been on hunger strike in Mahdia prison. Hammami, a member of the Workers Communist Party of Tunisia, started his hunger strike on 7 December in Kasserine prison.

His whereabouts were unknown until 14 December, when his family and lawyer heard that he had been transferred to Mahdia. They were allowed to see him on 15 December, after being denied access for nine days, in breach of Tunisian law

which guarantees detainees the right to access to a lawyer at all times.

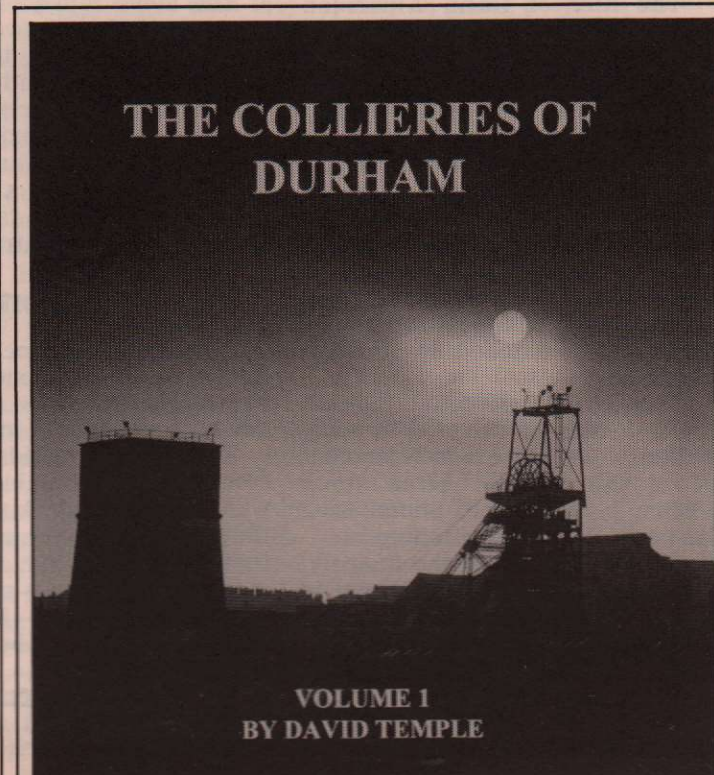
In both prisons Hammami, who has been recognised as a prisoner of conscience by Amnesty International, was held in solitary confinement in a punishment cell.

He suffers from heart and kidney conditions and requires special medical care. For the first two days of his detention at Mahdia he was denied water and access to a toilet.

Eventually he was seen by a

prison doctor and placed in a cell with improved facilities. According to a report just after Christmas he has continued his hunger strike in Mahdia prison.

Workers Press urges letters expressing concern about Hamma Hammami's health, deploring the way he has been treated, and demanding his release, to His Excellency Mr Mohamed Lessir, Embassy of Tunisia, 29 Prince's Gate, London SW7 1QG. Fax: 071-225 2884; or to the Tunisian embassy in your own country.



THE COLLIERIES OF DURHAM

THE COLLIERIES OF DURHAM

by Dave Temple

Trade Union Printing Services, 30 Lime Street, Newcastle upon Tyne NE1 2PQ

£9.90

'An outstanding piece of writing'; 'No praise is too high for the book's rich array of illustrations'

(Peter Fryer writing in Workers Press)

Trades unionists turn technology to use

BY CHARLIE POTTINS

WORKERS around the world face many problems with the use employers and governments make of computers. But now trades unionists are turning information technology to their own use.

Last year in the US, striking newspaper workers in San Francisco ran their own on-line electronic newspaper, and used computer networks to circulate names of scab advertisers.

Canada's first nationwide computer network, SoliNet, was launched in 1986, not by a telecommunications company but by the Canadian Union of Public Employees (CUPE), Canada's largest union, whose 450,000 members include teachers, hospital workers, and university and municipal employees.

The network has 1,500 users drawn from the ranks of CUPE and 20 other unions. Marc Belanger, CUPE's technology co-ordinator, dreams of someday giving a password to every union member in Canada, or 14 million people.

'To benefit from the information highway, we have to build some of it,' says Belanger. 'Otherwise, we'll be left behind.'

He thinks it important to be first. 'If we didn't do it, management would do, and that could put labor at a disadvantage. It's important for labor to have the power of technology.'

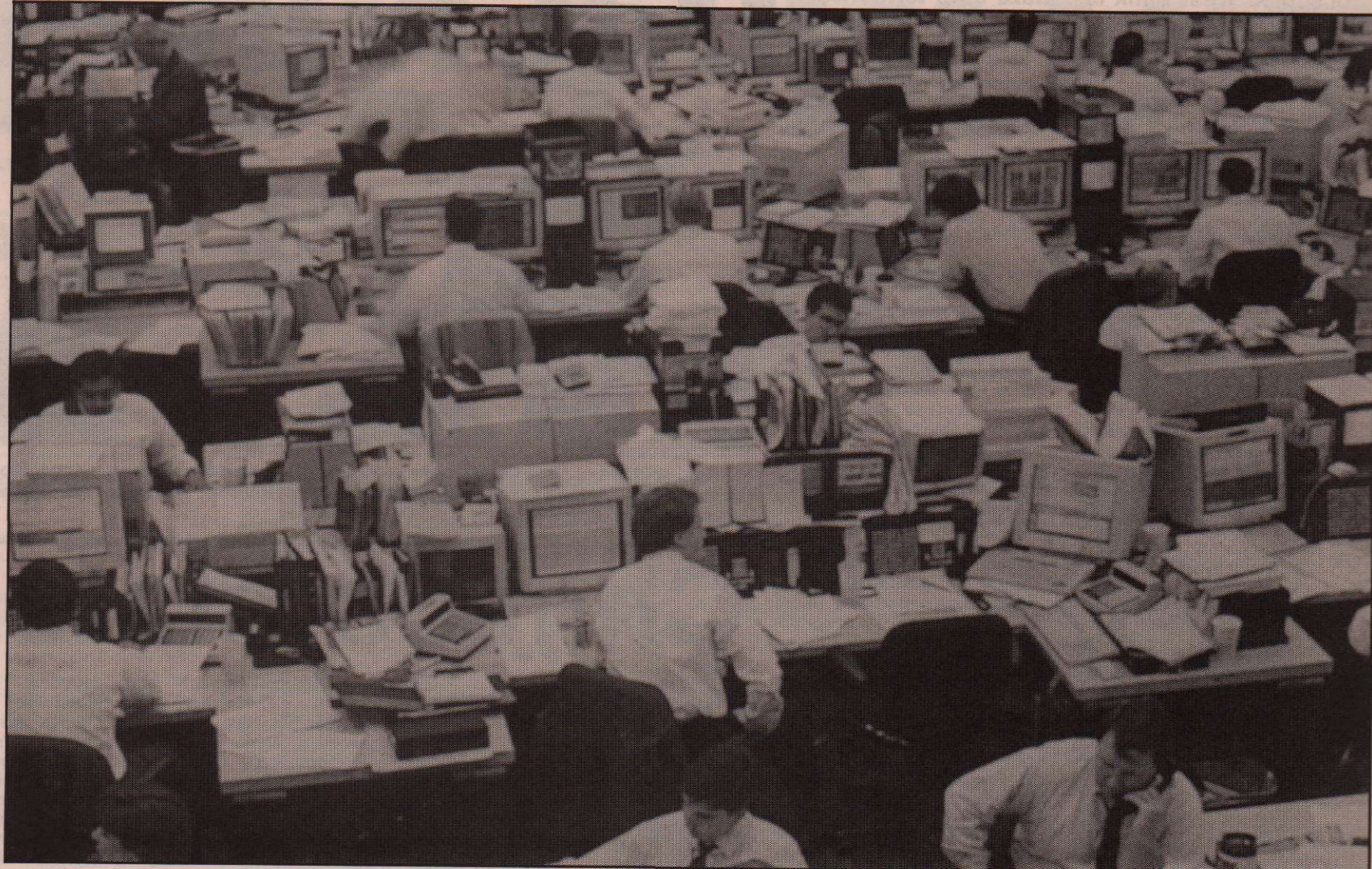
SoliNet took time to build. Belanger had to raise money to buy a central Digital VAX minicomputer. Networking hundreds of union locals (branches) all over Canada is a complex job. But SoliNet has proved its value, he says.

In 1989 a school caretaker's local went on strike at Hope, British Columbia. Learning the Hell's Angels motorcycle gang was coming to Hope for a meeting, union officers invited the bikers to picket with the caretakers. When the gang accepted the invitation, the news went out over SoliNet. The word spread fast and soon leaked to the other side in the strike talks. The result? 'They settled,' says Belanger.

Sense of solidarity

SOLINET also creates a sense of community among CUPE locals by providing them with news, information, and support. The network — which now connects with the Internet, the international network for computers — has more than 100 on-line conferences covering topics of interest to member unions.

Special month-long conferences deal with issues such as free trade and workforce diversity. Local union



US trades unionists are not leaving the information superhighway to the bosses, like these New York brokers, by building their own network

officers also download stories from the 'net' and incorporate them into newsletters.

SoliNet will even be used as an on-line classroom, linking teachers and students in a labour-degree program offered by the University of Athabasca in Alberta.

Belanger hopes SoliNet will link unionised employees of Pizza Pizza. It's about empowerment, or what he calls 'learning' — that is, learning more enables workers to earn more.

Budding network

ON-LINE bulletin boards, popularised by computer hobbyists in the 1980s are also proving useful. A handful of US union locals have operated bulletin board services for at least eight years. The powerful AFL-CIO union federation, with 14 million members, has a budding national computer conferencing network on CompuServe called LaborNet.

The number of users is small —

only 360 people. The AFL-CIO has decided for now to limit use to union leaders. But that may soon change. Last July, the 700,000-member Communication Workers of America (CWA) held a private conference for 60 locals in the South involved in a contract dispute with telecommunications and manufacturing giant GTE Corp. And it's also a test-run for much bigger plans.

The CWA intends to link up 500 other locals this year, either on LaborNet or on an independent network — when negotiations begin with telecommunications giant AT&T and the seven regional Bell companies.

'We want to share information with the rank and file,' says Marcia Devaney, a public relations coordinator with the CWA. 'That's the point.'

The Institute for Global Communications (IGC) in San Francisco also has a network called LaborNet. Its 300 users represent 150 unions, including the Service Employees Industrial Union and the United Farm Workers,

plus labour lawyers, educators, and labour activists. Its 32 on-line conferences include one conducted by the National Employment Lawyers' Association to discuss labour law and litigation. It also has current and archived labour news from around the world.

US unions have been losing members steadily since 1970, when membership peaked at more than 19 million people, more than a quarter of the workforce. Today, union members account for less than 16 per cent of the workforce (though membership in Canada is close to 40 per cent). 'Uniting has never been more feasible or more necessary,' says Rand Wilson, who has been organising workers at computer firm Digital Equipment.

Some white-collar employees at Digital and IBM use union-sponsored networks to share information. 'When hard times hit, it all comes down to information — who has it, and when you get it,' says Wilson.

During the CWA's 1989 strike against Nynex Corporation he helped the union organise the strike and use AT&T's EasyLink electronic-mail (E-mail) system to distribute strike news and negotiation updates to 60,000 members in 30 locals in New York and New England.

'Information is everything during a strike,' says Wilson. 'The greatest value of E-mail was damage control. Rumours about the negotiations could be laid to rest almost instantly.' The strike ended with the CWA winning most of its demands.

After Digital announced in July that it would eliminate 20,000 jobs worldwide, company employees in the US and Germany contacted Wilson via IGC's LaborNet, seeking advice on how they could get together to discuss their options. A Digital workers' meeting is being planned.

IBM workers may be joining them. The company plans to lay off more than 70,000 employees this year. Lee Conrad, an assembler-tester at IBM's Endicott plant in New York, and an activist in IBM Workers United, runs a 150-subscriber newsletter called the 'Resistor'. Conrad says many IBM employees are already commiserating on Prodigy, an on-line service jointly run by Sears Roebuck and,

ironically, IBM.

Conrad has been in touch by E-mail with IBM staff in the US and trade union activists, including some Digital workers in Europe.

Conrad plans to join LaborNet, and put the 'Resistor' on-line as an electronic magazine. 'A year ago, IBM management would announce plant closings and lay-offs nationally. They stopped doing that. Now we don't find out about it until it's too late,' Conrad says.

'On-line, we can get that information ourselves directly from the people affected.'

Democratic medium

E-MAIL networks have enabled workers in the private sector to communicate more freely and enhanced communication between union members.

'It's an inherently democratic medium,' says Michael Stein, a LaborNet co-ordinator. 'We want the union leadership to join, but we also encourage workers to sign up individually and exchange ideas with other workers in different industries. That kind of cross-sector link isn't supported by the union leadership.'

Users of the AFL-CIO's LaborNet pay CompuServe's \$8.95 monthly fee plus an extra \$5 per month for unlimited access to LaborNet. While the AFL-CIO is a federation of 86 national unions, only a handful of those unions have signed on. The AFL-CIO service is targeted at shop stewards and above from the 600 city central and 51 state labor federations, says Blair Calton, a LaborNet co-ordinator.

That has limited LaborNet's value to the rank and file, argues SoliNet's Belanger. He has urged AFL-CIO leaders to develop the network further, and do it independently. 'There is power in knowing how the networks work,' he says.

Rand Wilson agrees, but says he knows why the AFL-CIO took its approach:

'They want to control the information just like everybody else. . . I can see the networks eliminating a lot of middle-layer functions among the union bosses, and that must be freaking them out.'

Home, but not alone

THERE are days when Carol van Helvoort feels as though she's working in an electronic sweatshop. Unfortunately, that sweatshop is her apartment.

Carol works at home on a computer terminal processing orders for pizza delivery franchise Pizza Pizza Ltd of Toronto, Canada, and she finds it isolating. 'I end up not going out at all most days,' she says.

But Carol is not a typical home worker. She is a member of the only electronic home-worker union in North America, Local 175-633 of the United Food and Commercial Workers (UFCW). Along with other union members, Carol argues that she should be able to use her terminal to communicate with co-workers. But Pizza Pizza doesn't want the terminals used for any purpose other than processing orders.

Can a company dictate what an employee working at home does with

its equipment during personal time? Labour laws don't offer much guidance.

Carol van Helvoort's predicament arose after a strike in late 1992. The UFCW had learned Pizza Pizza had replaced most of its 150 unionised order-takers with non-union, self-employed home workers, saving itself about C\$4 an hour per employee. 'It was a joke,' says Gord Slater, an order-taker since 1990. 'Every day when we came to work, there were fewer of us.'

In August 1992, the company informed the remaining workers that the room they worked in would be closed, supposedly because there wasn't enough work for them. The union found out about the use of the independent home workers and went on strike.

The dispute was resolved a year later. Van Helvoort and 25 others agreed to work from home as union-

ised employees for the much lower wage of C\$7 an hour, or 1 per cent of gross sales plus 10 cents per call, which ever is higher in a given week. Pizza Pizza retained the right to use independents and now employs 75 non-union home order-takers.

Carol feels she won the war but lost the peace. Unhappy about working at home, she thinks it undermines the union. 'If someone needs me immediately to discuss a problem, I can't be reached,' she says. 'I want other home workers to know there's somebody to help.'

The UFCW is trying to arrange a meeting with management. 'We will encourage the company to allow workers to use the terminals to access a bulletin board or network,' says Bill Richardson, the UFCW representative dealing with Pizza Pizza. The issue is one between workers' freedom to communicate and capitalist rights of property.

Israeli death squads back in action

ISRAELI army undercover squads licensed to kill Palestinian militants are operating again in the occupied West Bank and Gaza strip territories.

The killer squads, whose past targets have included wanted student leaders and youths painting slogans, struck again in the West Bank village of Beit Liqya, not far from Jerusalem, on the evening of 4 January.

Their victims were Jihad Assi and Ali Mafarjeh, said to be members of the left-wing Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP), and two teenagers, Ashraf Suleiman, 17, and Mohammed Khamis, 16.

Initial Israeli army reports claimed they had killed four wanted 'terrorists' who had refused to stop, and opened fire on a patrol. Local people said all four men were sitting in a car talking when the Israelis pulled up in a plain transit van, jumped out, and opened fire without any warning.

Witnesses have sworn affidavits that one of the teenagers got out and tried to surrender with his hands up before he was killed, and that the Israelis then dragged the others out of the car to finish them off.

A few days earlier, Israeli troops pursuing a Palestinian into the Gaza strip shot dead three Palestinian policemen who tried to stop them at the Erez checkpoint. The following night, Palestinian police arrested a dozen undercover squad members whose vehicle had got stuck in mud in the southern Gaza strip. They were carrying grenades, guns, and walkie-talkies.

At first the Israeli army denied knowledge of this group. Later the army admitted that ten of its men had been 'in contact' with Palestinian police, and said a patrol had been following a stolen vehicle. The Gaza police released the ten after photographing them, detaining the two others, assumed to be Palestinian collaborators.

Murderous

The undercover squads, or mistaravim as they are called, operate in two units, Samson and Cherry. Often they go about their murderous business disguised in traditional Arab clothes — a loose jellabiya is also useful to conceal weapons — even dressed as religious sheikhs or old women. They have also been known to pose as tourists.

In one notorious incident

BY CHARLIE POTTINS

these killers turned up at a village soccer match, and murdered a young Palestinian player who was on their 'suspect' list.

Flyposting

On another occasion, when seen shooting youngsters who had been flyposting, they threatened witnesses — among whom were an Israeli couple visiting Palestinian friends, who were able to make a statement on what they had seen.

Last year Palestinian human rights activist Dr Hanan Ashrawi was driving from Jerusalem to Ramallah when she saw a man wearing traditional Arab clothes chasing two boys. One of them, a 14-year old fell.

'This man yanked him up by the hair and pointed a gun to his temple,' she recalls.

Seeing the man had a pink headband, she realized he was an Israeli.

'In their special forces they wear these headbands like identification tags.'

Ashrawi was able to stop the killing, and have the lad sent to hospital. But in scores of other cases, there is no protection.

The revival of the undercover killer squads reflects the Israeli military's perception that Yasser Arafat's Palestine Liberation Organisation leadership cannot hold down the Palestinian people's explosive resentment of a sell-out 'peace' deal that has left Zionist settlers lording it over occupied Palestine.

The Rabin government has continued expanding settlements in a belt around Jerusalem, and is trying to appease the right-wing parties who are demanding tougher action against Palestinian 'terrorism'.

But the army death squads' continuing actions, contemptuously ignoring the Palestinian Authority, can only weaken Arafat's position further, and drive more Palestinians to back armed resistance.



ISRAELI soldiers confront Israeli peace demonstrators in Hebron, one year ago. Slogans said 'Disarm the settlers'; 'Stop the murder of Palestinian activists'; 'Israeli troops out of Hebron'. The troops are still there, the settlers are still armed, and the murder squads are loose again

China's state of fear

BY COLIN PENDLETON

THE Chinese government has shown its fear of popular revolt by banning dozens of political dissidents from returning home to their country. Among those reported to be banned are leaders of the students' democracy movement that was suppressed in 1989.

Border police have been instructed to arrest them on sight.

The authorities have issued officers with a document entitled: 'A List Of Forty-Nine Overseas Members of Reactionary Organisations Currently Subject to Major Control,' according to the New York-based Human Rights Watch/Asia, which claims to have obtained a copy.

Some of those on the list are

people whom the government allowed to leave, such as former political prisoner Liu Qing. The policy appears to be to keep them out of China.

The authorities allowed dissidents to leave, thereby appearing to appease human rights critics in the United States, while at the same time they secretly pursued a policy of sending former political prisoners and other dissidents into involuntary exile, the human rights report says.

Last month a Beijing court sentenced nine people to prison terms ranging from two to 20 years, after a closed trial lasting five months, for 'counter-revolutionary crimes'.

Hu Shigen was sentenced to 13 years on the charge of 'leading a counter-revolutionary group' and ten years for 'counter-revolutionary propaganda

and incitement'. His sentence was consolidated to 20 years. Kang Yuchun was sentenced to 12 years on the first charge and seven years on the second which was consolidated to 17 years.

Relatives were not permitted to attend the trial and only heard the verdict when the judge came out of the court to read the sentences to those waiting outside. There is doubt as to whether the defendants had proper legal representation.

Altogether 15 people were charged, and some not sentenced still have to report to police.

Charges

The charges all related to forming or joining dissident groups, writing leaflets, or planning to distribute leaflets at factories and colleges before 4 June 1992, the anniversary of the 1989 Tiananmen square crackdown. Fourteen of those held had been detained for more than two-and-a-half years after being arrested in 1992.

China's ambassador in Britain, Ma Yuzhen, has defended the sentences, claiming the

'nine lawbreakers... were convicted because of their attempt to overthrow the government... It has nothing to do with human rights issues at all.'

ter, 'Guardian', 4 January. 'China now enjoys political and social stability and her economy is booming,' the ambassador declared. 'Every effort being made to further improve China's environment for investment. Her huge market is increasingly attractive to foreign entrepreneurs.'

In other words, workers intellectuals can be locked for dissent or distributing leaflets, so as foreign capital feel free to fleece Chinese workers in appalling conditions. Booming economy?

Tens of millions of Chinese people are now jobless as privatisation proceeds.

Whatever the politics of dissidents, the real counter-revolutionaries in China are Stalinist ruling bureaucrats. That's why we take their fear of opposition as a welcome sign that they must fear for their overthrow.

Victory to the coming Chinese workers' revolution!

Australia's housing crisis hits schoolchildren

FROM NICK BAILEY IN AUSTRALIA

RESEARCH at the Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology has revealed that 70 per cent of New South Wales's schools have homeless students.

Sociologist David MacKenzie says that some schools in Sydney's western suburbs may have up to 50 homeless students.

His study, conducted with Monash University sociologist Dr Chris Chamberlain, suggests that up to 30,000 students across Australia are homeless, as many as 3,000 of them in New South Wales.

That state, traditionally one of the most developed in Australia, is believed to be in a worse position because of cuts in student counselling provisions.

Students who were interviewed spoke about having to do their homework in parks and keeping their schoolbags hidden under bridges and up trees.

One 17-year old, who continued at school after leaving home at nine, told how he had had to get up at 4am to walk from his refuge to school.

There has been criticism that not enough has been done to keep homeless children at

school. Father Chris Riley, director of a youth centre and special school at Marrickville, pointed out that crisis accommodation only lasts three months.

'One of my kids had 63 placements in four years' he said. 'What chance did he have to go to school being moved on every two months?'

Lenore Grunsell, secretary of School Psychologists Australia, said it was crucial to intervene when children had left home but were still at school.

'Once they drift away from school,' she said, 'we cannot help them'.

She called on the state's 531 school counsellors — plus an additional 200 promised by the state government — to collect accurate figures.

Welfare

The senior education officer in student welfare and child protection in the Labour Government's Department of School Education, Helen Kerr-Roubicek, said that she was not aware of any centralised figures on homeless students.

She said her department would monitor the situation. If there was evidence of any problems they would be taken up.

Canada's Nazi front 'funded by state'

RACISTS who drew up a 'hit list' of black people, Jews and trade unionists were funded by the Canadian government, through its secret service, it has been alleged.

The Canadian Security Intelligence Service (CSIS), which carried out its own spying against the unions, minorities and broadcasters, is reported to have paid \$300,000 over five years to Grant Bristow, a neo-Nazi activist who was also an undercover agent.

Bristow, who helped set up a racist organisation called the Heritage Front, has been in hiding since his link with the government was exposed in a leaked document.

Among those on the Heritage Front's hit list was Canadian Jewish Congress president Irving Abella. Wolfgang Droege, the leader of the Front is reported to have urged that 'a few of the congress leadership be taken out in order to intimidate the rest.'

After a Toronto newspaper accused the CSIS of having prior knowledge of a synagogue attack, and taking no action, CSIS director Ward Elwood wrote personally to Abella denying the allegation.

Inquiry

A report from an independent inquiry into Grant Bristow's activities says the CSIS agent was 'overzealous', but had infiltrated a dangerous organisation.

Irving Abella is not concerned by the exoneration of Bristow. 'When he went into Heritage Front, the organisation was a weak, underfunded, disorganised group,' comments.

'But when he left, it was operating from coast to coast across Canada, it was issuing hit lists, and it had lots of money for all the things it wanted. What happened in between, I still don't know.'

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