# Workers Press

WEEKLY PAPER OF THE WORKERS REVOLUTIONARY PARTY

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## 'New' Labour leaders spell it out:

# WELFARESTATE

THE inevitable declaration that a future Labour government will carry on with the Tories' work in killing off the Welfare State came in a speech from the shadow social security spokesperson Chris Smith.

■ Smith STATED categorically that the next Labour government will not restore the welfare cuts made by the Tories.

'Returning to 1979 and putting back in place what was there then is not the sensible way to address the need for social justice,' Smith last week told the Institute for Public Policy Research.

■ Smith PROMISED that Labour would keep the lid on welfare spending.

He admitted that the 'old problems' of poverty and joblessness remained, but state spending was not the answer: intelligent participation of the private sector' was now needed to tackle these mat-

■ Smith WARNED that the old Labour belief that increases in spending was the way to keep the welfare state afloat was dead and buried.

Smith PLEDGED that Labour would keep 'an eagle eye' on fraud.

#### Lips

Here he does not have in mind the sharks in the City or the big insurance companies licking their lips at the prospect of the fortune they will make when people are forced to take out private insurance against illness, unemployment and old age.

It is no co-incidence that

#### BY THE EDITOR

the day of Smith's speech saw the Tories announce that in future people will be forced, assuming they have any money, to provide for their old age. The rest will presumably simply go to the wall.

On welfare benefits there is now no difference in principle between the Tory government and Her Majesty's loyal opposition.

Smith INSISTED that people must learn to fend for themselves and that any increases in welfare spending should be seen as a mark of failure, not success. The main emphasis will be on 'benefitto-work' schemes, said Smith.

For this read yet more fraudulent 'retraining' programmes in which young people in particular are forced to work for a pittance for some of the most ruthless employ-

The blunt truth is that

decaying capitalism has less and less use for the labour of millions of people, including increasing numbers middle-class people. Last week's announcement that the latest merger in the insurance world will lead to the loss of 5,000 jobs is a sign of the times

(see page 5). Smith proceeded to reject the idea that the state is necessarily the best provider.

A 'comprehensive' statefunded solution to the social no longer necessary, he declared.

'Mixed solutions' were required. In future, 'individual contributions' would be necessary, and 'private sector' involvement encouraged.

#### Talk

This is pure right-wing Tory talk.

Smith is spelling out the fact that the post-1945 'con-

problems facing people was sensus' is dead and buried. to concede over the past 50 After World War II the ruling class was forced to make important concessions to the strength of the working class.

The system of welfare benefits introduced by the Labour government under Attlee in the period 1945-51 was among the most important of these concessions.

Now capital can no longer afford such concessions. It must take from the working class all that it has been forced years.

Smith simply repeats the fact: a Labour government will launch yet more brutal attacks on the working class, the class that must be made to pay for the crisis of capitalism. Smith's remarks are the latest sign of how rapidly the Labour Party leaders lurch further and further to the

They are a dire warning of the shape of things to come.

right.

## Tower Hamlets hits out for education on May Day



#### Liverpool and internationalism

INTERNATIONAL WORK-ERS' DAY will be celebrated on its rightful day, 1 May, from now on in Merseyside. That was the decision of this wear's successful 3,000-strong workers' march led by the now historic banner of the Merseyside Port Shop Stew-

Behind the 500 sacked dockers at the head of the march came the Women of the Waterfront with their banner, and banners from trades councils, union branches, shop stewards' committees, pensioners, political groups, ...

It was fitting that the march.

Merseyside shop stewards organised and led the May Day in Liverpool. In February, their international conference rallied dockers and other workers in many countries to take solidarity action.

The dockers had called for workers to take the day off and join this international workers' day march. There was a large contingent of Unison workers whose branch had called for strike action on that day, and the Transport and General Workers' Union Liverpool office was closed as staff turned out to join the

International Trade Union Solidarity Campaign — African Liberation Support Campaign Conference address: PO Box 18, Epsom, KT18 7YR, Britain. Tel/Fax: +441372 721 550

## AN INTERNATIONAL **WORKERS** CONFERENCE

- Trade unions independent of the state and the employers
- Democracy in the trade unions
   Workers' internationalism.

#### AN INJURY TO ONE IS AN INJURY TO ALL

Saturday-Sunday 8-9 June, Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, London WC1.

Near Holborn. Start 10.30am Saturday, 10am Sunday.

This important conference is convened jointly by the ITUSC and ALISC. It will follow the 'Africa Month' here in Britain. We will be discussing and deciding how to take forward workers' international solidarity in the coming struggles. Delegates will be travelling from Africa, India, Bangladesh, South America, Russia, Ukraine and eastern Europe.

Therefore, rather than have a set attendance fee we are asking you to give whatever you can towards the cost of the conference and the fares of those delegates. A draft resolution will be sent to you, and we ask you to keep in touch during the preparation of the conference and let us have any resolutions and/or

written material on the issues you wish

discussed.

THOUSANDS of East London children stayed away from school on May Day. Over 500 children and parents marched on the offices of Tower Hamlets council to protest at education cuts which would mean the loss of up to seven teachers in the borough's secondary schools, and one or two from most of the primary schools.

This was the latest stage of a campaign which has brought together parents, teachers, headteachers, support staff and school governors at mass meetings and a Saturday morning demonstration. For most of the May Day demonstrators, this was their first political protest, and the arrival of so many at the lavish docklands office of the council was clearly unexpected.

Since the campaign began the chair of the education committee has been replaced, and there are signs that the Labour council is looking for a compromise which would find more money for schools.

Photo: Mick Regan

Scientific socialism, p2 ● SLP, p3 ● Dockers' solidarity conference, p4&5 ● Namibia, p6 ● Germany, p7 ● Croatia, p8

'THE SOVIET UNION's mistake was to abandon its socialist principles.'

Thus said National Union of Mineworkers president Arthur Scargill at the press conference that launched his new Socialist Labour Party.

He went on to declare:

'Had they had our commitment they would have had a socialist system in society and it would not have collapsed and now . . . it would be way ahead of the rest of the world. The tragedy is that it departed from these commitments.'

We will leave aside for the moment any comment on the history of the Soviet Union in the years after 1917 to concentrate on one point: that Scargill seems quite unaware of the most elementary principles of scientific socialism.

Some 150 years ago or so Marx and Engels established that history is in the last resort determined by material, class forces, and not by 'will' or 'conviction', as Scargill seems to imagine.

The division of society into exploiting and exploited classes arose historically not because of human greed but because the level reached in the development of the productive forces was insufficient to overcome basic want. That being so the division of society into antagonistic classes was inevitable.

It was capitalism, the first mode of production to exist as a world system, that, through the development of humanity's productive forces, for the first time laid the basis for a classless society.

The first breakthrough towards that society came with the revolution of 1917. But that initial breakthrough could only be consolidated to the extent that the revolution was spread to the most powerful centres of capitalism - in Europe and north America. For it was there that the essential productive forces for the building

of a socialist society were located.

This did not happen, and the revolution remained isolated. This isolation of the USSR and its encirclement by imperialism is the fundamental source of the degeneration of the Soviet state, the roots of which can be traced back to the mid-1920s. It was this degeneration, concentrated in the emergence of a counter-revolutionary bureaucracy eventually headed by Stalin, and not the 'convictions' of this or that individual, which resulted in the ignominious collapse of the Stalinist bureaucracy in the period since 1989.

That degeneration was in turn reflected in the theory that it would be possible to establish socialism within the boundaries of the Soviet Union, a 'theory' that flew in the face of scientific socialism, but one to which Scargill clearly continues to subscribe. It seems that Scargill has learned nothing from history, a fact that augurs badly for his leadership of the SLP.

## 500 not out!

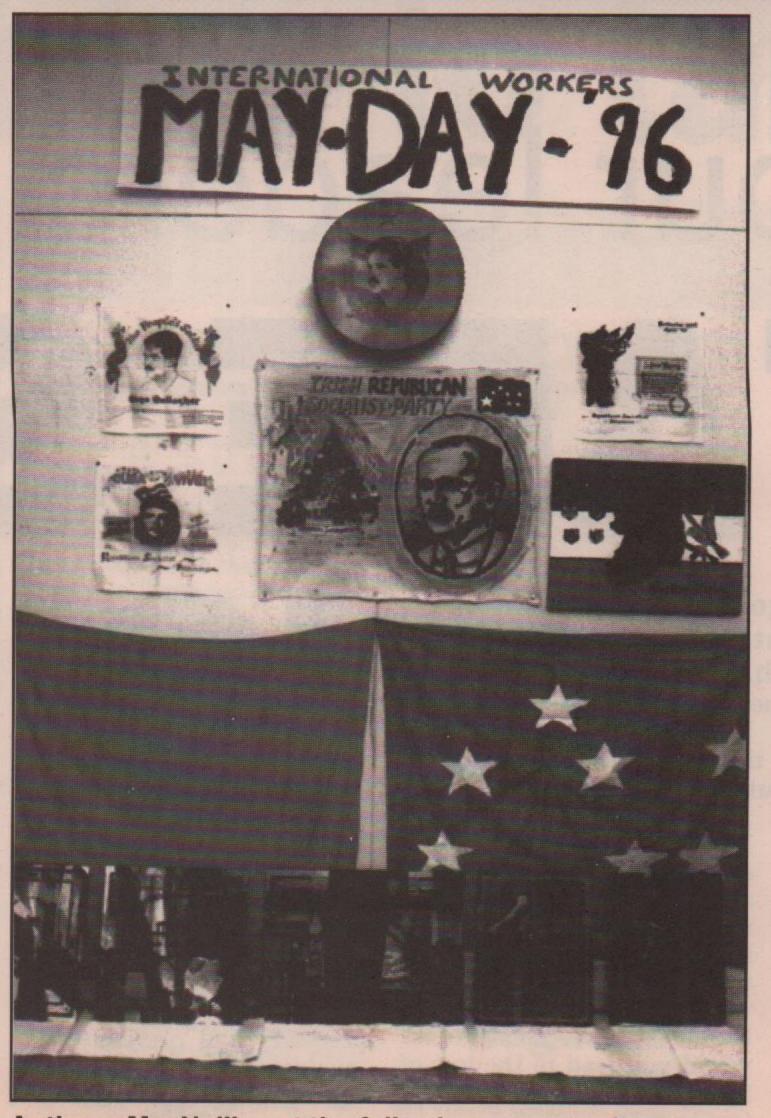
THE paper you hold in your hands is the 500th issue of Workers Press. We are proud of this achievement. And for a small weekly paper owned by no press baron and subsidised by no millionaire, but kept going solely through the contributions of its working-class readers, it is no mean feat.

We mark this milestone with a pledge. In the future as in the past, we shall do our best to serve the working class in struggle by fearlessly printing the truth, encouraging debate on the burning issues that confront the workers' movement, and aspiring to the very highest standards of revolutionary journalism.

Letters

WE WELCOME LETTERS SEND THEM TO: WORKERS PRESS, PO BOX 735, LONDON SW8 1YB - OR FAX 0171-387 0569

Letters longer than 500 words WILL be cut



Anthony MacNeill sent the following message from Portlaoise gaol, Co. Laois, Ireland: 'As international workers' day is almost upon us, I wish to send revolutionary greetings to the Workers Revolutionary Party on behalf of the Irish Republican Socialist POWs in Long Kesh and Portlaoise.'

### SAOIRSE (LONDON)

PO Box 3923, LONDON NW5 1RA

#### IRISH POLITICAL PRISONERS IN BRITAIN

Please send birthday cards to all POWs. Cards are welcome at

any time.	cards to air i o	vvs. Cards are	welcome at
	Prison	Number	Birthday
Liam McCotter Jan Taylor Paul (Dingus) Magee Nicholas Mullen Liam Quinn Joe McKenny Pat Hayes Pat McGlynn Patrick Kelly Denis Kinsella Eddie Butler Joe O'Connell Micheal O'Brien Peter Sherry Stephen Nordone Vincent Wood Thomas Jack Vincent Donnelly Sean McNulty Harry Duggan Sean Kinsella Paul Norney Brendan Dowd Hugh Doherty	Prison Belmarsh Whitemoor Belmarsh Whitemoor Frankland Frankland Frankland Frankland Whitemoor Full Sutton Full Sutton Full Sutton Full Sutton Frankland	Number LB83693 EN1977 BT3783 MR0639 49930 L46486 EN1978 EN1946 EN1194 EN1944 338637 338635 BT3782 B75880 758663 EN1049 EN3177 274064 CL3440 338638 758661 863532 758662 338636 879225	Birthday 2 January 18 January 30 January 2 February 6 February 7 February 27 February 25 March 12 April 17 April 15 May 11 June 30 June 2 August 7 August 7 August 10 September 25 September 13 October 13 October 13 October 14 November 15 November 16 November 17 November 17 November 18 December 19 December 19 December
	Belmarsh Full Sutton	MT2485 EN3887	14 December 31 December

Framed prisoner:

Danny McNamee Belmarsh L481616

#### **Prison addresses:**

HMP Frankland, Finchdale Avenue, Brasside, Durham DH1 5YD.

HMP Full Sutton, York YD4 1PS.

HMP Whitemoor, Longhill Road, March, Cambridge PE15 0PR. HMP Belmarsh, Western Way, Thamesmead, London SE28 0EB.

Workers Press also calls for the release of supporters of the Irish Republican Socialist Party in addition to the Sinn Fein supporters listed above.

Further Information: Saoirse, phone/fax: 0181-985 8250.

### Stop anti-racists going to jail **Defend the Mawhinney 4!**

Protest at the judge's sentencing, Bow Street Magistrates' court, Tuesday 14 May, 10am. Covent Garden tube.

## **Croatian nationalists** destroy democracy

#### FROM A CORRESPONDENT IN CROATIA

THE idea of establishing democratic capitalist countries out of the former republics of Yugoslavia continues to evaporate in Croatia.

Having lost the municipal elections in Zagreb earlier this year, Croatian President Franjo Tudjman refused to recognise the elected mayor and instead imposed one from his own HDZ (Croat nationalist) party. Now he has gone a step further and closed down the whole city council.

This follows the closure of two other councils in towns where his party lost, including the big working-class town of Rijeka. He justified the dismantling of Zagreb city council on the legal argument that it was taking measures that contravened the

The coup against Zagreb council came days before an important council meeting that would have voted on a proposal to lower council taxes for Zagreb citizens and decisions on a number of franchises for business in the city.

Tudjman has now imposed an administrator for the towns whose councils he has disbanded. The first decision of this administrator was to transfer money from the city funds for central government use. The HDZ mayor of Zagreb of course remains in

This attack on the legally elected opposition in major working-class regions is backed up by attacks on the media. A major daily paper has been closed down, as has a weekly magazine. They have been closed supposedly on account of financial irregularities but of course everyone knows that it was for their political opposition to Tudjman.

## **African Liberation Day** Saturday 25 May 1996, 1pm

Max Roach Park, opp Rosary Catholic Church, Brixton Road, London SW9. Nearest tube: Brixton

WORKERS OF THE WORLD UNITE! March in solidarity with African workers! Bring your banners!

IMPERIALIST organisations like arrest, torture and murder workthe IMF and World Bank impose devastating economic policies which cause starvation, civil and self-determination. wars and create refugees.

labour of African workers and African regimes, in collaboration with Western governments, and attacks.

ers, trade unionists and others who fight for democratic rights

Despite this, African workers, Multi-nationals exploit the like their comrades in oppressed parts of the world, continue to resist exploitation and state

Workers Press — May/June lectures

#### **MARXISM AND THE HISTORY** OF THE BRITISH **WORKING-CLASS MOVEMENT**

Some lessons for today

By Geoff Pilling, Workers Press editorial board

Lucas Arms, Gray's Inn Road, London. Thursdays 23 May and 6 & 20 June, 7.30pm. Nearest tube King's Cross

2. Karl Marx and the British trade union movement

The role of British trade unions in the formation of the International Workingmen's Association (The First International). How Marx saw the International and how he worked in, organised and led it.

3. Marx and the Struggle against sectarianism in the labour movement

The role of the petty bourgeois in the International. The Proudhonists and the followers of Bakunin. The fight against this tendency by Marx and Engels and its historical significance. The fight for

the legal eight-hour day against those who wanted to separate the industrial from the political struggle.

4. Frederick Engels and the foundations of the Second International

The origins of the Second International, founded in 1889. The role of the struggle for mass trade unionism in its formation. The entry of new forces into new politics in this period. Struggles in the East End of London. The part played by Marx's daughter, Eleanor, in the formation of the 'New Unions' and the International.

Picket Drake International, the Mersey Docks and Harbour Company's scab-herding agent

Tuesday 14 May, 11am-5pm 96 High Holborn, London WC1. Special call for largest possible turnout

from 3.30pm

#### Socialist Labour supports immigration controls BY MIKE COOKE IN THE closest vote against the Socialist Labour Party leadership headed by Arthur Scargill, the opposition managed to gain



Card-vote, on immigration controls, at SLP founding conference Photo: Mike Howgate

within the framework of establishing a humane and non-racist immigration system. A socialist Britain would welcome asylum seekers who are in flight from any oppressive regime without restriction.'

As one speaker against the leadership's position put it, immigration laws are always used against working-class people. Immigration laws have never applied to the rich and there is no such thing as just immigration

Apart from the chair, Pat Sikorsky (who didn't vote), the platform - Frank Cave, Arthur Scargill, Caroline Sikorsky, Brian Heron and Bob Crowe — voted to a person against the amendments and for some form of immigration control.

CLOSING the debate on the economy section, Arthur Scargill had earlier told the audience that to

vote for any amendment not supported by the leadership would be 'to declare a disbelief in our

amendments Scargill was opposing called for the inclusion of 'rank-and-file workers in struggle, such as the Liverpool dockers and JJ Fast Foods' before the phrase 'the groupings such as', in the following paragraph:

'Today, radical opposition in Britain is symbolised not by the Labour and trade union movement but by the groupings such as those which defeated the poll tax, the anti-motorway and animal rights bodies, Greenpeace and other anti-nuclear campaigners, and those fighting against opencast mining.'

In a sideswipe against opponents, Scargill said: 'It's no good going to the Liverpool dockers and telling them what one revolutionary said to another in 1917.'

The only problem with this

argument was that no one had raised the Russian Revolution in the debate, just as they hadn't raised the 'armed revolution' This is ironic since one of the which Scargill also inveighed against as 'absolutely irresponsi-

> In the only other reference at the conference to the Liverpool dockers, Scargill said that in addition to the international support there should be trade union support here in Britain.

IN THE debate on Ireland, led by Pat Sikorsky, support came for the peace process and for a 'no criticism of the Republican movement' policy. A fine distinction was made between 'criticism' and 'debate' with the Republican movement. The latter was accept-

Mention was made by one speaker of the ANC and PLO. He claimed that it was easy to support these organisations but that

Ireland had been the achilles heel of the British labour movement. The very next speaker, John Bassano from Southampton, questioned whether many in the room still supported these organisations.

Cheshire SLP member Royston Bull denounced the 'sectarians' and claimed that 'the Trotskyites want to use the Irish people to fight British imperialism.' Some of those 'critical' of the Republicans had in fact questioned the 'armed struggle's' effectiveness in achieving the end of a united Ireland.

This prompted a fierce response from Eamon Graal (Manchester) who said that Sinn Fein had single-handedly won against British imperialism and that Gerry Adams and Martin McGuinness had every right to treat with John Major.

OTHER policy sections discussed were women, education and pensions. International fraternal delegates came from Spain's United Left (IU) and Italy's Communist Refoundation (RC), both parties coming out of the fragmentation of Europe's Communist parties. A delegate from France's Communist Party never arrived.

A meeting is due of these and

similar organisations in Madrid in June to set up some sort of international centre at which the IU and RC speakers hoped there would SLP representatives. There is also a meeting led by these organisations on unemployment coming up in Paris. A political official from the Cuban embassy also spoke.

The SLP's candidate in the Hemsworth by-election, Brenda Nixon, said that she had been privileged to stand for the party but that she was 'more privileged to be a member of what I know will be a major political party'.

In the final speech of the conference, Arthur Scargill reported that the party had in the two days of its existence (the SLP was launched on May Day) recruited 1,252 individual members. Adding the memberships of the branches that had applied to affiliate would bring the total membership to 4,373.

There were 620 delegates with about 200 visitors at the conference. He stressed to reporters that the policy document had been written by members at open meetings.

The SLP founding conference ended with a few delegates at the back starting to sing the 'Internationale' which was then taken up by the whole meeting.

## More payments to top up low pay

BY PETER GIBSON

THE number of families on 'Family Credit', which tops up the income of working families with children, has increased by 83 per cent since 1991. The amount claimed by each family has on average increased by two-thirds, increasing the total bill by 198 per cent.

This subsidy to low-paying employers is in addition to the £500m paid each year in housing and council tax benefits to the low paid.

When we hear of the economic upturn from the government or the employers, they are talking about their profits. Those profits are often based on low pay for their workers and the subsidy paid by the rest of us to enable the employer to keep those wages

says there has been a £19.56 increase in the average weekly payment in the last five years, that is £15.68 more than the amount needed to keep pace with inflation.

More and more families are having to be paid this 'top-up' because of the very low pay from employers. The same employers will often explain how good they are at being efficient and making good profits.

The official TUC line is for an hourly rate of pay of £4 but this would only produce £166 for a basic week. By the time you have paid tax and national insurance, you will take home £100 or even less. That is not a wage that a family can live on.

The Labour leadership is reported to be in discussions with some union and CBI leaders about a £3.80 per hour minimum wage — because they say that it is Even the Labour Party now all the employers can afford.

## Mexican workers n Los Angeles decide to unionise

114 votes against 182 at last Sat-

urday's SLP founding conference

in London. The vote concerned

three amendments to the party's

policy document each of which

called for the scrapping of all

immigration controls. In the case

of one of the amendments this

leadership raised the spectre of

white racists from South Africa

descending in 20 years time on a

socialist Britain with a Socialist

Labour government after the

'revolutionary' changes made by

the African National Congress

government in overthrowing

apartheid. And, of course, 'social-

ist' Cuba has to keep out subver-

the main speaker on the anti-

racist section of the policy docu-

ment, was that 'every country on

the planet has to have an immi-

gration policy'. The same speaker

said that the SLP would look

stupid at a general election if it

didn't have such a policy. A

socialist' Britain would be in

favour of some 'elements' not

being allowed in on a class basis,

These arguments to give a

working-class' gloss on the policy

nide the fact that the document

tself says nothing about keeping

out or dealing with enemies of

he working class — indeed, there

re other and better ways to do

What the policy document

ays is: 'The area of immigration

s one of the most overtly racist

spects of British law. The SLP

vill scrap the asylum bill and re-

xamine in the cold light of day

Il existing immigration controls

said SLP leader Brian Heron.

Another argument, used by

sives from the US.

However supporters of the

was the only proposed change.

BY DOT GIBSON

HEN Liverpool dockers' shop ewards Bobby Moreton and ony Nelson headed a picket at e Los Angeles docks two weeks o it was the Mexican truck ivers who turned out to give ost support.

Los Angeles is the third rgest port in the world with 120 ntries (there are five gantries Liverpool). The three-and-a-If-hour picket affected the ck schedules, the loading of a re-mile train, the trucking and ipping companies, causing assive financial damage. The eket was only withdrawn when e port employers agreed to pay e wages of all the longshoreen who observed the picket.

Mexican and other Latin nerican workers are among the west paid in the area. The icks they drive are owned by companies that hire them but y must pay the insurance and repairs. To collect their pay the legal nine to ten hours a y, they must work 14 to 16. The ra work is unpaid.

If they don't complete a job, y get nothing.

On the eve of May Day a ort was received in Liverpool it following the success of the kers' picket these drivers had

ided to organise themselves.

#### Bosnian miner at Liverpool rally On 1 May this year, a shortage of safety equipment and Now the truth is that our min-

delegation from the Autonomous Trade Union of Coal Miners of Bosnia-Herzegovina participated on the Liverpool May Day demonstration led by 500 sacked dockworkers (see front-page report). Bosnian miners' president FIKRET SULJIC spoke to the rally and the Liverpool dockers made a collection of £500 to assist in the reconstruction of trade union organisation in Bosnia and Herzegovina. We publish Fikret's speech

I BRING you May Day greetings on behalf of the Autonomous Trade Union of coal miners of Bosnia-Herzegovina. The union represents all 20,000 coal miners in Bosnia-Herzegovina.

On this international workers' day I want to appeal to trade unions and working people here in Britain and throughout the world to act in solidarity with the miners in Bosnia.

Out of .20,000 miners only 10,000 are able to work due to other essentials. During the four years of war we received no wages at all. Now from the start of this year those who are working will get just £35 a month. Those who are unable to work will get £12 a month.

In the war many miners have been killed. Our families and our communities have lived through starvation and continual fear of aggression from those who wanted to carry out 'ethnic cleansing' which miners will never accept. Now everything miners have built up over generations of work is in ruins.

#### **Principles**

During the war our union has fought to keep alive basic trade union principles — to defend the rights of all miners. No one has left our pits because of nationality. Muslims, Croats, Serbs and others all still work together and we are rebuilding contacts with miners' organisations in other countries of the former Yugoslavia. We are all miners.

In the past we have given generously to workers in Vietnam, in South Africa, in South America and during the British miners' strike we donated one days' pay a month.

ers' union cannot survive without the same international solidarity.

As a union we want to defend the right of all miners to return to their jobs.

Only if we have a strong, independent union will we be able to prevent the government or anyone else sacking those miners who cannot work due to shortage of equipment. But our miners and our union are without any money to enable us to carry out our union functions.

We do not want to be dependent on government or the mine management, or political parties, or on religious groups.

The only people we can turn to are you. Without your solidarity our miners' trade union will not survive. We have been the victims of racist and fascist agression aimed at dividing people. If we are defeated then where will it happen next?

During our visit here we have been made aware that you also have big problems. We must act together to defend the rights of working people.

I hope that together we can begin to rebuild the spirit of international solidarity that used to exist and which May Day celebrates.

## HARD LABOUR OR TIME OUT?

TRADE UNION NEWS

A forum on changing working time patterns and their impact Presented by Trade Union News London Monday 20 May 1996, 7pm, Lucas Arms, Grays Inn Road, London WC1. King's Cross tube. With Kim Moody (US Labor Notes) and public and private sector trade union representatives Please elect a delegate from your organisation — or just turn up on the night. Join us to discuss strategies and find out how working time problems are shared by workers right across industry — in both private and public sectors. Plenty of time will be allowed for questions and discussion.

## Socialist Science Forum launched on May Day

agency workers are being used to

BY DANIEL ROBERTSON

MAY DAY was an appropriate day to launch the activity of the Socialist Science Forum in Lon-

Parallels were drawn between the Liverpool dockers' struggle against casualisation and the attacks on working conditions experienced by science workers in both industry and universities.

Temporary contracts have

cut costs in all areas of research. This must lead to declining

standards as well as eroding employment rights. Increasingly research is seen as being only justified if it can lead rapidly to greater profitability for private industry. The meeting resolved to build links with workers fighting casualisation behind the Liverpool dockers.

A continuing campaign around the BSE crisis was agreed

Renewed activity by racists around claims that intelligence is primarily inherited and intrinsically lower for non-Europeans or poor people has reflected capitalism's need for justifications for attacks on education and welfare. This important topic will be addressed by a series of articles and publications later this year.

The Forum welcomes support from everyone interested in the impact of science on life - and the crisis science faces under cap-

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British section of the Workers International (to Rebuild the Fourth International) Please send me information about the WRP

date ...... Name ...... Address

## Inside left

# Doctor without a cure

HIDING others' failure to grasp hisory, while hiding one's own ignoance, is probably part of the training f British foreign secretaries. Menioning Lord Owen's doubtful claims becture on Balkan history last week eminded some readers of the then abour foreign secretary Dr David wen's comments, in February 1978, a resolution remitted by the abour Party, about British arms and epression in Iran.

It seems to me a gross exagerraon to say that Iran has an internaonal reputation for "ruthless
olitical repression and torture",
eplied Dr Owen. 'If I may quote
tyself, answering a question on this
abject in a television interview last
lovember, "I think you have to look
the culture, the tradition, the hisory, the whole business of the
athority of the Shah in its origins in
ersian history, if you are going to
eally take a balanced view."

Shah Mohammad Reza Pahlavi's athority was hardly rooted back in the mists of time. His father was an emy officer who seized power in 21. He himself was propped back on is peacock throne by the CIA and I6 in 1953. But having impressed hyone so impressionable with his lik of 'culture, tradition' and 'histry', the learned Dr Owen proceeded more mundane business:

Tran plays a key role in promoting curity and stability in the Persian ulf . . . vital importance to Western supplies and our trade . . . an ally the Central Treaty Organisation . . . an's importance to us may be judged the facts that in 1977 she took over the facts that in 1977 she took over million of British exports and applied over a quarter of our crude limports . . .

None of this affects the deep conrn I feel and have expressed about the human rights issue in Iran and sewhere,' Owen wrote. 'All these ctors are taken into account in aching decisions about the provion of defence equipment, . . .'

Within a year the Iranian masses ad defied the tanks and guns, and not the Shah on a long vacation. The st is history, something the likes of ord Owen will never understand. As Iranian socialist observed:

The reader may think that the rean Dr Owen holds such false ideas is to his lack of correct historical towledge. I would argue that it is this lack of historical knowledge hich is the problem, but rather his the problem, but r

## Going, Joing . .

FEN Islington council's Red Flag s reported missing, I thought it a for a song — 'Take it down from mast, Labour traitors'. When the st of one-time Clerkenwell resint VI Lenin disappeared from the mall, I figured he was well out of (a friend claims he has it in his nt room). The London borough's sclear-Free Zone' signs were placed with 'Welcome to Islington' ms last Autumn (hope nobody told

Now a Lib Dem councillor who nted to auction them has been told y've gone. And the really bad ws? Having replaced Jeremy Cornas leader of the London group of bour MPs, former Islington council der Margaret Hodge MP reportion wants to come back as mayor of adon when Blair gets in.

gets in.
Charlie Pottins

Liverpool dockers' solidarity conference

# Reconstruction a the working-clas

WRP secretary CLIFF SLAUGHTER comments on the 27 April solidarity conference called by the Merseyside Port Shop Stewards' Committee

THE Liverpool docks shop stewards committee was absolutely correct in its decision to call the 200-strong, highly representative conference of its supporters in the struggle against the sacking of 500 men.

This conference in Liverpool on 27 April passed a resolution to set up a national committee and this was published in last week's Workers Press on the front page.

## Dockers must lead

IN HIS opening remarks to the conference, the chair of the shop stewards committee, Jimmy Nolan, said that the fight for solidarity with the dockers, like the dispute itself, had to be led by the dockers themselves.

He also said that this movement for solidarity is the starting point for a general movement of the working class as a class on the very same basic issues, and that it required a movement on that scale.

## National committee

THE conference decision to set up a committee structure at a national level in support of the dockers' fight is a definite step in the direction outlined by Nolan.

## Women of the Waterfront

THE Women of the Waterfront, a decisive element in the fight and a portent of things immediately to come throughout the working-class movement, have always emphasised the importance of the fact that after some seven years of casualisation and deteriorating conditions their menfolk decided to stand and fight.

In other words, generalising from this: at stake in the dockers' fight is a great beginning, the start of the reconstruction of the class movement of the working class, its reconstitution on the new foundations necessary for workers to confront the global offensive of capital in the 1990s.

## Facing up to the fight

IT IS not only because of this offensive — anti-union laws, casualisation, 'rationalisation', 'flexible labour market', structural mass unemployment, etc. — that reconstruction must begin.

It is also because, faced with the necessity to fight, the working class is facing up to the fact, proved in the last seven years, that its traditional

parties have failed it. Not only is Labour now openly and avowedly a party to manage capitalism, seeking to separate itself from any remaining element of control from the organised working class in its trade unions. The whole Stalinist strategy of 'socialism in one country', 'peaceful coexistence with capitalism' and 'peaceful competition between the two systems' as the way forward to socialism has ignominiously collapsed.

Socialists of all persuasions are compelled to re-examine from top to bottom their relation to the working-class movement and to each other.

## Work of socialists

THE necessary reconstruction of the working-class movement, to paraphrase Marx, 'is the task of the working class itself'. The work of socialists must be to recognise and take forward that self-reconstruction. And that is indeed the significance of the Liverpool conference and its decisions.

Already the dockers' committee had moved decisively on the central issue involved in the reconstruction of the class movement of the working class: the reconstruction of working-class internationalism.

This is the necessary negation of three-quarters of a century in which the working class has been failed by the parties which lead it.

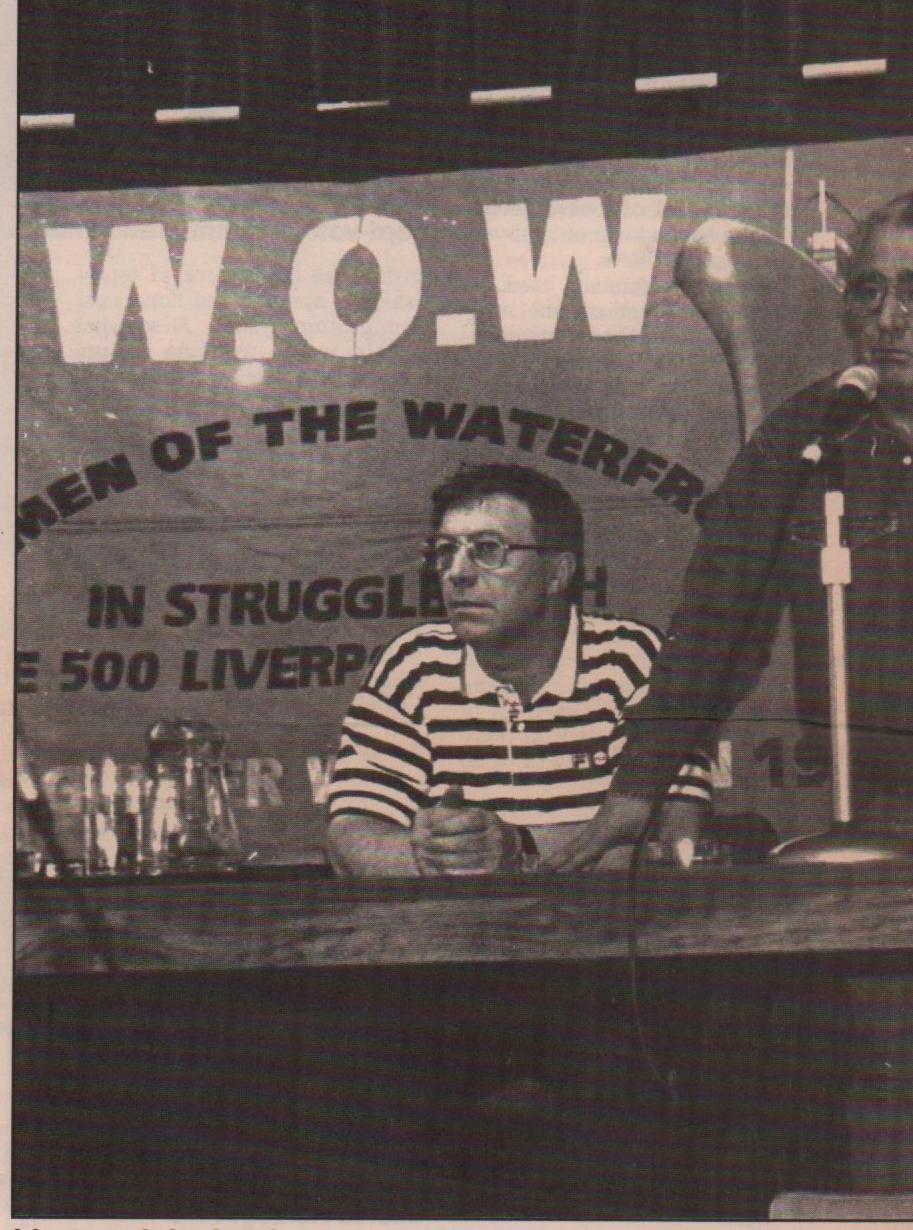
Fundamental to the reality of Labour reformism's betrayal of the working class was (and is) the Labourites' subservience to the capitalist class of their own country ('make Britain great again', says

Fundamental to the way in which Stalinism betrayed international socialism and eventually collapsed was the subordination of the international working class (including that of the Soviet Union) to 'socialism in one country'.

## War against capital

THE other decisive aspect in which the dockers' fight is the beginning of the necessary reconstruction is this: they have had to recognise — and to organise accordingly — that, while everything must be concentrated in the fight now to defeat the Mersey Docks and Harbour Company, they are in a war against capital, and that this war brings in all those who confront the same enemy.

The attacks of the employers come from the deepest needs of capitalism in its structural crisis, and not merely from the policy whims or



Liverpool docks shop stewards committee chair Jimmy Nolan a

temporary tactics of this or that employer, or even of the capitalists as a class.

That is why the decision of the dockers' stewards from the start to invite and encourage support on the widest scale, for example from Marxist and socialist intellectuals as well as from workers, and from socialist political organisations and individuals without discrimination, was absolutely correct.

(An outstanding example was the withering answer given by Marxists working in universities to the attack on the dockers by the employers' hireling, the monetarist Professor Patrick Minford.)

## Support committee

SUMMARISING the lessons of the dispute so far that will have to be the basis of the new support committee. Such a committee, coordinating struggles on a national scale, and with international connections, is necessary to bring together all the struggles ahead which will be on the same basic issues (and it follows that it must be completely open to these new elements who come into the fight).

These struggles are against the same enemy — the employers and the state (anti-union laws, police action and the courts) — and all require solidarity and support and where possible coordinated action.

But it is not only because all these struggles are essentially the same and need support that such a perma-

nent organisation of coordination is necessary.

Most important of all is the patient, determined and conscious preparation of the network, the communications, the common understanding gained in experience and study, which are going to be necessary at those decisive moments in the future not too far distant, when the crisis of the ruling class makes it possible and urgent for the working class to confront and defeat the power of capital.

The setting up of such a committee of support in this and future struggles should be consciously understood, and the work carried out, as the definite next steps in the reconstruction of the class movement of the working class which the dockers have begun.

## Political or industrial?

IS THIS struggle political, or industrial? In the most basic sense, it is both at the same time. Or rather, we should now conduct ourselves in the firm conviction that it can and must be the definite beginning of the overcoming of the division between the so-called political and industrial wings of the workers' movement which has for so long bedevilled the working class.

(Here another example of the necessary coming together of struggles like that of the dockers with the work of Marxist intellectuals — a debt is owed to Istvan Meszaros, who, in his recent book *Beyond Capital*, has demonstrated the historical

## DOCKERS CHARTER

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Donations also to above address.

#### Liverpool dockers' solidarity conference

# nd revival of smovement



dresses the 27 April solidarity conference

Photo: Alan Clark

necessity of overcoming this 'industrial/political' division if the working class is to move towards its own emancipation and reconstitute its class movement.)

Two very definite facts to be borne in mind in preparing the 'industrial-political' role of the movement which is now beginning are these:

First, mass action to defeat the anti-union laws will develop and will have to be led against the government.

Second, that government is likely to be a Labour government, and that will require momentous political decisions on how to fight such a government and on how the working class will break from Labour and bring forward its own vangard to politically lead it.

## Sectarian amendments

THE dockers' committee at the 27 April conference decisively (and rightly) refused to accept sectarian amendments to their resolution, amendments which attacked the trade union bureaucracy and called for the dispute to be made official by the TGWU.

It is some kind of sectarian hangover — fatal in the situation now facing the working class — that prevents people from seeing what is in front of them.

There in the conference and on the platform was the only real force that can change the unions and that can lead the working class, mamely, the class itself represented in responsible committees by its most conscious and trusted elements, with real responsibilities and discipline, and directly responsible to it weekby-week in mass meetings.

As Paul Henderson, from Leicester trades council and a member of the WRP, insisted: the mechanisms for the fight were there in the hall, and this is a thousand times more important than resolutions against trade union officials.

Henderson too was paraphrasing Marx, who said that what was called 'the weapon of criticism' must be replaced by 'the criticism of weapons'! In other words, look for and join that real force in the objective situation which can actually challenge (and not just verbally criticise or 'demand of') the powers that be!

Not to mention the big fat fact — explained clearly enough one would think for even the most stubborn sectarian to understand by docks' shop steward Bobby Moreton — that if the dispute was made official it would be only with the intention of leading the strikers back to work.

#### The real test

THIS leads to the necessity of overcoming sectarianism. Many speakers in the conference in introducing themselves announced their membership of a political group — Socialist Workers' Party, Communist Party of Britain, Militant Labour, WRP (Workers International), etc.

Now the fact is that these groups (with the exception of David North's 'International Communist Party')

have all given unconditional support to the dockers in this dispute (and I repeat that the dockers' decision to welcome all such support was highly positive).

But it should be said that here the test of every political tendency and group (including of course our own) is not to 'intervene', as we used to be in the habit of saying, or to give 'political content' to the dispute, least of all to go poaching for members or engaging in advertising campaigns for one's own wares. These are the understandable but outworn habits of the past.

The real test of these groups now is for them to do everything to make sure that the dockers win, to recognise that here is something new, the beginning of the revival and reconstruction of the working-class movement, a beginning that must now be carried forward. That is why WRP members voted for the resolution and spoke against the amendments.

Here is the main point. The committee now to be formed out of support for the dockers' fight, fighting to absorb all the above lessons and the many more that will emerge, begins the mobilisation and testing of a vanguard of the working class which can bring forward in the next stage of the struggle the full strength of the working class as a class, that is, politically.

This, and not waiting for some 'saviour' party to deliver the working class (or, as the sectarians hope, for the workers to recognise that they, the sectarians, are that saviour party), is the prospect on which we must base all our work.

City Lights

#### Sleep easy, boys

'BUY now while you have the chance' is the current cry in the City. The more unscrupulous City operators are putting it about that once Labour comes to office the current take-over bonanza will be brought to a halt. That is why stories of potential takeovers now abound, most of them with little chance of realisation.

The joke is that these rumour mongers are often the very same people who have been supping with Blair and his inner circle for the past two years and more, getting all the assurances they need that nothing will stand in the way of them accumulating yet more ill-gotten gains should Blair enter Number 10.

But truth is thrown out of the window when it comes to rumping share prices and thereby making fortunes. The basis for the deliberately-fostered alarms sweeping the City is that the Labour leaders have in the past made vague noises to the effect that in future the burden of proof in take-over bids will have to be that they are undeniably in 'the public interest'.

Under current competition law the reverse is the case, with speculators only having to prove that a takeover is not positively against the public interest.

Naturally this raises the question: what is this whimsical 'public interest'? Under the rule of capital there can be no such thing.

What counts are the interests of big business and finance, and nothing else. A sharp suited City lawyer, Alice in Wonderland style, can make the words 'public interest' mean exactly what he wants them to mean.

In any case, nobody really in the know within the Square Mile takes the 'threat' from Labour seriously.

And with good reason. Thus in a meeting with City and industry representatives last month Peter Mandelson, eminence grise to prime-minister-in-waiting Blair, went so far as to say that it mattered not a jot or tickle whether National Power was bought out by a foreign concern as long as 'adequate regulations' were in place.

No wonder the *Independent*'s City pages could say recently (20 April, 'Don't bet on Labour spoiling the City's party') that under Labour we were likely to see 'a new breed of mergers and acquisitions specialists skilled at drawing up public interest statements that whiz their deals painlessly past the authorities'.

'A continuation of the take-over boom under New Labour,' it concluded, 'is by no means out of the question.' Hardly the prediction of the year, you might think.

#### A Royal marriage

THE latest merger in what, to use the current jargon, is known as the 'financial services sector' will put up to 5,000 workers out on the stones but will bring 'substantial cost savings'.

This was the news following the coming together of Royal Insurance and Sun Alliance to produce the second largest insurance business in Britain. The savings are expected to come to £175m by 1998, enough to increase profits by a fifth.

Expect a further wave of acquisitions and take-overs in the insurance business, with much the same results. Shares in all the leading insurers rose sharply on news of the merger in greedy anticipation of more rich pickings — and yet further sackings.

## Sign of the times

IT'S surely a sign of the times when

in hand to the international money markets to help plug the gaping hole (currently running at some Ffr160bn, or £20bn) in its social security system.

PAGE 5

Even more remarkable is the fact that both the Bank of England and the Bundesbank are querying whether the loan for which the French are asking is entirely riskfree.

Explicitly guaranteed government debt normally carries a nil-risk rating, but the slightest chance of default raises that rating to 20 per cent, which could cost the French taxpayer up to Ffr24m a year in extra interest payments.

This possibility arises because the loan for which the French are asking is not being underwritten directly by the French finance ministry but by a special agency known by the acronym Cades.

The Bank of England and the German central bank are threatening to impose a risk surcharge because Cades is financed out of taxation — it proposes to repay the loan by a special 0.5 per cent tax levied on all sources of income.

The reaction from London and Bonn is hardly a vote of overwhelming confidence in the stability of French finances or politics.

## How much did she know?

JUST how much Lady Thatcher and her entourage knew about one of the biggest financial scandals of the 1980s should become clearer next month when secret Cabinet papers and videotaped interviews with the Iron Lady and other top Tories are released.

The tapes and documents, described by lawyers as 'political dynamite', form part of the British government's attempt to recover in the US courts the six-figure sum it lost after investing in John Delorean's collapsed motor car company, which went bust in 1982.

The videos include cross-examinations of Thatcher and Lord ('farmer Jim') Prior, former Northern Ireland secretary and ex-GEC chairman, as well as former attorney general Lord Havers and Sir Leon Brittan, now a vice-president of the European Commission.

In 1992, Prime Minister Major abandoned a two-year struggle to keep certain documents confidential by agreeing to hand over Cabinet papers, ministerial briefing notes and thousands of pages of other material, which would normally be covered by Whitehall's 30-year rule banning disclosure.

Major's about-turn was provoked by the threat of US trial judge Charles Stewart to throw the case out of court unless the government co-operated. In return Stewart had agreed with the government and DeLorean's auditors, Arthur Andersen, that the evidence would be kept secret until the trial.

Sadly for the hapless Major, Stewart then proceeded to die — to be replaced by a new judge, Michael Mukasey, who ruled that all the evidence should be put on the public record immediately.

The new judge has already decreed that there will have to be compelling reasons if all the documents are not to feature in the trial and that the prospect of 'negative publicity' would be insufficient to keep material under wraps. The government's case is that Andersens should have spotted the fraudulent activities of DeLorean who went down in 1982 with debts of £70m, despite having received £80m in government subventions.

In turn Andersen's case is that the government pumped money into DeLorean's plant (set up by the US financier to make Lotus sports cars)

for political, not economic, reasons.

#### Trotsky and artistic freedom

RARE these days, and therefore welcome, are reasonably accurate references in the periodical press to the life, work, and views of Leon Trotsky.

Rarer still, and therefore doubly welcome, are tributes, however backhanded, to Trotsky's unequalled intellectual grasp, to the unparalleled sweep, breadth, and depth of his knowledge of culture, to his lifelong interest in artistic experiment and innovation, and to his burning devotion to artistic freedom.

So it was good to read last week the following paragraph in a Times Literary Supplement review of Revolution of the Mind (Bloomsbury, £25) Mark Polizzotti's new biography of the French poet and pioneer of surrealism, André Breton:

'In 1938, Breton travelled to Mexico and had his celebrated meetings with the exiled Trotsky, which are here described evocatively. They led to nothing significant, but in themselves they are of interest in suggesting that Trotsky really did have mental possibilities none of his colperhaps leagues, except Bukharin, could have shared. It is particularly interesting that Trotsky should have read some of Breton's work in advance of meeting him, using copies he had requested from the American art historian Meyer Schapiro.'

Lachlan Mackinnon, the writer of this review, seems to have a higher opinion of Bukharin's 'mental possibilities', to use his own condescending phrase, than did either Lenin (who believed 'there is something scholastic in him') or the historian E.H. Carr (who draws attention to Bukharin's 'rigidity in ideas').

But that is by the way. The important question is: did those meetings between Trotsky and Breton really lead to 'nothing significant'? Let's see.

Breton, whose insistence that artists must be free from political tutelage had led to his break with the Communist Party in 1935, was in Mexico between February and October 1938.

During that stay at Coyoacan, he and the Mexican painter Diego Rivera went for long walks and trips into the countryside with Trotsky. All the time they were together the three argued, at times fiercely, about politics and art, about Marxist philosophy and aesthetics.

These heated discussions led to a call by Breton and Rivera for an international federation of revolutionary writers and artists in defence of literary and artistic freedom; this idea was overtaken by the outbreak of World War II in the following year and so came to nothing.

Those discussions did not entirely run into the sand, though. They led also to two documents which really can't be airily dismissed as 'nothing sig-

nificant'. One was a Manifesto on artistic freedom (signed by Breton and Rivera though largely written by Trotsky, and published in the autumn 1938 issue of the US Partisan Review); the other was a letter from Trotsky to Breton on 'The Independence of the Artist', dated 22 December 1938 (and reprinted in Leon Trotsky on Literature and Art, 1970).

Trotsky's late-1930s writings on the arts basically restate the position he had taken in Literature and Revolution (1924). But now he had Stalinism and its boot-lickers among the intellec-

tuals to deal with. With what withering contempt did he round on the Stalinworshipping literary celebrities of the day: 'the Aragons, Ehrenburgs, and other petty tricksters', the 'gentlemen who compose with the same enthusiasm biographies of Jesus Christ and of Joseph Stalin' (here he had in mind the French novelist Henri Barbusse,

1873-1935). With what passion, with what unfeigned admiration for artistic truth and the unremitting strug-

## PERSONAL COLUMN

genuine artist's revolutionary role and message, in words that resonate with great power and immediacy 58 years later:

'Our planet is being turned into a filthy and evil-smelling imperialist barrack...[T]he more ignorant and obtuse a dictator is, the more does he feel destined to direct the development of science, philosophy, and art. The intelligentsia's herd instinct and servility are yet another and not inconsiderable symptom of the decadence of contemporary soci-

'Art, culture, and politics need a new perspective. Without it humanity will not move forward. ... But a genuinely revolutionary party cannot and will not wish to "guide" art, let alone take it under its command....

'Only an ignorant and insolent bureaucracy running amok with arbitrary power could conceive such an ambition. . . . Art can be the revolution's great ally only in so far as it remains true to itself.'

These writings of Trotsky's included a devastating critique of 'socialist realism' (a label which 'could have been invented only by a bureaucrat at the head of an Arts Department'):

"The realism consists in imitating provincial daguerrotype pictures of the third quarter of the previous century; the "socialist" style, in using tricks of affected photography to represent events that have never taken place.

'One cannot without revulsion and horror read the poems and novels or view the pictures and sculptures in which officials armed with pen, brush, or chisel, supervised by officials armed with revolvers, glorify the "great leaders of genius" in whom there is not a spark either of genius or greatness.

'The art of the Stalin epoch will remain the most striking expression of the deepest decline of proletarian revolution.'

'NOTHING significant'? Those caustic words from Trotsky's prescient pen seem to me far from insignificant. And their significance is surely twofold.

First of all, they demonstrate the yawning gulf there was and of course still is, for all that Stalinism has collapsed between the Marxist and the Stalinist approaches to the arts, to human creativity, and to the artist's most precious gift of all: imagination.

The supposedly arrogant Trotsky, though he had doubts about what he perceived as a 'strand of mysticism' in the work of Breton and his fellow surrealists, was humble enough to do his homework, modest enough to pay homage to the artistic and literary imagination. Before meeting Breton, he went to the trouble of sending for and reading his writ-

To Trotsky it was anathema to militarise artists and writers, as was done in the Soviet Union, to dictate their subject-matter or methods, even to offer them party 'guidance'.

Artists so 'guided' - which in practice meant the most onerous and restrictive of ideological strait-jackets — could no longer be true to themselves. The struggle for artistic truth was part of the struggle for revolutionary

ideas. In the second place, we who are today discussing the need for a new socialist party should never lose sight of the part that artists and writers have to play in the struggle for socialism.

Like Trotsky, we should recognise that art is by its nature a human protest against an inhuman existence.

So we should welcome the contribution of artists, encourage their creativity, rejoice in their imagination, and enrich our lives with their dreams.

#### 'Truth Commission' call in Namibia THE question of what happened to Namibian liberation fighters held by their own South West African People's Organisation (SWAPO) has once again flared into the open. A recently pub-



Supporters of detainees demonstrate against SWAPO leadership in the late 1980s The regime of Sam Nujoma

described by the regime as an Prominent leaders of the Angliapostle of apartheid and Groth can, Lutheran and Catholic himself was said to be a member churches have opposed the (section of the Workers Internaof the extreme right in Germany.

The public media in Namibia has been swamped with protests against these blatant lies, which many see as proof of the falsity of the charges drummed up by SWAPO's leaders against refugees in exile.

The churches have been split by the resurfacing of this issue. request from some ex-detainees that the Namibian Council of Churches should launch the book officially and at the same time come clean on the role it played in the crimes committed against SWAPO fighters.

As in the late 1980s, when the facts about the treatment and detention of opponents of the SWAPO leadership, the Workers Revolutionary Party of Namibia tional) is playing a leading part in the growing campaign.

It is continuing the exposure not simply of the role of the SWAPO leaders and their crimes against some of the best liberation fighters in the movement, but also their links with the Great Powers who throughout helped cover up these crimes.

#### **Book review**

lished book details the terror

campaign of the SWAPO leader-

ship against young members of

the organisation and those forced

into exile during the liberation

of Silence appeared first in Ger-

man and then, late last year, in

English. It threatens to cause an

explosion throughout Namibia

and has led to calls for the estab-

lishment of a 'Truth Commission'

to expose what happened to

many of the best SWAPO fighters

throughout the 1960s, 1970s and

1980s at the hands of the move-

Some of these liberation fight-

ers are still feared to be in deten-

tion. Plans are well advanced to

translate the book into Namibia's

has reacted fiercely to these

developments. In an 'address to

the nation' Nujoma denounced

the book. He was followed a week

later by SWAPO secretary and

Minister of Labour Moses Garoeb

who threatened a 'civil war' simi-

lar to that in Rwanda and

Burundi should people try to

Those backing the Wall of

Silence were denounced in the

vilest terms. Prominent theolo-

gian Professor Lombard was

'reopen old wounds'.

common

Afrikaans and Oshiwamboy.

languages,

ment's leadership.

Pastor Siegfried Groth's Wall

struggle.

## The 'jazz age' and black resistance

TALK about the 'jazz age' brings up images of wild excesses, black musicians cheerfully entertaining white patrons. The phrase 'the roaring twenties' seems to sum things up.

Keep Cool: The Black Activists Who Built the Jazz Age by Ted Vincent gets behind the myths. The music itself was not based on feeble blacks humbly doing their white bosses' bidding. Rather the reverse; it was centred on strong individuals and rebellion against existing musical forms. Furthermore, it started not in the 1920s but before World War I.

Vincent argues that it was an overwhelmingly black music rooted in Afro-American experience. He also points out that even telling the story of the social struggles that created the jazz age could not happen spontaneously.

The events were lost to historians until the 1950s and 1960s civil rights battles brought forward advances in studies of black life.

## The shock of the old

VINCENT develops his argument by giving us an idea of how music that now sounds old and clichéd once shocked its audiences.

The new music itself came from the massive social change that was turning black lives upside down. Although much of the music started in the southern USA, it was driven forward by the way that Afro-Americans were moving away from the rural south. They moved into cities like New Orleans or more likely to the advancing industrial centres of the north and west.

The 'classic blues' of Mamie and Bessie Smith (unrelated) used powerful voices to tell black audiences things of relevance to their lives. This was so different from the way that the older black musicians had offered stereotypes of themselves for white audiences' amusement.

If war is the 'locomotive of his-

political life. Suddenly in World War I black American bands were brought to the fore of the US Army. Their dynamic new sounds were needed to inspire Americans to fight for Uncle Sam and to help show Europe that America was the new world power. Thus the music was suddenly recognised and encouraged

by authority. Racism was, however, the norm. Musicians and all those organising the presentation of the music fought an ongoing battle just to get the audiences and performers together.

This fight was two-fold. The battle was for the right to run desegregated performances and to get black artists into the recording studios. Even in the northern states, partial segregation was the rule in many theatres.

This book tells of the considerable energy and resourcefulness put into the battles against bigotry. The blues are often thought of as ancient music with origins somehow lost in the mists of time. Vincent points to evidence that the modern form developed at about the same time as jazz.

Even the 'rural' blues came out of a small area of about a dozen counties in Arkansas and Mississippi. In the first part of the century this area pioneered modern agribusiness with a large, lowpaid labour force and high output. In these conditions trade unions and music grew together.

## Music and militancy

A SURPRISE is the continuous role of political radicalism in the development of the music. A number of the early musicians and writers also had an unexpected side.

How many middle-aged listeners to 'Fats' Waller would realise that favourite songs were written by Andy Rafez, who was part of the African Blood Brotherhood, a black self-defence organisation? Rafez went on to dramatic affect on support Marcus Garvey's brand

W.C. Handy was sometimes called 'the father of the blues'. He was also closely involved in the revolutionary side of black activism in the 1920s, at a time when the movement showed support for Soviet Russia.

Many other black musicians held strongly leftist views.

Vincent points out that Duke Ellington's works commemorating black freedom fighters were many but they were not recorded.

Sidney Bechet became the first American black musician to visit the Soviet Union. He was also known for his enthusiasm for debate about politics and revolution. These were lively times.

Vincent tells of a visit to Tulsa, Oklahoma by a Broadway star and her jazz band in June 1921. Whites had started a race riot, as they had many times since 1917. They were met, however, by armed members of the Tulsa branch of the African Blood Brotherhood.

Although the black forces were ultimately defeated by vastly stronger and better armed racists their action was a deterrent to future lynch mobs.

Marcus Garvey's Universal Negro Improvement Association (UNIA) attracted a large number of gifted musicians in the 1920s. This movement, at its height in the early 1920s, had around a million members.

The working class was the main base of enthusiasm for the new music. UNIA was overwhelmingly working class in its composition and it played a powerful part in advancing jazz. Selfhelp was an important part of Garvey's thinking.

An aim was to have a UNIA Liberty Hall in every town. It would be a community centre. While this ambitious plan was not wholly achieved, in many centres the Liberty Halls provided centres for jazz and other black music.

An interesting part of this work is the accounts of the Afro-Americans who organised the music business. They had to face threats from the Ku-Klux-Klan and white executives trying to keep them out.

ensure that black performers could play and act as serious artists. This meant that they would oppose the 'comic' turns showing dumb, rural people for the amusement of white audiences.

### Unions

A KEY question was how workers could organise themselves. The AFL (the American equivalent of the TUC then) musicians' union was very reluctant to let black musicians in. Thus the employers could often benefit from conflicts between nonunion black musicians and white union members.

To deal with this situation James Rees Europe set up a black union called the 'Clef Club' in 1910. The story of the tangled web of racial and class conflict gives an idea of the complexity of working class organisation in this period.

While some left groups embraced the new music others went for the cultural 'high ground' and looked down on the music of the poor and oppressed. In particular the American Socialist Party and even its 'Negro' paper, the Messenger, had little positive to say about jazz and blues.

Many of the black intellectuals seem to have been cut off from the life of working-class black communities.

Vincent suggests that the jazz age was over by 1926. The originality of the music had shocked but now that phase passed. The black community had also lost control of the venues. Popular music was big business. The rise of the cinema also undermined the audience for live music.

The book has a fascinating tale to tell. It goes further than that. It suggests that the jazz of the 1920s and later forms like rhythm and blues, bebop, funk and rap are distinctly Afro-American and are thus bound to have a political

Geoff Barr

Keep Cool: The Black Activists Who Built the Jazz Age, Ted

dimension.

# A decisive change in Germany

#### BY BOB ARCHER

MAY DAY in Germany was a more lively affair this year than most people can remember. Dieter Schulte, the leader of the immensely respectable German trade union federation (DGB), told an angry 20,000-strong rally in Berlin that the unions would use a clenched fist against government attacks on the health, welfare and social security systems.

Workers at a May Day rally in the Ruhr area told journalists they thought a general strike was needed.

For decades the 'German model' of labour relations has been dangled in front of workers all over the world as the supreme example of the benefits of democracy and class compromise. But the last few years have seen the systematic demolition of the social and economic system in which the 'German model' was embedded.

Now it is clear the 'German model' offers no magic formula for avoiding poverty and social strife. Chancellor Kohl has been forced down the same path as the French government, which plans to reduce real government spending by 2 per cent next year, cutting housing and employment subsidies and letting 'natural wastage' remove a lot of civil service jobs.

The new Spanish government is also planning to cut expenditure and remove workers' protection against sacking. Prime Minister Jose Maria Aznar threatens privatisation and tax reforms which will undoubtedly remove some of the burden on businesses and make working-class consumers pay more.

Germany simply joins the queue of capitalist governments driven to claw back the gains the working class has made over previous decades. But the German working class is one of the strongest in Europe and has more to lose than others.

#### The economy

SIX YEARS after the 'collapse of communism' and German re-unification, the German economy is in the most difficult situation it has experienced since the aftermath of World War II.

Predictions that re-unification would create a powerful capitalist giant have proved to be very wide of the mark. Instead of being a source of strength to the ruling class, re-unification has turned out to be a disaster. Transfusions of billions of Deutschmarks into eastern Germany have failed to bring into being a viable productive economy.

West Germany gave its 'new territories' in the east 132bn Deutschmarks in 1991, 156bn in 1992 and 170bn in 1993.

Last year about 200bn — 10 per cent of GDP — was poured into what is now described as a black hole'.

Private capital showed very little initiative in investing in the new territories'. The main burden has been shouldered by the government. Even the private banks that took over the east German state-run banks and their enormous debts demanded and got government backing to the tune of 70bn Deutschmarks.

This means that a huge amount of the nation's economic activity flows through the various branches of government. This 'Staatsquote' is now well over 50 per cent of the economy. This is hardly a sign of strength in a 'market economy'.

A state body, the Treuhand, had to supervise the changeover in the east. By the time it was wound up, as much as a quarter of the money transfers were simply going to pay benefits to the 20 per cent of workers in the east who are unemployed.

What happened to the east's shipyards is symbolic of the real relationship between east and west. They were at best unwanted competition for the shipyards in the west, and shipyard workers in Rostock had to put up a real fight to halt closure. Finally the European Union came up with some money and the yards were taken over by western shipbuilders.

This year it was discovered that Vulkan shippard in Bremen had actually pocketed money intended for the eastern yards. Of course it was the bankruptcy of Vulkan which brought it all out into the open.

The huge cost of financing reunification has been met in part by a big increase in the German budget deficit, which is now over 3 per cent. This has created big difficulties with the Maastricht agreement for European Monetary Union. This agreement to weld Europe into one mighty economic unit is essential if European businesses are to compete effectively with firms in the US, Japan and the Pacific rim.

It is essential for European capitalists to have one currency under the direction of one overall authority to stop weaker European economies from devaluing their currencies to make their products cheaper to sell abroad.

The Maastricht agreement set out 'convergence criteria'. Governments must have budget deficits of no more than 3 per cent of GDP. Partly because of the cost of re-unification, Germany has gone over the 3 per cent mark, and one aim of Kohl's austerity package is to bring the budget deficit down.

Re-unification has also led to a big increase in taxation. Ordinary citizens have had to bear the cost through increases in phone charges but also a 'solidarity supplement' in taxes.

This is of course reflected in what are called 'indirect labour costs' — what it really costs an employer to employ a German worker.

German workers have a good system of statutory social and health insurance. By campaigns of industrial action over many decades, they have won the right to be paid sick pay at the full rate from day one, protection from dismissal and paid holidays.

on top of every Deutschmark



Demonstration against abolition of early retirement (Duisburg, 22 January)

paid to a German worker in direct wages, something like 80 pfennigs has to be paid into some pension, holiday or social security fund, health insurance or to the government in tax (there are 100 pfennigs in a mark).

This has led to a school of radical free-marketeers who talk about 'Standort Deutschland', roughly the 'UK plc' argument used by Thatcherites in Britain. They argue that German workers are pricing themselves out of world markets, pointing to the 'export' of jobs to areas where labour is cheaper and more flexible.

The plight of the huge Daimler manufacturing concern in many ways shows the depth of the problems facing German society. Company managers tried to build up a technological giant which could compete with firms like Boeing on the world aerospace market.

However the attempt went sour because, as Rolls Royce found out 20 years ago in Britain, it takes lots of money to stay in the big league. Daimler got into difficulties over its Dutch subsidiary, Fokker, and suddenly there was no government money to bail them out.

Now Daimler has had to fall back on core activities, such as its Mercedes-Benz cars. Its German aerospace subsidiary, DASA, has

One of the strengths of German capital in the past lay in its lead in advanced technology, both in production methods and products. But in key areas of modern industrial activity, German firms have lagged more and more behind US or Japanese rivals.

AEG used to be a byword for electrical engineering. The firm was a classic 'Konzern', the kind of integrated industrial giant that typified ruthless industrial efficiency. It hardly exists any longer. Daimler bought the firm up to try and create an integrated technology combine, then spent billions closing it down.

Siemens, the other electrical giant, has seen its computer subsidiary Nixdorf sidelined by Korean, US and Japanese competitors.

Daimler's response to its problems was to take the 'Anglo-Saxon' road. Talk about stake-holder responsibility was dropped. Shareholders in the company imposed a management stock-option scheme, which rewards the directors for paying big dividends to shareholders, over the objections of worker-directors and representatives of the wider community.

Capital is insisting on its rights. Where profits clash with jobs or workers' rights, it has to try and drive them to the wall. Behind the great monopolies there used to be the army of 'Mittelstand' companies, small and medium enterprises, usually family-owned and financed by long-term credit arrangements with specialist banks themselves supported by the government.

Because their shares were rarely sold to outsiders, the Mittelstand businesses did not have to stump up big dividends when times were hard. There was hardly any risk of a hostile take-over putting the firm in the hands of ruthless newcomers looking to close unprofitable activities and sack workers.

They relied on a highly-skilled and loyal workforce, often keeping them at work when business was slack.

'Mittelstand' firms have also been hard-hit by the recession. Those that can have shifted their operations abroad where wages are lower, or at least out-sourced part of their production.

The fact that the German government has kept the Deutschmark a strong currency while the dollar and the yen have fallen in value has cost these German firms dear in terms of exports. And yet memories of the hyperinflation in the 1920s are still so strong that few German politicians feel able to let the value of the mark fall.

While the sons and daughters of the original founders of companies have often been unwilling to follow in their parents' footsteps, newcomers find it incredibly costly to start up in Germany, and are faced with a tangle of regulations.

The old, paternalistic 'Mittelstand' employer is disappearing. Great efforts are being made to mobilise stock markets in all the regions as a source of capital for a new kind of entrepreneur who will maximise returns, sack 'surplus' workers and generally be tied much more closely to the needs of speculative capital.

needs of speculative capital.

The party which most closely represents the middle class, the Free Democrats (FDP), has lost its cuddly liberal image and, in the figure of economics minister Rexrodt, is the most insistent voice for deregulation, government spending cuts and 'free market' reforms.

## Globalisation and unemployment

THE strength of the Deutschmark is one emotive measure of the state of the German economy. Another is the unemployment figures. At about 4.5m, unemployment in Germany is approaching levels which evoke the crisis of the early 1930s which brought Hitler to power.

fies the government's budgetary crisis and weighs heavily on the indirect wage bill for those who are still in work, thus discouraging employers even more from investing in jobs in Germany.

Many workers who were made redundant, for example in the run-down of the coal and steel industries, were given early retirement on very generous terms. While they do not appear in the unemployment statistics, they are a drain on the pension fund, again pushing up either the government debt or the indirect wage bill.

Many left-wing trade unionists reject the 'Standort Deutschland' argument put forward by free-marketeers. They deny that German workers are 'pricing themselves out of world markets' and point to the particular strengths of German industry; the highly-developed infrastructure and a highly-skilled and hard-working labour force.

In fact Germany has always been highly integrated into the world market (except for the years of 'autarky' in the middle to late 1930s), so talk about globalisation and 'exporting jobs' is taken with a grain of salt. What Germany has been good at exporting is high-quality industrial products.

Ever since the late 1950s German firms have successfully been setting up subsidiaries abroad, Volkswagen in Brazil and the US, Zeiss in Singapore and so on. So there seems to be nothing new about that, either. And old industries like iron and steelmaking, coal-mining, metal-bashing and chemicals have over decades decayed and been replaced by modern industries.

While the new technologies which have replaced them are less reliable because they are more easily transferable, this is not the basic cause of the steady erosion of German industrial jobs over many years.

What is new in the globalisation experienced since the 1970s is the unparalleled increase in speculative finance capital washing around the world.

Whereas in imperialism's glory days metropolitan countries made their profits by extracting raw materials cheaply from colonial and semi-colonial dependants and selling manufactured goods abroad, they rely much more now on straight parasitism.

As the factories and entire industries have closed down in Britain, the great pink marble palaces of the City of London have shot skywards. As Britain became a net importer of manufactured goods, the invisible exports in terms of financial services grew bloated.

deceive workers: it is what capitalism really has to offer in the last decade of the 20th century.

The bulk of the changes to the German economy have actually been building up over decades. Huge numbers of industrial jobs have gone through automation and technical change and because productivity has steadily increased. And millions of jobs have been exported to areas where wages and conditions are worse; South America, Korea, Taiwan, the Philippines, India and not least 'communist' China.

Now the effects of the changes are forcing their way through into politics and the relationships between the main classes.

#### Class relations

A whole history of social control is breaking down in Germany and nobody has yet foreseen to the end the results of the breakdown.

'Corporatism' is an inadequate word to describe the system of German social control (or 'industrial democracy') because it implies that the working class was absolutely paralysed as a class by the absorption of its organisations (the unions and the Social-democratic Party) into the state machinery.

Clearly this was not the case. There have been many instances where the German working class carried out independent class struggles in the years since 1945. Nevertheless, the extent and perspectives of such struggles have always been circumscribed by the system of 'social partnership'.

The door has always been open for a 'Kanzlerrunde', a three-way discussion between the government, the employers and the union leaders.

German wage contracts are legally binding on both sides. Official strikes can only happen if negotiations on a new contract break down, never during the life of a contract.

There is basically one union for each industry and they are very strictly-run by officials. Workplace representatives are carefully integrated into the legally-recognised works-council system. Wild-cat strikes really are rare.

The Social-democratic Party (SPD) officially abandoned any reference to socialism in its Bad Godesburg programme of 1959. It is thoroughly at home with the German Fundamental Law which outlaws any party which does not accept parliamentary democracy.

The trade union and social-democratic leaders have tried as hard as any to keep 'social partnership' alive, because it is their natural medium, the very air they breathe. However, the changes in world capitalism, the eruption of its structural crisis, have cut off their oxygen.

These leaders of the working class first proposed an 'Alliance for Jobs' last year. In return for wage restraint and greater flexibility, they hoped to retain the system of class-collaboration.

But capital itself cut the ground from under them. Chancellor Kohl hesitated endlessly before recognising what was already an accomplished fact: Capital can no longer afford a highly-paid, properly-protected workforce in Germany.

Although not a single comma of the German labour relations laws have been changed, the real class relations are irreversibly transformed. The German working class will have to oppose the attacks it is undergoing, and the only line of march it can take is to fight for the end of capitalism.

But German workers will for the first time in many years be fighting alongside workers all over the world opposing the same conditions of degradation and exploitation

exploitation.

These are good conditions for rebuilding the trade unions as combat organisations and laying the basis for a new, international-

### The Kohl austerity plan:

- Cut £22 bn off all government expenditure, central and regional.
   £11bn to come off central government expenditure.
- Unemployment benefit to be frozen.
- Child benefit to be frozen.
- Cuts in government departments and changes in the pension system.
- £11bn to be cut in regional and local expenditure, mainly through a public-sector wage-freeze.
- Health insurance entitlements to be cut.
- Age at which workers can go into early retirement to be raised.
  Payment of sick pay from day one for six weeks in full
- based on recent pay including bonuses and overtime to be replaced by sick pay at 80 per cent of basic earnings. (This will not immediately affect the four out of five German workers whose sick pay is fixed by legally-binding wage contracts.)
- Firms employing ten workers or less will now find it easier to sack workers. (The cut-off figure used to be five

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## Tudjman tries to tame media Life after the war in Bosnia

CROATIA'S state media had a first last month — they interviewed a dead man. Radio Croatia's 3pm news bulletin reported that US Commerce Secretary Ron Brown had arrived in Dubrovnik, been greeted by Prime Minister Matesa, and commenced talks on eco-

nomic development.

In fact, Brown's plane had crashed at 2.40pm, killing him and 35 other passengers. But the following morning the pro-government newspaper Vecerni List reported that the US government and business delegation had been received by Prime Minister Matesa, and quoted the US Commerce Secretary: "The fundamental purpose of my stay here is the fact that the keys to keeping the peace are long-lasting economic growth and the establishment of new employment opportunities," announced R. Brown, who also said that from this visit he expects results similar to those achieved by America 50 years ago with its economic assistance to west European countries.

"This mission signals the next phase of American relations with Bosnia and Croatia," said Brown.'

Maybe the reporters were trying to show some alacrity, to make up for an earlier gaffe by a sleepy Croatian Radio announcer, clearly a victim of old habits, who concluded his report on the recent visit of President Tudman to Benkovac with the words: 'You have been listening to a speech of President Tito.'

But Tudjman is doing his best to encourage such bureaucratic time-servers by clamping down on those journalists who are more concerned with telling it how it is, and less with showing respect for the president.

This goes with his attempts to over-rule elections and impose his own choice in cities like Zagreb (see page 2). The capital is home to a quarter of Croatia's 4.7 million people, and most of the country's industry.

Commentators point to stateowned enterprises that have ended up in the hands of the pres-

ident's associates. The ruling party has made a

#### BY CHARLIE POTTINS

lot of money from the privatisation of state property. Tudjman is not about to turn over the city administration, that can monitor these sales, to his opponents.'

The satirical weekly Feral-Tribune is currently being sued for defamation by Tudjman's daughter, Nevenka. It ran pictures of the mayoral candidates, along with one of the president, and asked readers to guess which one was Zagreb's real mayor.

The weekly Panorama has been closed by the financial police, the official reason being violation of property and environmental laws. It had just published a critical profile of Tudjman. Last month the newspaper Novi List was fined £1 million, accused of evading customs duty on imported printing equip-

#### **Minorities**

Another issue is the regime's attitude to minorities — notably the Serbs, many of whom fled during the Krajina offensive, and are finding that in spite of promises, the authorities are blocking their return.

Then there is Tudjman's continued encouragement of fascist tendencies. He wants to turn the memorial at Jasenovac, the World War II concentration camp, into a site for Croatian war dead including the Ustashe, who ran the camp. He has also spoken of bringing back the remains of Ustashe dictator Ante Pavelic.

The Council of Europe agreed despite criticisms last month to admit Croatia as a member, European diplomats claiming this would encourage improvements in human rights, and strengthen European Union influence. The decision is due to be finalised by officials at Strasbourg next week.

#### BY FARUK IBRAHIMOVIC Independent journalist, Tuzla

PEACE is taking root in Bosnia. It is still fragile and for how long it will last nobody knows. But people are moving. Groups of Bosnians who wanted to visit their homes from which they had been expelled in Brcko and Doboj were stopped from doing so.

Tuzla demonstrates again that it is an open town with free access to everyone. All check points were removed. Tuzla police guards are without weapons and are, very often, accompanied by UN observ-

Last week there was a fair in which companies not only from Bosnia but from other ex-Yugoslavian republics took part. There were some companies from European countries as well.

It reminded me of the days before the war. Crowds of people were heading towards the sports centre, the venue of the fair. Many of them went just to see what was new, and accompanying the venues grill bars alfresco offered cevapcici and Tuzla beer.

Slovenians were the most interested to renew trade links with Bosnia. It was evident from a greeting printed on plastic containers filled with cream cheese. It seems they have adapted to the new situation very quickly.

The fair was a chance for many Tuzlanians who left the town at the outbreak of the war to revisit. They were astonished with the life there. Many of them had no

idea of the 25 May massacre when many young Tuzlans were killed.

Serbian propaganda was very powerful. Many of them regret that they left. Some will never return to Tuzla due to the misdeeds they committed. Some will visit for medical checks.

A journalist from Edinburgh was looking for an interesting story from this area. She was interested in children born to Bosnian women who were raped. I had no idea where to start. We started to inquire but everything was wrapped in silence.

Nobody wanted to talk about it or to point us in the right direction. The first person who told us anything was a director of the orphanage. We managed to see about 30 children. They were nearly three years of age and were playing carelessly like any other children. They crowded around us, touching my cameras, taking different poses.

#### **Negative**

When we asked if their mothers visited them the reply was in the negative. Except one. She came that day to visit her beautiful son Ramiz. She permitted me to take a photo of her son.

When we asked her for an interview, she refused saying: 'I have been interviewed so many times. Everybody could learn from those interviews what I and my fellow women had experienced but nothing has been done so far to bring the criminals to the tribunal. Mladic and Karadzic, the creators of all crimes committed

in Bosnia, are still free.' While she was talking with us she kept her son on her lap and caressed his hair. Tears started to glisten in her eyes. We decided to leave. I wondered what would happen when this boy and other kids realised the truth. Would they be treated differently by the others, by society, in school, in play?

A 58 year old woman from Vlascnica (eastern Bosnia) was in tears: her husband, her three daughters and her two granddaughters were still missing. She told her story. Her monologue was frequently interrupted by her bursting into tears.

She spoke with a clairvoyant in Sarajevo. He calmed her down saying that her daughters were alive. Suddenly, to cheer herself and to change the subject, she told us that other journalists had asked her who she would vote for in the forthcoming elections. answer was 'For Amica'. 'But Amica is a humanitarian

organisation, not a political party, they said. I know that it helped me, not Izetbegovic or anybody else from the government.'

We all smiled. We left this woman with a bitter sadness in our hearts.

On my way back home I met my former neighbour. I could hardly recognise him. He was walking with great difficulty with the aid of a crutch. He had suffered an extraordinary brain stroke.

Due to the poor diet in the war, especially during the winter of 1993-94, a blood vessel in the brain

twisted or blocked and thus caused the stroke. But my neighbour does not give up.

When the weather is nice he climbs 156 steps leading to the hospital on a hill overlooking Tuzla once or twice a day. He has an ache in his right arm. His son was studying in Slovenia and he managed to visit recently for the first time in five years. Leaving him I thought of his expertise in electricity.

#### Damaged

Spring has come but the weather is still rainy and chilly. Communal workers are very busy. They started to clean the town and to repair damaged streets. You can have coffee or Coke in the open without fear from shelling in front of cafes.

Various monitors are coming to Tuzla. It is a chance for young people and landlords to make money. The UN Implementation Force (IFOR) is repairing roads and constructing bases. Nearly half of its mandate has elapsed and it has not brought all its equipment and weaponry yet. It seems IFOR will not stay in Bosnia for a year.

A new initiative, the Tuzla Democratic Circle, is organising a round-table discussion, entitled: 'Tuzla — a lasting tradition', next weekend. Local and foreign historians, politicians, doctors, professors, writers and journalists have been invited to take part. A very constructive discussion can be expected on this interesting sub-

## JFK 'rejected Cuba peace'

Workers Press

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US PRESIDENT John F. Kennedy rejected an offer of peace from Cuba's 'Che' Ernesto Guevera, just after the CIA-backed Bay of Pigs invasion fiasco, according to newly-released White House documents. A memorandum written by top

Kennedy adviser Richard Goodwin describes how he was approached by Che Guevera at a cocktail party in Uruguay on 17 August 1961.

Guevera told him that the Cas-

tro government would be pre-United States ceased hostile actions against Cuba.

disrupting Cuba.

pared to pay for confiscated US property in trade, to move away from an alliance with the Soviet bloc, and to remove Cuban support from insurgent movements elsewhere in Latin America, if the

But Kennedy decided to ignore the Cuban overture, and instead authorised Operation Mongoose, a further CIA conspiracy aimed at

TENS OF THOUSANDS of rebel trade unionists staged their traditional May Day parade this year in open defiance of Mexico's progovernment labour leadership, heralding a split in the 5-millionstrong Confederation of Mexican Workers (CTM), which has sustained the country's ruling party

for six decades.

Electricians, telephone workers, civil servants, pilots, bus drivers and university teachers marched past the empty balcony of the National Palace, where Mexican presidents once lorded over a ceremony that reaffirmed the leadership of the labour movement's unswerving loyalty to the Institutional Revolutionary Party

(PRI). That loyalty is vanishing, shattered by the country's economic crisis and a labour leadership discredited by its close and corrupt ties to the government.

For the second year in a row Fidel Velazquez, the 96-year-old patriarch who has ruled the CTM for half a century, decreed that there would be no parades on May Day. In an attempt to shield the government of President Ernesto Zedillo from the anger of the workers, Velazquez chose to organise a polite indoor event.

Last year 'Don Fidel', as he is generally known, succeeded in his ploy but this year the country's largest unions have broken away from the CTM fold.

With unemployment rising, with wage settlements struck at only half the rate of inflation, more and more workers are demanding that the movement's historic alliance with the ruling party be broken. The rebel unionists, led by telephone workers' leader Francisco Hernández Juárez, have been threatened with expulsion from the official trade union movement.

Earlier this year Juárez formed the 'Forum for a New Trade Unionism', which was joined by electricians, pilots, teachers, transport workers, social security unions, bank workers and some car industry unions.



This year's London May Day march

Photo: Marg Nicol

The Forum wants a new labour law to free it from government control. At present, all union elections must be endorsed by the labour ministry, while 'independent' trade unions find it almost impossible to gain registration. The government has the power to declare whether or not strikes are legal.

The Forum also demands the clean up of the unions and the bond of patronage between the union leaders and the government ended. This patronage sees many union officials rewarded with governorships and other lucrative posts. Union bosses also grow rich in the state sector by auctioning jobs and running their own private businesses.

'The most immediate consequence of a split in the labour movement will be a wave of strike actions, as rival labour leaders wrestle for power, warns Juan Millán, a CTM leader who was appointed secretary-general to the PRI last year.

The Mexican regime i increasingly worried that the ail ing Don Fidel is no longer able to keep the lid on the labour move ment. He has already this year failed to persuade the governmen to tie wage increases to the rate o inflation or to prevent the govern ment increasing the price of basi foodstuffs. He is also charged by the government with compound ing the crisis by refusing to nam his successor when he finall

retires in 1998.

## Irish Republican Socialists condemn racist attack

THE Irish Republican Socialist Party has come out strongly against a racist attack directed at a Chinese family in Belfast. Party spokesperson Una McKee said:

'This attack must not be viewed in isolation, even if a vast majority of thinking people find such attacks abhorrent.

Whether we consciously recognise it or not, racist language and attitudes are commonplace in the north of Ireland and need to be the fact that ethnic Chinese and Indian families have on the most part tended to be from the business community and, therefore, live in middle-class areas, have gone to disguise and hide this fact.

'It is commonly recognised that Loyalist paramilitaries have strong links with British and European neo-fascist groups. In a post-conflict 'peaceful' society an increase in ethnic working-class people wishing to move to the

'The existence of former paramilitary members with extreme right-wing viewpoints, coupled with economic and unemployment factors has the real potential for the growth of neo-fascist organisations and with this will come racist attacks.

'There need to be strong community and legislative safeguards put immediately into place to counteract racist activity of this

sort.

See nage 2