workers power

ISSUE 200

FOUR PAGE PULL-OUT!

For Internationalism, Socialism and Workers' Revolution

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Stop all deportations! Smash the Asylum Bill!



The racist Asylum and Immigration Bill is set to become law. But we can stop it with mass non-compliance. Meanwhile we need urgent action to stop a wave of deportations.
■ TURN TO PAGE 2

Tories cling to power:



DRIVE THEM OUT!

Major's government hangs by a thread. The Tories are fighting each other over Europe. We don't need to suffer another year of Tory misery.
● Turn to page 3

Fight racist deportations!

LATE IN the evening of 23 April, police arrested Romanian refugee Mircea Ilin in North London. As reported in last month's *Workers Power*, a previous attempt to deport Mircea left him severely depressed and suicidal.

Mircea had been in hiding to avoid removal to Romania where he had experienced torture and repression.

Before moving Mircea to Rochester prison, in Kent, police at Hornsey Road Station tried to stop his wife, Margaret, from seeing him. She was told that Mircea, who speaks only a little English and had no interpreter, had signed a waiver stating that he did not want visitors.

Prison officials at Rochester have subjected Margaret to a degrading search before being allowed to see her husband.

Margaret Ilin is a council worker in Hackney and a member of the local Unison branch, which is supporting Mircea's campaign. Margaret addressed a well-attended meeting in Hackney Town Hall, just five days before Mircea's arrest. The meeting was sponsored by Hackney Unison and the local NUT association. It brought together a number of anti-deportation campaigns currently fighting in Hackney and other areas of London. Representatives from the campaigns called for action on the deportations and against the new Asylum Bill.

As we go to press Mircea's lawyers are preparing a last ditch Judicial Review. Mircea's supporters must be ready at short notice to fight any attempt at deportation.■

Rabi-ul Islam's campaign against deportation continues (see WP 199). Rabi is a teacher at Haggerston School in Hackney, and his case is supported by several local NUT associations and other unions.

On 20 April Rabi-ul Islam and Mircea Ilin's supporters staged a joint lobby of the Home Office. The 60-strong lobby, called by Hackney NUT, drew support from teachers in both North and East London.

Rabi's campaign received a boost recently when the Home Office indicated that they might review his case. This clearly reflects the pressure from the local community, MP Mildred Gordon and the NUT. Union branches are asked to pass motions of support and write directly to the Home Office about Rabi's case.

● Contact Hackney Teachers' Association, 219 Mare Street, Hackney, London E8 for more information about Rabi's campaign. Hackney Unison can be contacted at the same address, regarding Mircea Ilin's case.

This month the Asylum and Immigration Bill is due to pass its final hurdles in parliament. The supporters of passive parliamentary campaigning who have run the fight against the Bill are already preparing to plead for small concessions, abandoning the fight to stop the Bill through direct action. Meanwhile Britain's racist immigration laws claim one victim after another, even before the Bill is passed.

Every case featured on this page has one thing in common: the victim is supported by their union at local and even national level.

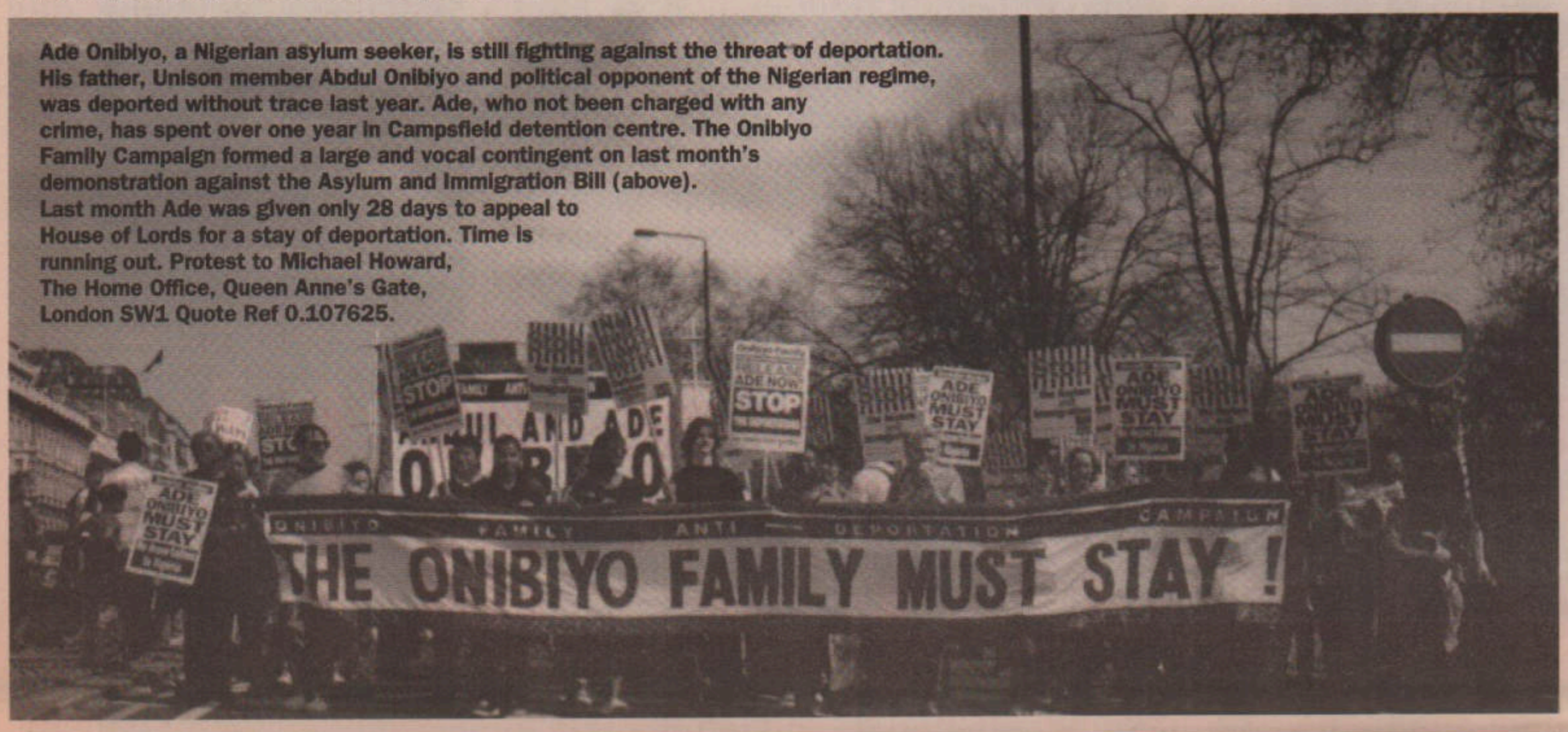
This is a massive advance compared to the situation fifteen years ago, when the trade union movement stayed largely silent on the struggle against racist deportations. But it is not enough.

Union backing can provide vital legal support and a network of experienced activists who have "been there before" to support the often bewildered victims.

But when the unmarked vans arrive, when police crowd into the homes of refugees, carrying their body belts and handcuffs, we need direct action, including strike action.

Most of all we need an active, union-led fight to make the laws unworkable. The union leaders are reconciled to the Asylum Bill becoming law. Labour's Jack Straw was booed off the platform of May's Asylum Bill demo when he refused to pledge Labour to repeal the whole Bill.

But the fight will only be beginning if the Bill is passed. We have to mobilise trade unionists who are called on to implement the Bill in a mass campaign of non-compliance. We have to commit Labour to repeal not just the Asylum Bill but all immigration controls: they're all racist. They've all got to be scrapped.



Ade Oniblyo, a Nigerian asylum seeker, is still fighting against the threat of deportation. His father, Unison member Abdul Oniblyo and political opponent of the Nigerian regime, was deported without trace last year. Ade, who not been charged with any crime, has spent over one year in Campsfield detention centre. The Oniblyo Family Campaign formed a large and vocal contingent on last month's demonstration against the Asylum and Immigration Bill (above). Last month Ade was given only 28 days to appeal to House of Lords for a stay of deportation. Time is running out. Protest to Michael Howard, The Home Office, Queen Anne's Gate, London SW1 Quote Ref 0.107625.

JSA

Workers and claimants unite!

THE FIGHT against the Job Seekers' Allowance (JSA) gained momentum in April as civil service workers staged a series of strikes in benefit offices and job centres.

The JSA is the Tories' most vicious attack yet on the long-term unemployed. The government is hoping to introduce the measure in two stages, between now and October. If they succeed, jobless people will only be entitled to claim unemployment benefit for six months rather than on year. After that benefit will be means-tested.

The Tories' ultimate aim is clear: to force people off the dole and into low paid jobs, however abysmal the pay and conditions. They want to compel the unemployed to serve as a "reserve army of labour", undercutting the wages of those in work.

The government has already launched pilot work-for-dole schemes in Hull and Maidstone as initial steps towards the introduction of a US-style "workfare" system.

But civil service trade unionists in the DSS and the Employment Service have fuelled the fightback with industrial action.

In some offices, the impact of JSA on conditions and safety for benefit workers has triggered walkouts. In West London CPSA members in the Benefits Agency and Job Centres struck for one week last month—not just over the issue of protective screens, but against the principle of the JSA itself.

Some 150 workers across five offices mounted pickets, staged a rally, and fought for secondary action after forcing their union bureaucracy to make their action official.

Along with branch members in the Employment Service, the strikers demanded the cancellation of the of the JSA experiment at Southall Job Centre.

Chris Ford, CPSA branch secretary for the West London Benefits Agency and an activist in the CPSA Socialist Caucus, told Workers Power:

"Strikers stood up to a lot of intimidation from management. They shipped in scabs from as far away St Albans (Hertfordshire) and Stoke Newington (North London), but the action really did bite."

Support

The action won support from claimants, he stressed, with unemployed workers boosting an early morning mass picket of the Ealing branch office.

"This proved the highlight of the week as pickets, supported by striking women from the Hillingdon Hospital dispute, persuaded six strikebreakers not to cross, with some saying they would join the union. As one claimant put it: 'you're fighting for all of us'", Ford added.

Anxious bosses have moved to ban Socialist Caucus literature from West London offices. They also refused to talk to any union delegation including Chris Ford, preferring to "chat" with PTC officials who represent only 10% of union members in the offices.

In the meantime, workers are implementing an overtime ban, due to continue until at least 18 May.

As we go to press, other trade unionists at Tottenham in North London were set to strike for a week over JSA-related issues from 6 May. In Leeds, management provoked walkouts in two offices after threatening the compulsory transfer of staff to JSA work. CPSA members in Brighton were balloting for a five-day strike. This wave of industrial action shows we can beat the JSA.

We need to forge links between union members in the benefits offices and job centres and the unemployed themselves, with the aim of winning national industrial action and mass protest against the current trials.■

Defend Mawhinney 4!

LAST MONTH Tony Gard, Amanda Egbe, Navid Malik and Karen Doyle were convicted of assaulting Tory Party chair Brian Mawhinney with paint and flour during a November demonstration at Westminster against the Tories' Asylum Bill. Gard has been threatened with the sack for his part in the protest and the three others, student activists at Kingsway College, London and UNL, have faced persecution from college authorities.

The four come up for sentencing on Tuesday 14 May. Join the protest outside Bow Street Magistrates' Court from 9.30 am. (Nearest tube: Covent Garden).

Don't stop the music!

MAGISTRATES AT Thame in Oxfordshire banned last month's planned Tribal Gathering—an event billed as the biggest dance festival for years. 25,000 ticket holders were furious as the festival was stopped on grounds of "traffic control".

The organisers appealed for a rescheduled event in June. Meanwhile, NUS activists have organised a national petition against the ban.

Coming on top of the anti-Ecstasy hypocrisy which followed the death of Leah Betts this adds impetus to the establishment backlash against dance music and youth culture. It will drive dance music back into illegal venues, where youth get ripped off by the private organisers and treated like shit by private security staff.

Youth should be demanding not just the right to hold dance festivals but state subsidies and modern health, sanitary and transport facilities at festival sites.

All summer long young people will face harassment from police and magistrates just for trying to have a good time. The Criminal Justice Act has given them all the powers they need. We have to turn this summer into a fight for the right to party and for the legalisation of drugs.■

Students hit back at racist lecturer

STUDENTS AT Edinburgh University have forced its management to seriously consider sacking psychology lecturer, Christopher Brand, who has proudly proclaimed himself "a racist in the scientific sense."

Protests began after news broke about Brand's new book, *The g Factor.* New York-based publisher, John Wiley & Sons, tore up Brand's contract as student anger and media interest mounted.

Brand has repeatedly asserted his claim that "black Americans are less intelligent than white Americans". He calls for measures to encourage single mothers to engage in procreative "sex with higher IQ boys." His views echo those of the right-wing US sociologist Charles Murray, who co-authored *The Bell Curve,* another piece of reactionary pseudo-science.

Extreme

Brand has received a fellowship from the Galton Institute, named for one of the founders of "scientific" racism and partly financed by the extreme right, US-based Pioneer Foundation.

Brand sees himself as a martyr to political correctness. His record reveals, however, that he is not a harmless academic crank, but someone who quite consciously gives a gloss of respectability to the most vile ideology produced by capitalist society.

Student opposition to Brand took the form of 70 students collectively walking out of one of his lectures after one third-year bravely explained why he was no longer prepared to listen to Brand's outpourings.

Since then a campaign has swept across other departments, spurring the students' union executive to pass a motion demanding Brand's dismissal. A secret ballot across the university has indicated that 90% of Brand's own students want him taken out of the classroom.

In the face of the student campaign, the university's administration has retreated from its initial defence of Brand's "intellectual freedom" and has agreed to seriously review his future as an employee of the institution.■

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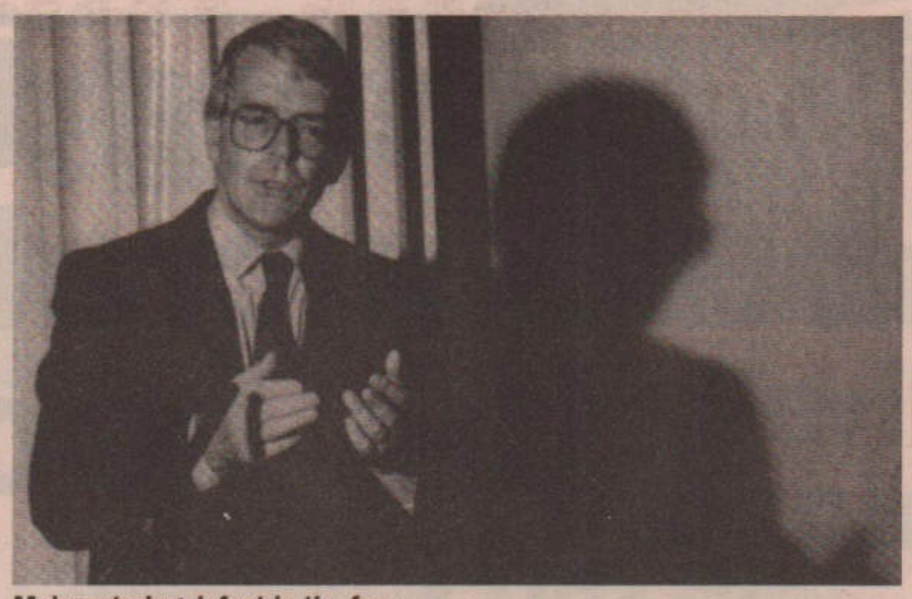
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ISSUE 200

Four page pullout!

A special feature on the role of the revolutionary paper and the record of Workers Power over two decades of class struggle.



Major: staring defeat in the face

Tories lose their grip

IT'S BEEN a bad month for John Major. Actually, it's been a bad four years. The government's survival hangs by a thread after the defeat in the Staffordshire South-East by election. After the Tories 35th by election defeat, Major is left with a majority of one.

The May local elections could see the Tories lose up to 1,000 seats. They could be banished from town hall rule in the North of England entirely.

Undaunted, Major has declared his intention, "to go through to the end of the five year period."

Major's hope is that the economic recovery will finally deliver a substantial "feelgood factor" over the next twelve months - and that Labour will self-destruct over its tax policies.

Scorched earth

Meanwhile, the government is pursuing a "scorched earth" policy. They are selling off the railways - virtually giving them away. They are racking up anti-Asylum legislation. They are stuffing the existing prisons with the victims of the system, and building new ones to take the overflow.

The Tories are serving up to their rich backers, the hurried last course of the feast they've gorged on over the last few years. The immediate problem for Major, however, is not whether Labour will self-destruct but whether the Tory Party will, before next year.

The Tory party is divided into two factions: Eurosceptic far-right wingers like Redwood, Portillo and Lilley against pro-European elements like Chancellor Kenneth Clarke. They are in a permanent state of war with each other.

That war has hotted up with the beef ban, the renewed pressure for a single European currency by Germany at the Inter Governmental Conference, and the pressure felt by backbenchers from the arrival of James Goldsmith's anti-European Referendum Party.

Major is powerless to end or resolve this inner-party strife. His weakness is enraging natural Tory supporters. While the *Sun* has decided to support Goldsmith, more significantly the "bible of the middle classes", the *Telegraph*, now attacks the Tories more often than Labour.

The *Daily Express* is the latest to stick the boot into Major. After backing him during last summer's leadership contest it now promotes the cause most dear to his challenger, John Redwood: the campaign against "Euro-rot".

Ruling class disenchantment with Major is not confined to Tory news barons. Last month Rolls Royce joined a growing list of capitalist firms who have suspended donations to the Tory Party.

As the election draws near it is less a question of "can Major win?" and more "can the Tory Party survive electoral defeat?"

A defeat this year or next could easily turn the cold split into an open one, as the growing pressure to join the revamped Exchange Rate Mechanism poses the question of Europe point blank to the Tories.

Danger

The greatest danger for workers is Labour's waiting game. Blair's recipe is simple: copy Tory policy on law and order and on Ireland; keep your head down on Europe and taxation; tour the boardrooms with the message "ask and you shall receive"; sit back with a welcoming smile as apprehensive middle managers across industry and the public sector take out party cards.

In other words, take the workers' vote for granted, woo the middle class and pacify the City.

If Labour attacked, campaigned on the streets, the Tory crisis could be brought to a head now. We would not need to suffer another year of Major's torture. The Tories could be driven from office, massively boosting the confidence of the working class. But Blair does not want to inherit an expectant and confident working class movement, only a relieved and grateful one.

But we don't have to sit back and wait for the election. In the trade union conferences through the summer, in the election of delegations to Labour Party conference, and in the run-up to the TUC militants can fight to put their demands on Labour forward: repeal the anti-union laws, renationalise the privatised industries, guarantee a minimum wage and the 35 hour week, finance the crumbling public sector and education system through a steeply progressive income tax, repeal the anti-union laws and the barrage of anti-immigration laws.

Everybody senses that these are the last days and months of Major's administration.

But few trade unionists, few active anti-racists, few young people are looking forward to Blair's government with enthusiasm.

To them, and to all the victims of the Tories' sixteen years in office we say: don't sit back and wait for Labour. Fight back now, force your demands and interests onto Labour, through the union link, through direct action and through an active campaign for a Labour victory.

• **Labour and inequality, page 6.**

Euro-referendum: what we say

Last month John Major tried to heal the Tory split over Europe with a meaningless compromise: *if* the Tories are re-elected, and *if* the cabinet decides to enter the single currency, then there will be a referendum.



James Goldsmith

Now talk of a Euro-referendum dominates right wing circles. Big businessman Sir James Goldsmith has threatened to stand candidates against every Tory who refuses to back a referendum - not just on the single currency but on Britain's whole future in the EU.

Goldsmith's "Referendum Party" already has 20,000 supporters and plush offices in Westminster. Not bad for a party founded in 1994. But then again Sir James is the 8th richest person in Britain. The £20 million he has vowed to spend on sabotaging the Tories is chickenfeed compared to his £1.2 billion fortune.

Embittered

The danger Goldsmith poses to the Tories is clear. He could help wipe them out at the next election, by swiping the votes of the embittered little-England nationalists.

But Goldsmith also poses a danger to the working class.

Unlike Portillo or Redwood, Goldsmith is no mere brain-dead British nationalist. Dividing his time between homes in Paris and Mexico he can hardly wave the Union Jack with pride. Goldsmith's objection to European integration is part of a strategic capitalist alternative to what the pundits call "globalisation". Globalisation of production has seen jobs transferred from "high wage" Europe and the USA to low waged economies in Asia and South America.

Goldsmith wants an end to global free trade and in its place "regional free trade": Europe vs America vs Asia. Globalisation, according to Sir James, is bad for the working class.

It means "the arrival of huge populations willing to undercut radically the salaries earned by our workforces. The social divisions that this will cause will be deeper than anything ever envisaged by Marx."

Goldsmith wants an alliance of workers and bosses to build a protected market and compete with the rest of the world.

Unfortunately that coincides with the aims of many on the old left of the trade union movement.

Reject

We have to reject economic protectionism, whether of the little-England or Europe versus the rest variety. It is not just nasty and reactionary: it is an attack on our fellow workers overseas, carried out on behalf of the bosses who rule and exploit us.

And if it comes to a referendum, a choice between a capitalist Britain or a capitalist Europe, workers have to avoid being sucked into either camp. They will never give us a referendum on the things that really matter. Given this choice, workers should abstain. Whoever wins, its still us against the bosses, all across the globe.

We should tell Goldsmith, Major, Redwood and Portillo where to stick their Euro-referendum.■

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Dockers' conference

Letting the bureaucrats off the hook

THE MERSEY Dockers' Port Shop Stewards' Committee (MDPSSC) organised this meeting in response to the enormous support they have attracted throughout Britain and as a result of the success of the international conference held in February. The Conference attracted 185 delegates, representing the support committees across the country, along with many trade union branches and left-wing organisations. Nearly 100 observers also attended.

Sincere

Jimmy Nolan, Chair of the MDPSSC, began the conference by expressing "the sincere appreciation of the dockers for your support so far". Nolan explained that the purpose of the day was twofold:

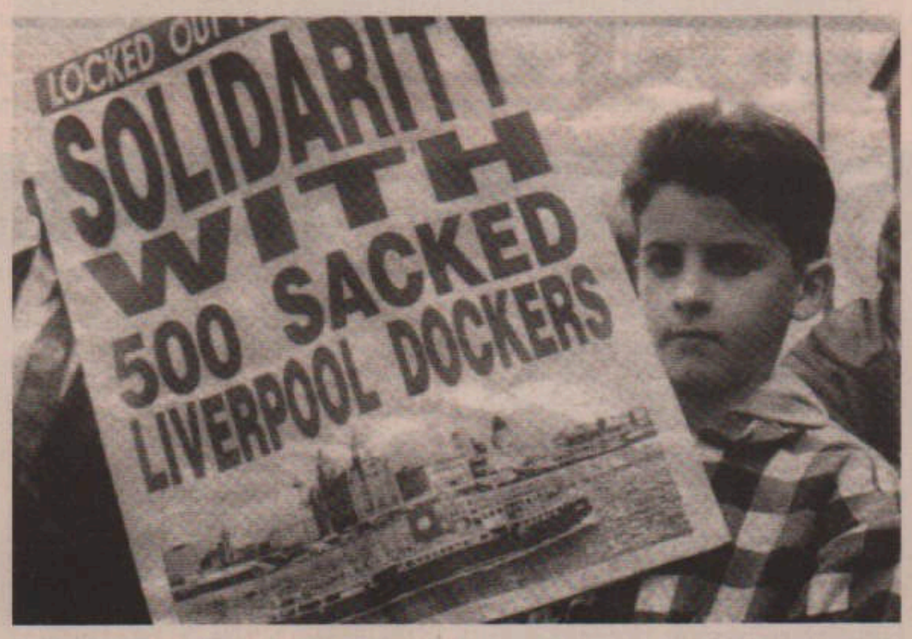
- to establish a national co-ordinating committee to build on the work done in support of the dockers; to organise solidarity industrial action and prepare for future working class struggles;
- to argue for delegates to go back to their own industries and fight for a 24-hour national stoppage against the anti-union laws and casualisation.

The dockers have addressed tens of thousands during their dispute, including more than 3,600 meetings in Britain. They have visited over 20 countries to build support for their struggle. Thousands of pounds have been raised in Britain and solidarity action has been won from dockers around the globe.

Dominated

The Conference was dominated by discussion of the anti-union laws, the role of trade union officials and unofficial versus official action.

The morning session included a debate about the significance of the anti-union laws in disarming workers and enabling the bureaucracy to mislead and sell out disputes. But differences in emphasis only became apparent when the discussion turned to concrete proposals.



As the Liverpool docks dispute entered its eighth month, shop stewards staged a solidarity conference to discuss the way forward. Two **Workers Power** supporters, delegated by their union branches to attend, report.

Workers Power delegates put an amendment to the main resolution from the MDPSSC, calling for the TGWU leadership to make the strike official and to organise solidarity action by TGWU members. An amendment from the Socialist Workers Party simply criticised the leadership but did not call on them to do anything. A vote was not taken on the amendments but the debate was revealing. MDPSSC executive member Jimmy Nolan, in contrast to remarks he made earlier in the strike, stated that he had no criticism of the TGWU leadership. He could only applaud Jack Adams (the union's Deputy General Secretary) and Bill Morris for their role in the dispute.

Against the Workers Power amendment he argued that if the TGWU leadership were to make the strike official this would lead to the sequestration of the union's funds. One MDPSSC steward explained how on a trip to Canada to organise solidarity action a lawsuit had been brought against the strikers for losses incurred for £2.5 million. The lawsuit was thrown out because the strike was unofficial.

Jack Adams has told port shop stewards that if the TGWU made the strike official the national leadership would take control out of the hands of the stewards committee and the dispute would be "resolved in three weeks". More accurately it would be sold out.

Idea

We have to be clear: a co-ordinating committee is an excellent idea both to build solidarity now and prepare the future struggles under a Labour government. But it will not be built if we are ambiguous about the role of the officials. They must be replaced by militants willing and able to fight. To be replaced they must be criticised and fought. This is in sharp contrast to the view of Militant Labour's Dave Cotterill, who stated that: "the strategy of the MDPSSC in the opinion of Militant Labour is the correct strategy".

The Liverpool shop stewards have shown great determination in the past seven months of struggle. But their current attitude towards the TGWU bureaucracy recalls the position of the National Port Shop Stewards' Committee in 1989 when confronted by the Tories' plan to scrap the National Dock Labour Scheme.

Tactics

At that time the shop stewards chose not to challenge the delaying tactics of then TGWU General Secretary Ron Todd, who also hid behind the anti-union laws to justify his refusal to back an immediate strike.

As a result, the initial widespread anger among dockers ebbed. The port bosses had time to buy off large sections of dockers with hefty redundancy packages and made contingency plans for any eventual strike. The final outcome was the demise of the TGWU as an effective force outside of Liverpool.

A key lesson of the 1989 experience was that we have to challenge the dead weight of the union bureaucracy and the anti-union laws.■

Rail

Fight privatisation

FOR THOSE with a few hundred quid to spare, the Railtrack privatisation sounds like an excellent bargain.

If you invest in the Railtrack sell-off, you get £400 worth of shares for £200 (you pay the other half later). There's a guaranteed dividend payout in October. And the shares will be priced so low that their value is bound to rise. You wait for October, take your dividend, sell your shares, pay-off the remaining £200, and pocket the substantial sum left over.

Century

The Tories are virtually giving money away. But who pays for this sale of the century?

We do. The bribes and sweeteners the Tories are loading onto the Railtrack privatisation will cost every tax payer in this country £100. It's not a bargain; it's the great train robbery of the 1990s.

Consider the facts:

- **Rail privatisation is unpopular with rail users and City investors alike. But the Tories are rushing to sell off the railways as a last gasp of privatisation before they are booted out of office.**
- **To ensure that all of Railtrack's shares are sold the Tories are set to massively underprice them. They are selling land, assets and rail services worth £6 billion for under £2 billion.**
- **Nobody knows if Railtrack will make a profit in the first year. But before that year is out shareholders will receive a £64 million payout from profits generated last year, when Railtrack was a state-owned company. That £64 million could have been used to invest in new trains, modern stations, safer signalling equipment. Instead it's being used for a Tory election victory.**
- **Railtrack plans to turn its vast property holdings into money spinning projects, redeveloping big stations as office complexes. Then profits generated will go into the pockets of the big investors, not into improving the rail service.**

To privatise the railways the Tories have broken up British Rail into myriad smaller companies. The result has been predictable market madness.

Rail service operators are now holding new timetables to the last moment so that their other lines cannot alter their timetables to "compete" with them. Track access time is now sold by the hour. That means vital maintenance services are being squeezed into more limited access times, compromising safety.

And, within this array of competing companies, legal experts now predict that no-one can be held responsible in the event of a major accident.

One reason the Rail sell off has been unpopular with big business has been Labour's threat to stop it or reverse it. As the Tories' majority has shrunk, bringing the possibility of an early election closer, investors began to lose interest in the sell-off.

Commitment

But Labour has saved the sell-off. Labour's Clare Short announced on 29 March that the party was scrapping its commitment to a "publicly owned, publicly accountable railway".

Labour had never planned to renationalise the railways outright, but had toyed with schemes like buying back some shares or regaining control of Railtrack by increasing public subsidies. Labour will simply widen the powers of the regulator to force companies to meet certain standards and limit fare increases.

So what happens when the needs of the passengers clash with the demands of shareholders?

Not far into a Labour government Blair will be forced to make this choice.

Only outright renationalisation, under workers' control, will guarantee a rail service which meets the needs of passengers and rail workers.

The tragedy is that a few words from Tony Blair could have stopped the sell off. According to the *Economist*:

"If Labour had really wanted to keep the rail network in the public sector it could have done so. A threat to impose an annual levy equivalent to any profit it proposed to distribute to shareholders in dividends, would have brought privatisation to an abrupt halt."

Losses

Privatisation means railworkers will face massive job cuts and reductions in conditions of service.

The rail franchises are already pointing to thousands of job losses. Health and Safety for railworkers will undoubtedly be severely affected by privatisation.

Millions of rail users are being ripped off, along with millions of taxpayers. The Tories' aim is not a better service; the present rail regulator has agreed that services can be cut and fares can rise after privatisation.

The Tories aim is to bribe what's left of their middle class voting base.

We must force Labour to resist the sell off. We must demand that Labour pledges to renationalise the whole rail network, with no compensation to shareholders.

We must demand a massive spending programme aimed at integrating the railways into a modern, safe and cheap national transport system.■

Postal workers

Building for action

POSTAL WORKERS are heading for a decisive showdown with Royal Mail's bosses over the implementation of the so-called Employee Agenda.

Under mounting pressure from below, the national executive of the CWU has authorised a ballot of some 170,000 members for industrial action. Management are publicly refusing to enter any further negotiations, with the ballot due to start in early May.

The Employee Agenda includes the widespread elimination of second deliveries and the axing of thousands of full-time jobs. Its introduction would consolidate a series of piecemeal attacks on conditions and working practices.

The rhetoric of National Executive members has become much more aggressive in recent weeks. John Keggie, an Executive member from Scotland, talks of being "on a collision course unless Royal Mail change their minds."

But many activists in the sorting offices will be rightly sceptical about the Executive's recent left turn. The possibility still exists of a last minute stitch-up before the ballot even starts, while a "yes" vote could turn into nothing more than a bureaucratic bargaining chip–unless militants swiftly intensify their organising efforts both locally and nationally.

Postal workers will almost certainly need to take indefinite national strike action to fend off Royal Mail's attacks. The running of such a vital dispute cannot be left in the hands of the Executive.

A national strike will require an elected strike committee, made up of recallable delegates from as many CWU branches as possible. A few branches have already begun to organise such committees at local level. They will have to consider the day-to-day running of the dispute, organising picket lines and their defence, administering hardship funds and doing their best to keep sequestrators' hands off union assets if Royal Mail turns to the bosses' courts to invoke the anti-union laws.■

Conference against the Asylum and Immigration Bill

Saturday 11 May, 10 am – 3 pm, NATFHE Conference Centre, Britannia Street, London WC1 (Nearest tube: Kings Cross).
Registration: £10 for delegates, £5 for observers and others.
Contact: CFDU Asylum and Immigration Conference, c/o Islington Unison (A branch), 1a Canonbury Street, London N1 2TA.

Workers Power urges all Unison activists to seek sponsorship from their branch and attend the CFDU conference. We strongly urge them to support the resolution adopted by the London CFDU on 3 April, calling for non-compliance and industrial action in support of anyone victimised for taking a principled stand.■

Civil Service

Unity at any price?

THE CPSA and the recently formed Public Services, Tax and Commerce Union (PTC) both hold their conferences this month. Delegates will meet against the background of ongoing Tory attacks.

Since 1979 the Tories have slashed 250,000 civil service jobs. Last November's 1995 budget pressed for a 25% cut in running costs of the Benefits Agency. This means massive job losses.

For those of us still directly employed, the management wants further pay cuts and worse working conditions. With the transfer of more than two-thirds of civil service jobs to Agency status, devolved bargaining has become the norm without a hint of opposition from our union leaders. Most CPSA members and many in the PTC cannot earn £4 an hour, even at the top end of their pay scales.

CPSA members in the Employment Service (ES) staged the only national pay strike of 1995, a dispute that carried on until February 1996. The strike went down to defeat largely because of the deliberate refusal of the union's national executive to spread the strike throughout the whole of the ES.

Activists at both the CPSA and PTC conferences need to learn from this key dispute if we are to revive our unions. We need to maximise the votes for those motions calling for *national* strike action, recognising that piecemeal local walkouts are unlikely to win on their own. Delegates must seize the opportunity to link the immediate workplace fight to the broader struggle against Tory policies that attack service users and claimants. The recent strikes in the Benefits Agency against the Job Seekers Allowance (see page 2) highlightwhat can and should be done.

Unfortunately, the strategies put forward by the left currents in the PTC—Left Unity and the Unity-Broad Left Alliance—suggest they have not learned from this experience. Calls for one-day actions, followed by vague references to overtime bans and selective action on 85% pay, are inadequate to the task of beating the Tories. They also risk demoralising members, leading them to question the value of any strike action.

Some left-wing delegates will point to the PTC's scabbing on CPSA strikers in the Employment Service dispute as another argument in favour of a single merged union. In the job centres, however, the PTC is effectively a management union.

While a merged union would, of course, be bigger, it won't pave the way to victory so long as blurs the real distinction between management and workers. Many of us in the PTC already suffer through union meetings disrupted by the presence of managers with union cards who spy on activists and sow doubts by lying, threatening workers in lower grades and scabbing on picket lines. The sort of merger we need would create a single union for rank and file civil service workers.

Now more than ever, we need rank and file movements in the civil service unions that aim to transform our unions into democratic, fighting organisations. Supporters of Workers Power, as members of the Socialist Caucus, are committed to doing just that.■

Read *Rank & File*, journal of the Socialist Caucus. Conference special (issue number 4) is out now, price 50p. Available from PO Box 3140, London E17.

NUT

Tame left bides its time

LAST YEAR'S NUT conference hit the headlines after activists from the Socialist Workers' Party (SWP) managed to corner Labour's shadow Education Secretary, David Blunkett.

The union's right wingers and the Tory press were outraged, and a full scale witch-hunt was launched. To their shame this witch-hunt was aided by leaders of the major left grouping the Socialist Teachers' Alliance (STA). This led to the SWP leaving the STA a few months later.

This year the Executive had invited Tory Education Secretary, Gillian Shephard. Delegates from the STA and the SWP met and decided not to walk out or demonstrate, but to have a silent protest and wear anti-selection T-shirts. When Shephard got up to speak some held up cards saying "No to Selection". Whilst she spoke militants, rather like naughty school children, pretended that they weren't really listening.

As a result the arguments about selection and the Tory cuts were left to right wing NUT leader, Doug McAvoy. And when Blunkett turned up next day, despite the fact that Labour's policy on education has become increasingly right wing over the past year, he was greeted with applause!

Why were the left so passive? The answer to this question lies mainly in the strategy of the STA leadership. STA leaders believe that the left is close to taking over the union. After recent elections the left need only two more places on the National Executive to gain a majority. In the meantime, they argue, we must all behave ourselves and not do anything which might threaten our election chances.

This is a flawed strategy. Even if the left gains a majority, how will rank and file militants be able to ensure that the candidates remain left-wing and accountable to us?



Gillian Shephard

Workers Power NUT members argue for the need to transform the union. Yes, we need to get left candidates elected, but they must be held to a fighting strategy. They must be accountable to the rank and file. They must be recallable. If they sell out, they get out. Union officials must be paid no more than the average teacher's salary. We don't need bureaucrats on £70,000 plus a year, like Doug McAvoy.

Every year the left win important motions at conference. This year was no exception. On salaries, on inclusive education, on lesbian and gay rights, the left won over conference. Conference also defeated McAvoy on democracy within the union.

He wants to take power away from local associations where issues and action can be discussed amongst rank and file militants, and instead conduct an endless series of postal ballots. Ballots where individual members will only hear the arguments he wants to put out with the ballot papers and have no chance to discuss the options. He lost the vote, but then announced he would go ahead anyway!

Until we transform the union, NUT conference will always be rather like an Easter bonnet: it may look very nice for a few days in Spring, but then all those left motions are put away in a box at union head office and forgotten about until next year. ■

OUT NOW!
Trotskyist International
Issue 19
Price £1.50





Perils of redeployment

Redundancy or redeployment? This is the dilemma that many workers now confront. Most prefer redeployment to redundancy. But redeployment deals can be a two-edged sword in the bosses' hands—they get to cut jobs and target activists. A Unison Steward from Birmingham has recently been on the receiving end . . .

AS A union activist you often find yourself arguing in the branch for action to save jobs. Recently, I've had a rather different experience—one of the jobs is mine.

In 1995 Birmingham Social Services cut £10.7 million. This year they have announced a cut of £9.9 million. Last year they cut 80 jobs and this year they want to get rid of 123 workers. They say that there will be no compulsory redundancies—not yet anyway.

To carry through the cuts management has been involved in reorganising sections to identify jobs which could possibly be axed. Workers in these jobs will then be targeted for redeployment. What they are not so keen to tell you is that you could be downgraded and after a certain, unspecified amount of time, you could be sacked.

The whole reorganisation procedure takes place behind closed doors. The criteria for identifying jobs is vague and the whole thing is clearly open to widespread abuse by management.

Since April, my job has been deemed to be "at risk". What this actually means is that my job no longer exists but I am still on the payroll as the worker who did that job. So they have decided to cut my post; they want me to move elsewhere or get out.

I can't say that it came as a complete surprise. Last year a manager told me: "I think you'd better find another job. I'm thinking of your job for next year's cuts."

Forward planning obviously!

Union members in my own section tend to take the cut very personally, and many of them have spoken directly to management to tell them how unfair they are being to me as an individual. It is quite difficult to say that I'm not the issue. It is an attack on all of us.

Across Unison in Birmingham there is a certain amount of complacency. Like council workers across the country, we have become used to the phoney war around the budget. Every year the council announces massive cuts and warns that there will probably be huge numbers of redundancies. The union ballots for action, mass meetings discuss strike action—usually beyond the terms of the ballot . . . and then we sit and wait.

A few weeks later the council announces that the cuts won't be quite as big as planned at first, there will be no sackings and possibly only voluntary redundancies.

The union officials then say "well that isn't so bad, at least no one is going to be sacked", and we all carry on—until next year.

This has happened so often that people have come to expect it. We actually lost a ballot for action when the cuts were first announced this year because union members didn't believe a fight would be necessary.

Many Unison members in Birmingham are genuinely shocked that the council have finally pursued the threatened cuts. Even though the budget was introduced in April, I'm sure some people still think the council will come up with some extra money from somewhere.

We have tolerated voluntary redundancies and redeployment for so long, that it is difficult to get action on anything short of compulsory redundancies. And yet redeployment is a brutally effective weapon for the bosses.

The union has correctly taken a position of not being involved in the targeting of the jobs to be cut. Meanwhile certain managers are using the redeployment exercise to target the jobs of activists. My manager has made it clear that she does not like unions and troublemakers (like me).

As a black worker and union activist, I have raised the issue of racism at work because a number of black workers have recently left our section. Through Unison, I am currently pursuing a grievance against this manager over the way in which my job was identified.

The management at Leisure Services have been even more blatant in selecting their victims. They have decided that anyone fighting for employment rights is in their opinion a "poor" worker, i.e. someone they want to get rid of through cuts.

The current experience of fighting for my job reminded me of the importance of battling to keep the post. Fighting for the post rather than the individual person alone is important because it unites workers. We are fighting not just for each other, but also for our jobs and the services that we provide.

Every year the bosses try to divide the different sections. Only a united campaign against all cuts and for the defence of all jobs can combat the council's strategy.

A second ballot for action is now being held. We hope to win strike action against the cuts and against a new sickness monitoring procedure which the council wants to introduce. It is about time we gave the managers a few headaches!■

Whistleblower: BCM Box 7750, London WC1N 3XX

Labour's economic plans

What about the workers?

Labour's alternative to Tory economics contains no solution to poverty and inequality, writes **Keith Harvey**

THIS MONTH Labour's social security spokesperson Chris Smith will deliver a keynote speech on "Social Justice in the Modern World". He will outline the key elements of a Blair government's approach to poverty and inequality.

There is a lot to deal with. Britain has never been more unequal. The Thatcher-Major governments have rewarded the rich and hammered the working class and unemployed. The Tories have presided over the erosion of state pensions and cuts across the whole range of welfare benefits, while slashing taxes for the wealthy.

Will Hutton, in his book *The State We're In*, notes that the "gap between low and high wages is now the highest since records began".

The wages of the top 10% have risen to twice the level of average earnings, compared to 1.67 times in 1979. Tax changes have made this gap even worse. Those on £5,000 a year have gained £2 a week through tax cuts while those on £80,000 a week have raked in an extra £913 a week!

Meanwhile, indirect taxes have soared so that the poorest pay a higher proportion of their income to Inland Revenue. The bottom 10% surrender 20% of their income in taxes, while the top 10% lose only 8% of theirs.

Since the Tories came to office, the value of supplementary benefits has fallen from 26% to 19% of full-time male earnings. And many more people now rely on benefits, due to poverty pay and unemployment. In 1979 seven million adults were on income support, compared to 11 million in 1993. This amounts to £7 a day for all expenses except housing, presuming they receive housing benefit.

This injustice cries out for a sharp turnaround. But if you are expecting a radical answer from Labour—don't!

Labour will not reverse the redistribution of wealth and income carried out by the Tories. That is Labour's number one election promise to the bosses.

Does this mean that there is no difference between Major and Blair's solutions to inequality? No, but the gap between them narrows by the week.

The Tories insist that poverty does not exist in Britain; Labour acknowledges its extent and growth.

The Tories insist that inequality is necessary in order to generate growth in living standards for all; Labour says that inequality contributes to lower growth by depressing demand.

The Tories say that inequality is essential to stimulate "enterprise and efficiency"; Labour recognises that inequality has led to a huge, marginalised, largely unskilled pool of wasted talent.

The striking thing is not so much Labour's differences with the Tories, but just how openly it too is driven by the criteria of what's good for the profit system. The idea that poverty is bad because of the sheer human waste and misery involved barely gets a mention. The basic socialist goal of "redistribution of wealth" has vanished.

Old Labour used to talk about redistribution but rarely delivered it. New Labour prefer not to even talk about it.

Labour refuses to tax the wealthy and use the revenue to pay for benefits, or to boost state pensions and spending on the NHS.

To date, the specific commitments have been few. Its main pledge has been a £1 billion "windfall tax" on the privatised utilities, with the money raised earmarked for training 18-25 year olds. But with New Labour what we win on the swings, we lose on the roundabouts: last month shadow Chancellor Gordon Brown announced that training funds for 16-18 year olds will come from scrapping child benefit for that age group.



Gordon Brown: now for a Labour tax betrayal

Blair has conceded, under trade union pressure, the notion of a minimum wage. But he refuses to name a figure and insists on consultation with the main bosses' organisation, the CBI. He has made it crystal clear that it will be what the bosses say they can afford, not what low paid workers need.

In contrast to the Labour left but even to such symbols of the "old right" as Roy Hattersley, Blair has shunned the idea of using the state to directly shift the distribution of income. Long gone are the days of "squeezing the rich until the pips squeak", in the words of Labour right-winger Denis Healey.

Blair is committed above all else to winning the backing of the British bosses and the upper middle class for Labour. They are not directly affected by poverty. But indirectly they may see their businesses go bust because of low demand; they may have to grant their workers higher pay because of skills shortages. And they dread the urban crime generated by growing poverty. Blair's policies seek to address these problems—not the problems of the working class.

Labour's economic plan is twofold. First, to raise the rate of growth of British capitalism by raising the rate and volume of industrial investment. Secondly, to increase the skills of the workforce so that long-term unemployment can be eliminated, and high wage jobs sustained in the global market. In theory, this will raise incomes and generate demand. Both the goal and the strategy for meeting it are fatally flawed.

The goal depends on the belief that British *capitalism* can return to something approaching full employment. Even allowing for Labour's acceptance that there are "no jobs for life" any more, their programme stands or falls by the view that in the medium term ("the lifetime of two parliaments") lifelong access to training will serve to eliminate structural unemployment. This asks us to believe that 32 million unemployed in the main industrialised countries are on the dole simply because of under-investment and poor training.

This is simply rubbish. Mass structural, long-term unemployment is a systematic feature of all developed capitalist countries. It returned in the 1970s after a brief respite in the 1950s and 60s.

It stems from the structural crisis lodged at the heart of capitalism: investment in new technology is designed to raise productivity, reduce the workforce, improve competitiveness and sustain profit margins. A massive human scrap heap of wasted talent and blighted lives is the result.

The millions of unemployed are functional for the bosses in that they help depress average wage levels of those in work. It is not a "British disease"; the trend is clear in all OECD countries even if the exact figures vary. Even Germany now has double figure unemployment. Japan's artificially low unemployment rate reflects the fact that the unemployed remain on company books rather than being made to sign up for state benefits.

Labour's goal of reducing unemployment, at the expense of workers in competitor nations, would still require the state to force up the rate of investment and training against the unwillingness of the City and the CBI.

Blair has refused to consider this. The modest legislative and structural reforms advocated by pro-Blair economists, such as Will Hutton, to enforce a change in investment patterns, are rejected in favour of an attempt to "change the culture" of British industry. It is the simplistic solution typical of a man whose life is run by spin doctors and PR consultants.

And if the goal is utopian, so is the chosen strategy. Blair's refusal to raise substantial money through taxation for his proposed education and training packages condemns the whole exercise to tokenism.

Labour has tried to buttress its timid policies with a barrage of reactionary social philosophy. Chancellor-in-waiting Gordon Brown opined at the John Smith memorial lecture:

"Equality of outcome goes against the grain of human nature; it seeks to deny humanity rather than liberate it."

This is the new spin on the age-old Labour stance of "equality of opportunity". The state is not there to compensate for the obvious effects of market madness and injustice but to provide help (vocational education, training through life etc.) so that workers can make the best of their talents. Inequality of outcome is then simply a natural facet of different aptitudes, determination etc. This may pass for GCSE economics, but it is still social democratic claptrap. Inequality is not primarily determined by lack of *opportunity*. It is rooted in the lack of access to *property* in the *means of production*. Every study ever undertaken proves that social class, at birth, is still the most decisive factor in success in life. A state that enforces market rules merely reproduces the spontaneous relationships of power and inequality inherent in this market.

The idea that equality of outcome is against humanity also turns truth on its head. Real human individuality can only flower if everybody is free from hunger, homelessness and job insecurity. They certainly won't be under a Blair/Brown government.

So what's the alternative?

Many in the Labour Party have demanded a more ambitious and radical set of policies. For example, raising tax on profits to the EU average would bring in £5 billion; imposing VAT on private education and private health care would raise £1 billion. Income tax at 55% on over £40,000 a year (the EU average) would net a further $6 billion.

These kind of baseline figures would only be a minimum to begin to repair the torn fabric of education and healthcare in Britain. But they are too much for Blair.

Revolutionary socialists naturally support any and all progressive measures which begin to undermine wealth and privilege. But our starting point is different to the Labour left's, and our solution is altogether more radical.

We see inequality and capitalism as integral to each other. The capitalist market began when the ruling class violently robbed the mass of the population of any means of supporting itself except by the ability to work for a wage. The market reproduces this fundamental property inequality as if it were a state of nature.

Meanwhile, repeated recessions and business cycles throw the well-trained and untrained alike on the scrap heap, despite following the advice of careers teachers and Job Club supervisors.

We have to force the system to provide us with decent work at decent pay, or decent benefits—and in the process challenge the very basis of the profit system itself.

We must fight to force Blair and New Labour to commit itself to:

- a minimum wage of £8 an hour.
- immediate restoration of all benefits to the real levels of 1979.

To pay for this we demand:

- a massive wealth tax on earned and unearned income and property.
- the renationalisation of all privatised industries and utilities without compensation so that revenues can be used for social need not shareholder dividends.

By themselves, even these measures will only touch the surface, and will be fiercely resisted by industry and the City. They provide only the starting point for a workers' answer to poverty and inequality. We have to fight for the nationalisation and expropriation of all the industrial and financial property of the captains of industry.

When the whole of commerce, industry and finance is placed in the hands of the working class then we will have all the means in our hands to plan the economy to meet human need.

We can end the cycle of boom and bust which throws people into poverty at regular periods by co-ordinating supply and demand. A socialist planned economy is the only way to eradicate poverty and inequality. In contrast, a Labour government with the best of reformist intentions will only ever be applying a sticking plaster to the worst effects of capitalism. ■

Minimum wage—how much?

The trade union leaders support a minimum wage of £4.15 an hour. This would leave millions of part time and low paid workers on poverty pay. But New Labour resists even this. We should fight in the unions and the Labour Party to commit Labour to honour this basic increase, but continue to argue that workers need a living wage. That means a minimum wage equal to the male median wage of £8 an hour.

Demands on Labour?

NEW LABOUR has moved so far to the right some workers think it is mad to demanding it acts in our interests.

Certainly Blair has done everything he can to make New Labour immune to pressure from the unions and constituency activists.

But Labour is still a party based on, funded and supported overwhelmingly by workers. We need to use our collective strength, particularly through the trade unions, to make Labour pay for this support.

The union leaders must be forced to use the bloc vote at Labour Party Conference to committ Labour to a basic programme to meet our needs.

Once in office we must mobilise to force Blair to implement that programme. There must be no holding back on working class struggles and demands either to get a Labour government or preserve one in office.

We need an active, socialist campaign for a Labour victory, which mobilises the working class to place their own demands on Blair and leaves us better organised to fight Blair once he's in office.

Sellafield
Lifting the lid on the nuclear dustbin

Harold Bolter has blown the lid on the secrecy that surrounds the lack of safety at Sellafield. As **Pauline Golding** reveals, he should know. He spent 25 years as British Nuclear Fuel's public information director.

TEN YEARS after the nuclear disaster at Chernobyl, both the radioactive and political fall-out continue to take their toll. Six thousand died as a result of the 1986 explosion at the Ukrainian reactor. Estimates suggest that 30,000 more will die of radiation-induced cancers.

At the time of Chernobyl, Britain's nuclear chiefs rushed to reassure us that the accident was due to the defective safety procedures and excessive secrecy surrounding the Soviet nuclear power system. It could never happen here.

In fact it already had.

One of the graphic accounts in Bolter's book deals with the October 1957 fire at the nuclear reactor at Sellafield (then called Windscale). Bolter calls it "the first major accident in the history of nuclear power".

Defective safety procedures? Bolter says of those brave workers who rushed to put out the fire, "the official version of events is that these volunteers were all fitted out with respirators and protective clothing" and "dosimeters" to record the massive amount of radiation to which they were exposed.

Pump

Yet in fact it was "a matter of all hands to the pump", there "was not time to organise things properly". They "simply poked the burning fuel elements out of the channels" as best they could. Moreover, Bolter confesses that "it has been established that no records at all were kept for some men who fought the fire."

At least 100 have died or will die due to this accident. Bolter confesses that it would have been much worse but for pure luck.

The highly risky decision to douse the fire with water could easily have ignited an explosive mixture of air, hydrogen and carbon monoxide.

Have the lessons been learned? Procedures for evacuation are essential in the industry but Bolter warns, "... mass evacuation has still not been provided for adequately at Sellafield. A single broken-down tractor can block parts of the A595 . . . it is still little better than a country lane in places, nearly forty years after the pile fire pointed up the possible need for a fast escape route from Sellafield."

Nor is excessive secrecy the preserve of a Stalinist bureaucracy. Bolter argues:

"Sellafield's bosses seemed to have treated the fire as though it was a purely local difficulty, not something that could have effected the whole country if it had got out of hand as it certainly threatened to do. The uncommunicative attitude in times of crisis persisted throughout my career at BNFL—and almost certainly still exists".

Candour

Bolter's inside story is well worth reading for its candour, although he is no enemy of nuclear power. Bolter even supports the government's current privatisation programme, in which eight nuclear generating stations are set to be sold for the bargain basement price of £2.75 billion—the cost of building Sizewell B alone!

Bolter says this is not so much "a case of the Government selling off the family silver as it is disposing of a canteen of old and unwanted cutlery for the best price it can obtain". Why is this?

Bolter reveals the commercially unprofitable character of the nuclear power industry. It first emerged in the 1950s, to produce not electricity, but uranium 235 and plutonium for the British bomb, whatever the cost.

That cost was high and now weighs down the whole industry with massive decommissioning, waste disposal and reprocessing costs.

The government's sole enticement to the stock market is to dump all these costly loss-making sides of the industry into the BNFL "black hole" and underwrite it, probably to the tune of £15 billion over the next decades.

At different times over the last 40 years up to 10,000 have worked on the site, either in the reactors or on various building projects.

It was the main source of employment in the area, and the unions were so strong at Sellafield that the site was known locally as the "holiday camp".

The government wanted industrial peace at the plant and had to concede a great deal of power to the shop stewards. Workers enjoyed short hours and excellent pay. Several times they breached government public sector pay norms. They were among the first to negotiate the 35-hour week in 1989, much to Bolter's evident dismay. They were a clear part of the labour aristocracy within the British working class.

Bargaining

In 1988 BNFL considered ditching a national agreement in favour of site-by-site pay bargaining. They hoped to push through pay freezes in several of the other sites this way.

But BNFL abandoned the plan. Bolter says it would have put pay bargaining at Sellafield into the hands of the shop stewards and "the thought of the Sellafield shop stewards in particular, acting without the leavening of realism provided by the national trade union officers was too much for BNFL to contemplate".

Yet this union strength has its downside. It can and does lead to craft conservatism, a sectional and purely economic outlook, with few concerns about the dangers that the industry holds for the surrounding population—or for the fate of other sectors of the energy industry such as coal.

The unions can conspire with the management over secrecy, which hides the risks from the local community.

Issue

But the nuclear industry is an issue for the whole working class, nationally *and internationally*; more people are likely to die of cancer from the Chernobyl fall-out in the UK alone than from the 1957 Windscale fire.

Bolter's remedies are reactionary. He hopes privatisation will break union power and lead to sackings, cost-cutting and profitability. Socialists should answer the issues raised by Bolter by seeking to impose workers' control over the industry, not just by the site unions but by workers and residents' inspection committees, advised by sympathetic scientists.

Secrecy

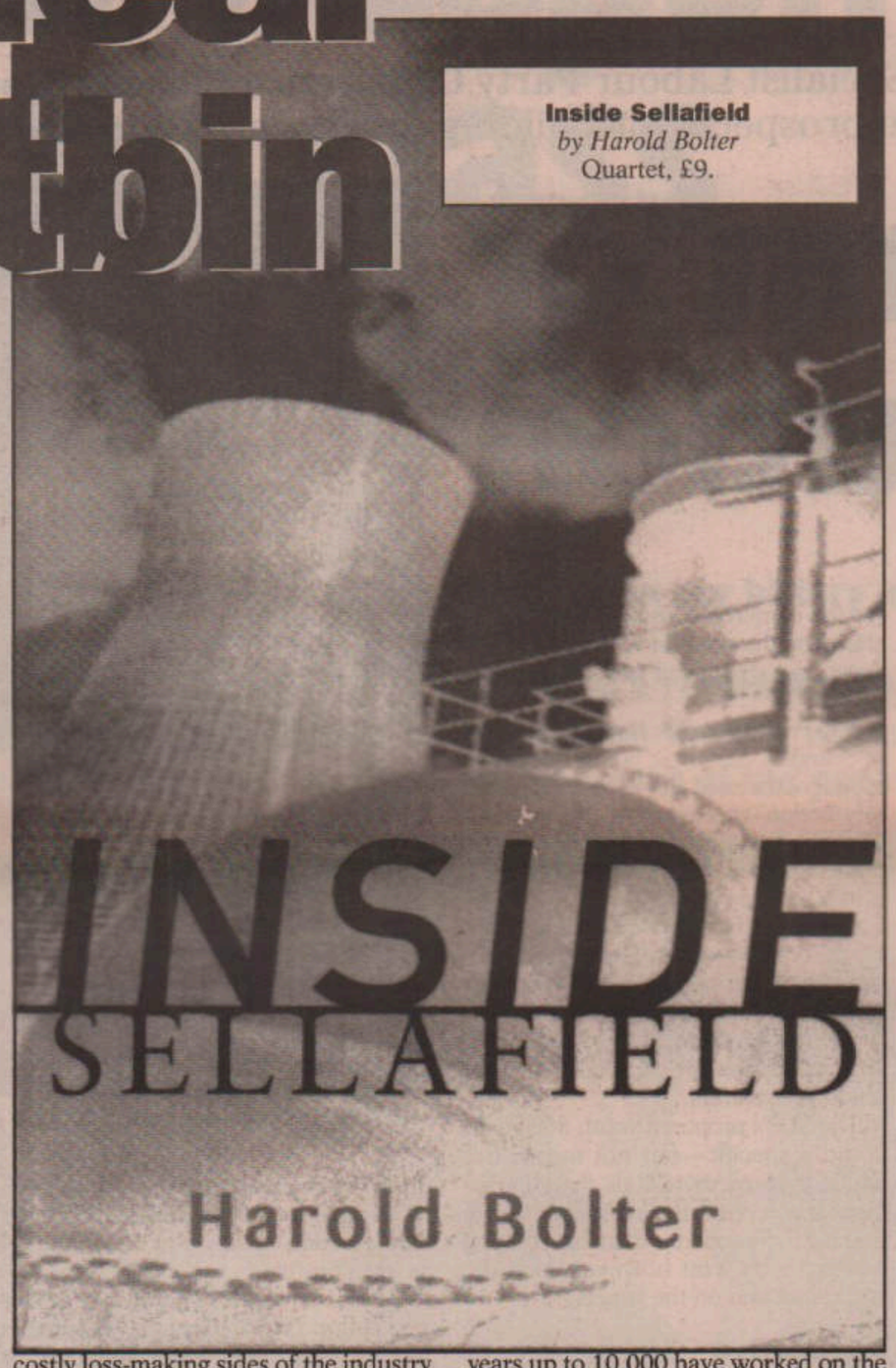
All secrecy must end. Any site or process considered at all unsafe should be shut down until the doubts can be removed. All bomb-making processes should be immediately halted.

The government must pick up the tab for increased research into effects of radiation as well as into alternative forms of energy. Jobs lost due to closures should be replaced elsewhere.

Over the next 50 years the temptation of financially-strapped British governments to cut corners on waste management will be enormous.

We can't afford to wait 25 years for another Bolter to reveal after the event what we could have avoided armed with the knowledge we now have.■

Inside Sellafield
by Harold Bolter
Quartet, £9.



The pain behind "The Family"

Roddy Doyle is both a critically acclaimed and commercially successful novelist. His recent television series, *The Family*, provoked outrage among British and Irish guardians of conventional morality. But **Kate Foster** is dubious about the hype surrounding his new book The *Woman who Walked into Doors*.

The Woman who Walked into Doors
by Roddy Doyle
Jonathan Cape, £14.99

DOYLE's LATEST novel develops out of the television series, *The Family*. It tells the story of a woman and her marriage against the background of a sink estate on the outskirts of Dublin. The central character, Paula, narrates the story, from childhood innocence and sex-obsessed adolescence through to alcoholism and a desperate, violent marriage. Surprisingly, this is not a depressing novel. Doyle gives Paula just enough strength and humour to make her a heroine, rather than a victim.

Doyle's prose is sparse and direct. His often staccato sentences hold a seductive simplicity. He has an eye for detail and a wry sense of humour. Both feature in one of Paula's descriptions of herself:

"She still has brown hair, with a bit of help from something out of a bottle. She looks good if she remembers to stand up straight and you don't look at her too closely. Her arse is sagging a bit but she's the only one who knows. The skin of her face is veined, thin lines joining tiny pink rivers on a map. They're easy to hide. Give her a mirror, some make up and half an hour and she'll make herself look thirty. See her when she's getting out of bed and she'll look fifty."

The book's strongest passages recall Paula's conversations with her two sisters: Denise and Carmel. Paula is the romantic, Carmel is the cynic. Poor Denise is squeezed between the other two. They clash over memories of childhood:

"It was a happy home. That's the way I remember it. Carmel doesn't remember it like that and Denise won't talk about it at all because, I think, it would mean that she'd have to take a side, mine or Carmel's."

The three sisters sometimes manage a drink together, particularly on child allowance days. The conversations between the three women and their memories will sound familiar to many.

Paula's dream-like descriptions of a poor but secure childhood are contrasted with Carmel's frequent interruptions:

"What was left of Sunday's meat with boiled potatoes on a Monday; shepherd's pie on a Tuesday; I don't remember what there was on Wednesday and Thursday; cod on Fridays, with chips from the chipper—we'd have hated the fish without the chips; stew on Saturday. Ice-cream on Sundays; rice on Monday—when I woke up in the morning I knew exactly what was going to happen. I had my bath on Saturdays; I had the water after Carmel, me and Denise in the bath together. Mammy scrubbed, Daddy dried us.

- He didn't.
- He did, Carmel
- Not me.
- Ah Carmel; he did."

Doyle's publisher Jonathan Cape is not marketing the book on the quality of the writing, or the character of Paula, but on the basis that it deals with domestic violence. The title refers to Paula's excuse for how she has become so battered and bruised. But this is the weakest part of the novel.

Doyle offers little insight into the issue of domestic violence. The descriptions of Charlo's brutal assaults on Paula are graphic, but there is no real explanation of what lies behind the violence. The facts that Charlo is unemployed and life is hard seem to be adequate reasons.

Doyle points to Paula's refusal to stop loving Charlo, her desire to imagine that it will all get better, that there will be no "next time". He describes how the doctors ignored her, agreeing that her injuries came from walking into doors and falling down stairs. But these are not fresh insights into the problem of domestic violence.

Doyle has expressed the hope that the book will serve to highlight the plight of "the hidden women" of Irish society. But reading the novel, I developed the uneasy feeling that the violence in Paula and Charlo's relationship had more to do with marketing the book, rather than being central to the story. And that leaves an unpleasant taste.

The Woman who Walked into Doors is undeniably well-written and full of life. Read it for that rather than for any great message about women's oppression, the reasons for abusive relationships or ways to tackle domestic violence.■



Arthur Scargill: party will be built on "Marxist" phiosophy

THE SOCIALIST Labour Party (SLP) is set to hold its first national members' conference on Saturday 4 May. Party membership is growing. So far up to 2,000 people have joined the party. This includes some influential trade union officials, notably seven members of the RMT executive, and many experienced union activists.

Workers Power has always argued that the most important task facing socialists today is the construction of a new revolutionary workers' party—politically and organisationally independent of Labour. We welcomed Scargill's initiative as an opportunity to debate the way forward to that goal.

Can the SLP make a political break from the reformist traditions which have strangled the British workers' movement? Or will its members rest content with reconstructing "Old Labour" Mark II, or a revamped Stalinist party?

This is the question which confronts SLP members as they assemble in Camden on 4 May.

Already, however, the Scargill leadership of the new party has moved to restrict democratic debate.

Even before the new party began recruiting, a "draft" constitution appeared, written by Scargill in consultation with left wing barristers Michael Mansfield and John Hendy. It banned existing socialist organisations from affiliation to the SLP and prohibited party membership by individuals holding differing views to official SLP policy.

The SLP leaders armed themselves in advance with exactly the same mechanism of bureaucratic manipulation which Kinnock, Smith and Blair used against them.

Workers Power warned that this approach would leave thousands of committed and experienced fighters outside the party. We pointed to the undemocratic essence of the constitution, which can and will be used to prevent democratic debate of policies rejected by the SLP leadership.

Where is Socialist La

On the eve of the first Socialist Labour Party Conference **Richard Brenner** surveys the development of the party, the politics on offer and the prospects for building an alternative to Blair's New Labour.

Reform or revolution

"ONE THING especially was proved by the Paris Commune ... the working class cannot simply lay hold of the ready-made state machinery, and wield it for its own purposes."

(Karl Marx 1872, Preface to *The Communist Manifesto*)

With these words Karl Marx explained why workers should reject the strategy of parliamentary reformism.

The "ready-made state machinery" Marx was referring to exists in every capitalist country. It consists of the army, the police, the top civil servants and state bureaucracy, the courts, the judiciary, the secret police, and—in Britain—the Monarchy.

Neutral

These forces are not "neutral". They are there to preserve the rule of the capitalists. No parliamentary majority—even one full of Arthur Scargills and Brenda Nixons—could control this state apparatus.

The best proof of this is the experience of Chile in 1973. The left-wing Popular Unity government of Salvador Allende was returned to power with a clear majority in 1970. It launched a programme of radical reform in the interests of the working class.

As a right-wing campaign mounted against Allende, the army and state apparatus struck. Allende was deposed and murdered. Countless working class militants and trade unionists were rounded up and executed. Chile sank into the dark night of the Pinochet dictatorship.

The conclusion that Marx drew from the experience of the Paris Commune, and that we draw from the events in Chile, has a burning relevance for the working class movement today.

The capitalist state machinery has to be broken up—*smashed*—by the action of the working class itself. To build socialism the working class has to construct a new type of state, one rooted in the self-organisation of the masses.

Painfully

We need a *revolution* to get socialism. That is the fact which has been painfully taught to the workers' movement by decades of experience. The question of reform or revolution is what divides real socialists from Labour traitors, new and old.

Where will the Socialist Labour Party stand on this question?

Arthur Scargill has declared that the SLP will be founded on a "Marxist philosophy". But the documents circulated for the conference show a fatal lack of clarity on the need for revolution as opposed to a strategy of parliamentary reform.

The *Programme for Britain* contained in Scargill's economic policy document speaks of the need for "extra-parliamentary action—necessary to bring about change". It is a purposefully vague formula, designed to allow the SLP to be all things to all people.

More specifically it is designed so that Scargill can boost his "Marxist" credentials with the clique of cringing ex-"Trotskyists" he has picked to run the party, at the same time as roping in swathes of dyed in the wool reformist union bureaucrats.

The SLP's proposed youth document is more specific—but not much. But whilst it correctly tells us that "Parliament is a corrupt talking shop", it says nothing more concrete than that "the real power to be won however is in the workplace and on the streets."

Legislative

Meanwhile, the other documents blithely detail the proposed legislative agenda of a future "SLP Government"—clearly on the assumption that the real power rests on the leather benches of Westminster.

The contradiction is crucial. An SLP government which went even halfway to implementing its proposed programme would meet vicious armed resistance from the capitalist state.


1984-85: Miners confront full force of capitalist state machine

To remain silent, or unclear, about the key question—reform or revolution—is irresponsible.

Some SLP leaders may declare talk of revolution "too extreme", "pie-in-the-sky" or even "impossible". In doing so they will prove their disregard for history, their lack of faith in the working class and the very possibility of socialism.

Others will agree in general, but want to keep more "extreme", "blood-curdling" statements about revolution out of the party's programme. The rationale for this is the need to "win seats" and "not frighten people off".

One way or the other, the SLP conference will decide between the two strategies of parliamentary reformism and workers' revolution. Definite consequences will flow from the party's choice.

A revolutionary SLP would use election campaigns to raise the arguments for revolution and for its detailed programme. But it would recognise that Parliament is, at best, a talking shop.

Revolutions take place when the mass of workers' ideas and attitudes change radically, and quickly. The conditions for this have historically been deep-seated social crisis and war.

A revolutionary SLP would not sacrifice its principles to garnering votes in the short term. It would conduct its work knowing that what may seem extreme and unpopular to many workers today will be seen as the only way out when the capitalist crisis intensifies.

A reformist SLP would be a different affair altogether. It would have to keep quiet or even ditch certain policies, even if they were clearly in the direct interests of the working class.

This is clearly the kind of party Scargill wants. This kind of parliamentary opportunism has a slow but steadily corrosive effect on any workers' party.

New Labour shows one way this process can end. The fate of the Allende's government in Chile shows the other.■

How to fight union bureaucrats

THE DRAFT SLP policy document on the Anti-Trade Union Laws recognises the extent to which the rights of trade unionists have been eroded in Britain since 1979. It includes the call for "the trade union and Labour movement to refuse to co-operate with laws designed to render ineffective the rule books and constitutions of trades unions and deny the democratic rights of union members."

This is an excellent starting point. For too long the union leaders have bowed to Tory legislation that could have been rendered unworkable years ago. The fact is that the union leaderships have cared more about preserving their funds from sequestration than defending their members.

So how should we tackle the problem of the union leaders? Here the policy draft contains a serious, and by no means accidental, omission. It declares that "trades unions, controlled democratically by their members, are vital for a free society."

But what do we do when trade unions are not controlled democratically by their members?

At the dockers' national demonstration in Liverpool in April, Arthur Scargill spoke of the need to challenge what he called "the trade union bureaucracy".

Indeed, the unions are run by a *caste* of bureaucrats, separated from the concerns and needs of the membership by higher wages and privileges, all of which are derived from their role as mediators between shop-floor workers and their employers. Scargill, despite his militant record, is a member of that caste.

Revolutionaries fight not just for better, more left-wing trade union bureaucrats but to abolish their status as a privileged caste within the labour movement.

To do that the SLP should fight to establish a democratic, anti-bureaucratic *rank and file movement*. Such a campaign across the unions should fight for:

- All trade union officials to be paid the average income of the workers they represent
- All union officials to be subject to regular election and recall by their members
- Action against the employers and the government with the union leaders where possible and *against* them when necessary
- The transformation of the unions into fighting class struggle organisations.

This in turn will mean a political fight against both the Blairites *and* the backers of "Old Labour" in the leadership of the unions. A revolutionary SLP would organise fractions of its members in the unions, and would call a trade union conference to plan its campaign.

Some SLP trade unionists, including members of the CPSA Socialist Caucus, have called for all party members in the unions—including officials—to be bound by the decisions of the party.

Yet this elementary democratic proposal has been rejected by the SLP Steering Committee.

These proposals should be forced onto the agenda if there is any attempt to suppress them on 4 May. They deserve the support of all party members keen to build an SLP that can break the hold of the sell-out merchants in the unions.■

Scargill's bureaucratic plan has not prevented political debate emerging in the party. At several pre-conference workshops centrist and even revolutionary minority positions emerged.

In *Workers Power* 198 we said that the SLP was now "immune" from a democratic internal discussion. Clearly this was premature. The Conference itself will show whether revolutionary opponents of the Scargill leadership can make their voices heard.

On the eve of the Conference, however, Scargill's allies seemed to be working overtime to ensure that some left-wing documents and amendments from the pre-conference policy commissions were not on the agenda. As it stands today the SLP is not the revolutionary alternative the working class needs. But SLP members at this month's founding conference are still faced with a choice.

They can open up debate, allowing affiliation from the thousands of socialists already organised in left groups outside the SLP. They can reject the warmed-over Stalinism on offer from the leadership. They can choose a revolutionary socialist alternative to Labour.

Or they can follow Arthur Scargill down the road of a bureaucratic and reformist SLP.

Scargill has chosen a slow growth strategy; 5,000 members in two years. This is not the result of pessimism or pure passivity. It is a cold calculation: a party with only a few thousand members can be steered rightward when the time comes to garner support from Labour and trade union leaders defecting from Tony Blair.

A mass party of activists, deeply rooted in today's struggles, would have no time and no place for reformist bureaucrats.

The key issue—not just at the conference but in the SLP branches and commissions—is the political programme the new party will be founded on.

Central to that debate is the question: reform or revolution?■

Labour going?

Why we still say: Vote Labour

IT IS crucial that those who want a revolutionary SLP address head on what to do about Blair's New Labour.

A section of the current membership wants to salve its conscience, creating a mini replica of "old Labour" and turning its back on a party which still has millions of working class supporters and affiliated members.

This is a dead end strategy, and one that risks repeating all the mistakes of the Independent Labour Party (ILP), which split with Labour in 1931. The ILP failed essentially because it wavered between reform and revolution. To preserve its "left" credentials it heaped scorn and abuse on the Labour leaders but refused to engage in any revolutionary tactics to *break away* the mass of Labour members.

One revolutionary tactic which is vital in the coming period is that of critical support for Labour at the polls.

Voting Labour is not, as some childish sectarians believe, a betrayal. It is a way of putting workers' illusions in Labour to the test; of mobilising their expectations in an organised way. Revolutionaries support Labour, in Lenin's famous phrase, "like a rope supports a hanged man".

There are several views on this tactic within the SLP. Some clearly see the SLP as a way of pressuring New Labour from without. They are prepared to stand only against the worst of Blair's cronies at the polls. Scargill declared his intention of standing as many SLP candidates as possible against Labour. This too will chime in with the mood of a layer of militants who want to punish Blair for his betrayals. Both these tactics are self defeating.

So too is the line that workers cannot vote Labour because it has become an outright ruling class party. Labour has always been a ruling class party, in politics and practice. But it has also always had a mass, organised working class base, primarily through the union link.

Walkout

Scargill's walkout from the Labour Party effectively told workers to abandon the struggle to preserve the union link. As long as the union link and mass working class support remains, Labour remains what it always was: a *bourgeois* workers' party.

Certainly the Blair leadership wants to change that. But that struggle is not over yet.

Putting Blair into office will help to break millions of his working class supporters from their illusions. The danger is that the SLP's election campaign could serve as a solace for those who have really no answer, no consistent alternative, to the crisis of old Labour's ideology.

For revolutionaries the tactic of critical electoral support is only useful if masses of workers, either nationally or locally express illusions in a reformist or centrist workers' party. At present there is no evidence that the SLP expresses such mass support. It has one quarter of the membership of the Socialist Workers Party, and gained a far smaller share of the Labour vote than, say, Militant Labour in Glasgow or Coventry.

Until that changes Workers Power will not advocate critical support for the SLP.

All across the left there are veiled and open polemics flying around which accuse Workers Power of "softness on Labour" because we have taken this stand.

"The most advanced workers are breaking from Labour" so the story goes, "while Workers Power advises them to go back."

Clearly we do not give such advice. But we do say this, to SLP members, and to those currently involved in the Militant Labour-initiated Socialist Alliances:

Stand candidates against Labour? Yes, but on a revolutionary programme—something the SLP or Militant Labour have yet to do.

Break from Labour? Yes. But don't give up the fight to stop Blair breaking the party's link with the unions. And don't use the excuse of building a small replica of "old Labour" to ignore the task of addressing New Labour's mass of working class support.■

Fight for a socialist programme!

Clare Heath examines the SLP policy drafts in detail

Nationalisation

The draft programme commits the SLP to "the common ownership of all public utilities, including transport, as the start of a plan to change the overall direction of the whole economy."

But for the direction of the economy to be transformed towards socialism, the banks and major financial institutions would also need to be nationalised. So too would any industries or companies declaring redundancies.

The draft lacks a clear statement of how nationalisation would be carried out. Would the former owners be *compensated*? Who would *control* state owned corporations?

Socialism can only be built if the capitalist class is decisively separated from is property and wealth. If the SLP wants to build a classless society, it must commit itself to the first decisive step:

★ Nationalisation, without compensation, under workers' control, of the commanding heights of the economy: banks, businesses, utilities and finance houses.

Ireland

Compared to Labour's disgraceful bipartisan policy on Northern Ireland the SLP's draft policy document on Ireland reads at first like a breath of fresh air.

It concludes correctly:

"Lasting peace can only be achieved on the island of Ireland and between Ireland and Britain, by the ending of all British interference so that the Irish can exercise their inalienable and indivisible right to national self-determination."

But the document fails to draw the necessary conclusions from this. If Britain has violated the national and democratic rights of the Irish people then Britain has no right to be in Ireland. British troops should get out now.

And if Britain is denying these rights through the occupation, then it is the responsibility of socialists in Britain to offer the fullest solidarity to those who are fighting the occupation.

In short, this must mean a commitment to the slogans of Troops Out Now, Self-Determination for the whole Irish people, and unconditional support for those, such as the IRA, who are fighting British imperialism.

Defence spending

The reformist logic embodied in many of the SLP's policy documents is reflected in the proposals on defence spending.

The capitalists' army, though comprised of many working class youth, is an instrument by which the bosses defend their system, extend their markets and influence through predatory wars, and hold the Third World in semi-colonial servitude.

It is totally unacceptable for socialists to give any support to the capitalist army. Our slogan should be "Not a penny, not a person for the defence of this system!"

In contrast the SLP policy document speaks only of "cutting defence spending by two-thirds".

Principled socialists should vote against any conference document which contains a proposal to retain one third of present defence spending. The vote for the imperialists' war budget is what separated reformist traitors from revolutionary socialists in 1914. The same issues are at stake today.

Women

The draft policy document includes key demands against women's oppression, and calls for SLP women to develop a ten year plan to overcome all aspects of women's inequality in society. But like the other policy areas, it is weak on exactly where it is going, and how to get there.

Women's oppression is rooted fundamentally in the family and domestic labour. The document calls for "policies at work and elsewhere to enable and encourage men to do an equal share of domestic labour child-rearing and caring for others". Of course, we support such policies, but equality is not liberation. The revolutionary answer is for the full socialisation of domestic labour, with an end to the separation of "private" work in the home from collective production.

How do we get there? The document is silent on women's organisation. We need to build a mass, working class women's movement that can draw together militant women in the unions, on the estates, in political parties of the workers' movement. Women must also have the right to caucus within the party in order to fight against sexism within the labour movement. ■

The A–Z of Marxism

L is for Luxemburg

by Bill Jenkins

ROSA LUXEMBURG was one of the great revolutionary socialists of the 20th century. She fought for internationalism against imperialist war, and for the revolutionary activity of the working class against bureaucratic leaders who betrayed the working class.

Those who want to write off the achievements of the Russian Revolution, and to deny the need for a revolutionary party, often like to claim Rosa Luxemburg's work as justification. But they are wrong.

Born in Poland in 1871, Luxemburg was a fighter against oppression from her school days onwards. She faced discrimination as both a Pole and a Jew in the Russian Empire.

Years of underground work culminated in the founding of the Social Democratic Party of Poland and Lithuania in 1894.

Luxemburg moved to Germany in 1897 to work in the growing German Social Democratic Party. She established a reputation as an innovative Marxist intellectual with her work on economics and her intervention in the debate on the Polish national question.

Luxemburg was to clash sharply with Lenin and other Bolshevik leaders over both her theory of economic crisis and her refusal to back the call for Polish national self-determination.

But Luxemburg's main contribution to Marxism was still to come.

In 1898 Edward Bernstein, a leader of the SPD, published his "revisionist" manifesto *Evolutionary Socialism*. Luxemburg's pamphlet *Reform or Revolution* was a rallying cry against Bernstein's ideas. She showed that his ideas of gradual reform and opportunism—adaptation to the capitalist system—called into question the very existence of the new socialist party.

Luxemburg also attacked the wavering "centre" in the SPD, led by Karl Kautsky, which developed a conciliatory attitude to opportunism.

Following the Russian Revolution of 1905 the SPD debated the political value of the mass strike. The German trade union leaders banned discussion of the mass strike as "playing with fire". The SPD leadership made a secret deal not to oppose them.

Published in August 1906, Luxemburg's pamphlet *The Mass Strike, the Political Party and the Trade Unions* was a polemic against the trade union bureaucracy's attempt stifle the spontaneous revolutionary activity of the working class. She explained how "the mass strike is inseparable from revolution", and that "the social democrats are called upon to assume political leadership in the midst of the revolutionary period."

Luxemburg counterposed the spontaneity of the masses to the conservative policy of the trade union bureaucracy. "This counterposition", Leon Trotsky wrote later, "had a thoroughly revolutionary and progressive character".

But there were weaknesses in Luxemburg's attitude to building a revolutionary party. Not surprisingly, it is these weaknesses that form the attractive part of her politics to today's opponents of Bolshevism.

While Luxemburg understood the importance of a revolutionary party, her stress on the spontaneous activity of the working class meant she did not understand the need for a *combat* party like that of the Bolsheviks. While she fought the right wing in the SPD, she did not organise the left into a fraction to oust them from the leadership of the party until it was too late.

In 1914, at the outbreak of the First World War, Luxemburg stood almost alone against the SPD's support for the imperialist slaughter. She denounced the SPD as a "stinking corpse". Alongside Karl Liebknecht, Franz Mehring and Clara Zetkin she began to rally the internationalist wing of the SPD against the war.

Luxemburg hailed the Russian Revolution of 1917. Lenin's detractors today seize on Luxemburg's criticisms, forgetting her insistence that the Bolshevik rising was "the salvation of the honour of international socialism".

In November 1918 the German



war effort collapsed. Troops mutinied. Workers' and soldiers' councils were formed. The SPD was propelled to power, determined to head off a revolutionary outcome to the crisis. Luxemburg and Liebknecht launched *Die Rote Fahne* (The Red Flag) the paper of the recently formed Spartakusbund.

In her brilliant incisive style she rallied the masses for revolution:

"Either the continuation of capitalism, new wars and a very early decline into chaos and anarchy, or the abolition of capitalist exploitation."

Luxemburg formed the German Communist Party (KPD) in December 1918. But in January 1919 the KDP was provoked into a premature uprising. After urging the young and inexperienced membership of the KPD not to launch the rising, Luxemburg and Liebknecht were powerless to stop it.

The rising was crushed. A massive campaign was launched against Luxemburg. One hundred thousand Marks were offered for her capture. The SPD leaders, Noske and Scheidemann, ordered right wing paramilitaries to hunt her down.

On the 15 January 1919 she and Liebknecht were caught. Luxemburg's head was smashed in with a rifle butt and her body thrown with Liebknecht's into a canal. Red Rosa was dead.

Rosa Luxemburg should be remembered as one of the greatest revolutionaries. Her comrade and close friend Clara Zetkin wrote in her memory: "She was the sharp sword, the living flame of the revolution."■

viewpoint
KEITH HARVEY

From Canary Wharf to Walworth Road

A COUPLE of weeks ago I went to the Labour Party's HQ at Walworth Road for the first time in years. The local elections were coming up and I needed some policy documents.

Back in 1992 I remember a quaint ramshackle basement bookshop. It was not exactly the shop front of a mass party, in fact it had to be opened up by a party worker if anyone wanted to buy anything. But it was there.

Not any more. This time I could only get as far as the receptionist—sitting behind a reinforced glass partition.

There was no browsing at leisure through shelves of old Labour classics, but a coldly efficient greeting. I asked whether they had material on poverty.

"Property?", she queried? When I put her right, she phoned through to the information officer who told her no, they did not have anything that would help me.

I was reassured, however, that if I was a member of the Labour Party I could find out what the party stood for by subscribing to the "Policy Value Pack". A bargain at £40 a year.

I took the brochure to think it over, and she handed me another catalogue: coffee mugs, T-shirts and fine wines, and an order form for David Blunkett's new book. If I wanted anything else I should "write to the press officer"—New Labour is mail order only.

Labour under Blair is determined to cut out the middle man when it comes to getting its propaganda across. No need for bookshops, activists, mass rallies of the membership. To get the message over New Labour needs access to the bosses' press and little else. Cuddling up to Murdoch gets Blair a few articles in the *Sun*. Hire Alastair Campbell, ex-*Daily Mirror* journalist, as Blair's press secretary and gain an experienced media manipulator.

So central is getting the bosses' media on board to New Labour's project that Blair has set up, under Peter Mandelson, a media and press office at Canary Wharf as counterpart (or is that counter-weight?) to the party machine at Southwark. No wonder there is no money for a bookshop at Walworth Road.

Getting the bosses' media is on his side makes Blair confident in his reshaping of "democracy" inside the Labour Party. Having concentrated policy-making into the hands of a select few, having imposed a Stalinist-type monolithism on public spokespeople, Blair now wants to use that other tried and tested Stalinist method—the plebiscite.

He has announced that the party manifesto for the General Election will be put to the membership—on a take-it-or-leave it basis. That they will take it will be determined by Blair's confident use of the mass media, carefully priming Blair's message for the atomised and passive Labour members sat at home.

Blair plans to turn Labour into an open bourgeois party—this means loosening and eventually severing the *organic* links with the working class, the ties that traditionally have bound the party to its working class base. It means abandoning the mechanisms that integrate the membership of a living, fighting party.

These organic ties are the only reason for advocating a vote for Labour at the May local elections and the upcoming General Election. Through them pressure can still be exerted to force Labour to carry out the few positive commitments that have been dragged out of Blair to date.

Coffee mugs, T-shirts, fine wines, and an order form for David Blunkett's book. If I wanted anything else I should write to the press officer—New Labour is mail order only.

Admittedly they are few and far between. In the run up to my Walworth Road visit Blair's attempts to put clear blue water between Labour and the working class came fast and furious. In the space of a week or so Blair managed to announce a number of new positions: Labour supports the Monarchy, Labour will keep the House of Lords, Labour is a party of the centre not the left, God votes Labour. And so it goes on.

It is easy to see that by the time of the general election the Liberal Democrats will be to the left of Labour on many if not most issues—tax and spending commitments for health and education, the homeless, constitutional and electoral reform, Trident, civil liberties.

The Labour Party was born as the political expression of the trade union bureaucracy in the first years of this century. Despite slip-streaming the Liberal Party for many years, union officialdom had to strike out on its own because the Liberals open and direct ties to the industrialists and bankers made them unwilling to support trade union reforms in parliament.

Now Blair goes out of his way to declare that he owes the trade unions no favours, that anti-union laws will stay. The mass of trade unionists grit their teeth, unhappy with the direction all this is taking the party but having accepted the winning the election is worth any amount of policy betrayal—for now.

This is a big mistake. Blair will push on with paring down the party's roots in the working class once in office. The more we let him do this now the easier it will be for him in office. Trade unionists and party members have to act before its too late; before Blair closes down not just the bookshop at Walworth Road but the whole building.

After all there is still plenty of office space at Canary Wharf.■

Italy

Left celebrates too soon

ON THE night of 21 April millions of Italian workers took to the streets to celebrate the victory of the centre-left in the general elections. The "left" was in government for the first time since the war.

by Eduardo Rosso

Yet on the morning after the elections, the Italian stock exchange soared. The bankers gave their backing to a government of the centre-left. They looked forward to stability and a raft of pro-business measures.

In fact the vote for the right (Berlusconi's Polo coalition and Fini's National Alliance) and the left (the "Olive-tree" coalition) was evenly balanced—at around 16 million votes for each.

If we add the 750,000 votes for the fascist Flame party of Pino Rauti and the three million for the right wing Northern League, the vote for the right was even bigger.

The right *lost* the election because they could not sustain the unity which gave them victory in 1992 and 1994.

The left did not gain many more votes. It redistributed them marginally between the two fragments of the former Communist Party, the Democratic Left (PDS) and Communist Refoundation (RC).

The left won because the fragments of the old ruling Christian Democracy did not stand alone, as in 1994, but dissolved into both the right and left-wing camps.

The PDS benefited more from this than Berlusconi; hence the narrow victory in terms of seats—284—though still not enough for an absolute majority.

It is undoubtedly the presence and prominence of the trusted bankers and ruling class figures of the centre—Prodi and Dini—that the stock exchange greets.

On the other hand, it was the increased vote for the RC, though not formally part of the Olive-tree coalition, that the most militant workers hailed. Its 35 deputies are now critical if the coalition is to put together a government.

The RC originated as a hard-line Stalinist split from the PDS after the latter junked its Stalinist ideological baggage. The RC has built itself a reputation for organising a fighting mass movement in the factories and on the streets. It has established radical rank and file bases in the trade unions.

It went into the election insisting that the election was merely one part of a social struggle against capitalism. Its programme for the elections included opposition to the attacks on living standards, against unemployment. The RC promoted progressive demands on wages and conditions at work, welfare and health, defence of immigrants and women's rights.

During the campaign the party's daily newspaper reduced its price to 50p and sales soared from 14,000 to an average of 26,000. Likewise its membership doubled to around 30,000.

While the PDS lost a few hundred thousand votes compared to its 1992 result, the RC increased its support by 800,000 to 8.6% of the total vote. Over 3.2 million backed RC.

In the largest cities the RC vote grew impressively, doubling in Turin to 13.7% and reaching double figures in Rome, Genoa and Naples.

This alone shows the appeal to many workers of a fighting class-based programme. Much of the RC support has come for PDS members disgusted with the ever-rightward drift of the PDS under D'Alema's leadership, culminating in its support for the last Dini government Yet the RC is now set to fritter away the enthusiasm of its supporters. Its leader, Fausto Bertinotti, announced that the Olive-tree coalition will receive the



RC banner proclaims "Fight for work"

RC votes it needs in parliament to give it an absolute majority.

This, Bertinotti claims, will be done in the name of "reinforcing the victory against the right".

This is no surprise since Bertinotti advocated support for Olive-tree in the first-past-the-post section of the election. RC members were encouraged to vote for the openly ruling class parties of Prodi and Dini in this coalition.

In return Olive-tree stood aside in certain seats—a deal that gave the RC an extra 15 seats. In addition, Refondazione was promised a number of parliamentary commissions and the vice-presidency of the Senate.

The election has produced a potentially stable government based on a tame, if untested, PDS. Its commitment to pro-capitalist reforms is not in doubt.

The bosses who greeted the Olive-tree victory immediately pressed for £5bn worth of cuts in welfare spending, to bring budget stability and pave the way for a cut in interest rates to help business. They demanded immediate progress on privatisation of the lucrative telecommunications sector.

Despite this the RC is committed to maintaining the Prodi government in power, even if it refuses to support its most blatant anti-working class measures, for which Prodi will rely upon the 59 votes of Bossi's Northern League.

But RC's commitment to vote for the formation of a PDS-based government will weaken and disorient resistance outside parliament to the government's measures. RC itself will be prevented from openly campaigning for strikes and occupations in resistance against privatisations.

In the end what unites the PDS and RC is far more important than what divides them.

They have different ideological underpinnings since their split in 1991 but they share something that they have both absorbed and maintained from their Stalinist past. That is the view that "socialism" will come only from a long-haul peaceful "democratisation" of the institutions of the Italian state.

After 50 years they have regained a toe-hold in these institutions.

Maintaining that toe-hold is more important to both the RC and PDS than furthering any number of anti-capitalist social struggles outside parliament. The bosses have allowed the reformist left through the doors of government; the left is desparate to prove itself worthy of their trust.

Only two members of the RC National Executive (supporters of the USFI) voted against the decision to support a Prodi government. A national and a series of regional conferences have been called (but not a conference of rank and file delegates) to endorse the leadership's decision.

It is critical for the future development of the Italian workers' vanguard that a revolutionary opposition is mounted within RC to Bertinotti's policy.

Otherwise, passivity, isolation and demoralisation will follow hard on the heels of the euphoria felt at the celebrations of 21 April.

- No support for Prodi government! RC members must call its leadership to account!
- Break the unity of the Olive-tree coalition; for a PDS-RC bloc on a programme of resistance against attacks on pensions, welfare spending and state-owned industries!
- RC must table legislation for the immediate restoration of the indexation of wages and the other parts of its election manifesto!■

At a glance. . .

PDS: Party of the Democratic Left. Former Communist Party majority.
Leader: Massimo D'Alema.
RC: Communist Refoundation. Hard-line Stalinist split from PDS.
Leader: Fausto Bertinotti.
USFI: United Secretariat of the Fourth International. Centrist "Trotskyists" who joined RC.
National Alliance: Ultra-right former fascists pursuing legalistic road to power. Leader: Gianfranco Fini.
Polo Coalition: Conservatives grouped around Forza Italia, which scooped 1992 elections. Leader: Silvio Berlusconi.
Northern League: Right wing racists; middle class-based movement for autonomy from the "backward" south of Italy. Leader: Umberto Bossi.
Flame: Fascist breakaway from National Alliance. Leader: Pino Rauti.

Northern Ireland

Boycott bogus elections!

ELECTIONS FOR an assembly will be held on 30 May in Northern Ireland. Elected representatives of the parties will then nominate participants to all-party talks starting on 10 June. Sinn Fein, after initial hesitation, have agreed to stand. They are wrong. The nationalist community of the Six Counties should not heed them and they should boycott the election.

From the British side the whole process is an undemocratic, closely supervised farce. The draft legislation and ground rules for the elections were published on 16 April.

These include an insistence that parties wishing to contest the ballot are approved as fit to stand by the British government! This initially led to the Communist Party being banned.

Now 30 groups have been approved. Not all will gain enough votes to get into the assembly. However, the method of elections (proportional representation) has been carefully fixed to guarantee that the small fringe parties of Loyalism (e.g. the Progressive Unionist Party) will get through and appoint people to the talks.

The ground rules for the negotiations that will follow are a concession to the Unionists and designed to court Sinn Fein's rejection. Unionist parties are guaranteed to win a majority of the seats, which in turn ensures that they will dominate the talks in the assembly. In other words, the original artificial majority for the Loyalists guaranteed by the 1922 partition is being reproduced.

Meanwhile, Sinn Fein are warned:

"If during the negotiations, any party demonstrably dishonoured its commitment to the principles of democracy and non-violence set out in the report of the International Body (i.e. Mitchell Commission—WP) by for example, resorting to force or threatening the use of force to influence the course or the outcome of the negotiations, or failing to oppose the efforts of others to do so, it would no longer be entitled to participate in the negotiations." (*Irish Times*, 18 April)

In addition, Mayhew emphasised that in the talks:

"There must be parallel de-commissioning, as the Mitchell principle sets out. As the talks proceed, the decommissioning must proceed in parallel with the talks. The precise manner of that is a matter to be determined at the beginning of the talks."

In short, Sinn Fein are asked once again to surrender unconditionally their ability to wage a revolutionary nationalist struggle against occupying British troops, the one thing that marks them out from the constitutional reformist party of the nationalist community—John Hume's SDLP.

So far, Sinn Fein have rightly refused to get involved in these talks. But they should have boycotted the whole electoral process and refused to recognise its legitimacy. A massive boycott, with demonstrations, rallies on the day of the poll, burning of voting cards, would have registered the hostility of the anti-unionists to the British-Unionist plan much better than a vote. In the pre-ceasefire days, when Sinn Fein stood in elections it was in the context of an ongoing war by the IRA against the British army. They were expressly committed to the revolutionary destruction of the sectarian statelet. After 1972 elections could not result in power for the winning parties because of direct rule from Westminster.

Likewise, the outcome was largely predetermined, given the in-built majority for the Unionists.

But there was a sharp polarisation within the nationalist population between the revolutionary anti-unionists of Sinn Fein/IRA and the collaborationist reformist SDLP. Each election was to that extent a plebiscite upon British troops and British rule and the legitimacy of war against that occupation. For that reason we advocated critical support for Sinn Fein, despite the bankrupt guerrilla strategy of the IRA.

Now the situation is very different. Sinn Fein is in wholesale retreat. In 1994 they announced a strategic shift away from the armed struggle towards the methods of bourgeois diplomacy. Sinn Fein and the SDLP together drew up the terms of a ceasefire. Sinn Fein has tacitly abandoned its aim of a united Ireland and the struggle for self-determination of the whole Irish people.

Gerry Adams has made it clear that in standing for the elections they remain wedded to this strategy, one of peace without justice for Irish anti-unionists. Their aim in standing is naturally to secure a mandate for this strategy, one that socialists and workers cannot endorse.

The "let them know we have not gone away" bombings in Hammersmith and Earls Court do not contradict this strategy. There is no ceasefire but neither is there a return to war.

In all likelihood Adams' hope is that the "neither peace nor war" strategy can see out the next 12 months and get them through to a new General Election. With a new government there will be an end to the Unionists' leverage in Westminster. Thereafter he hopes that, with help from Washington and Dublin the British can be persuaded to override the objections of the Unionists for a "negotiated settlement".

This would mean little more than talks without pre-conditions and a constitutional settlement giving the nationalists power-sharing in the North. It would be a solution to the problems of British imperialism, but not those of the nationalist masses.■

South Africa

Reject new constitution!

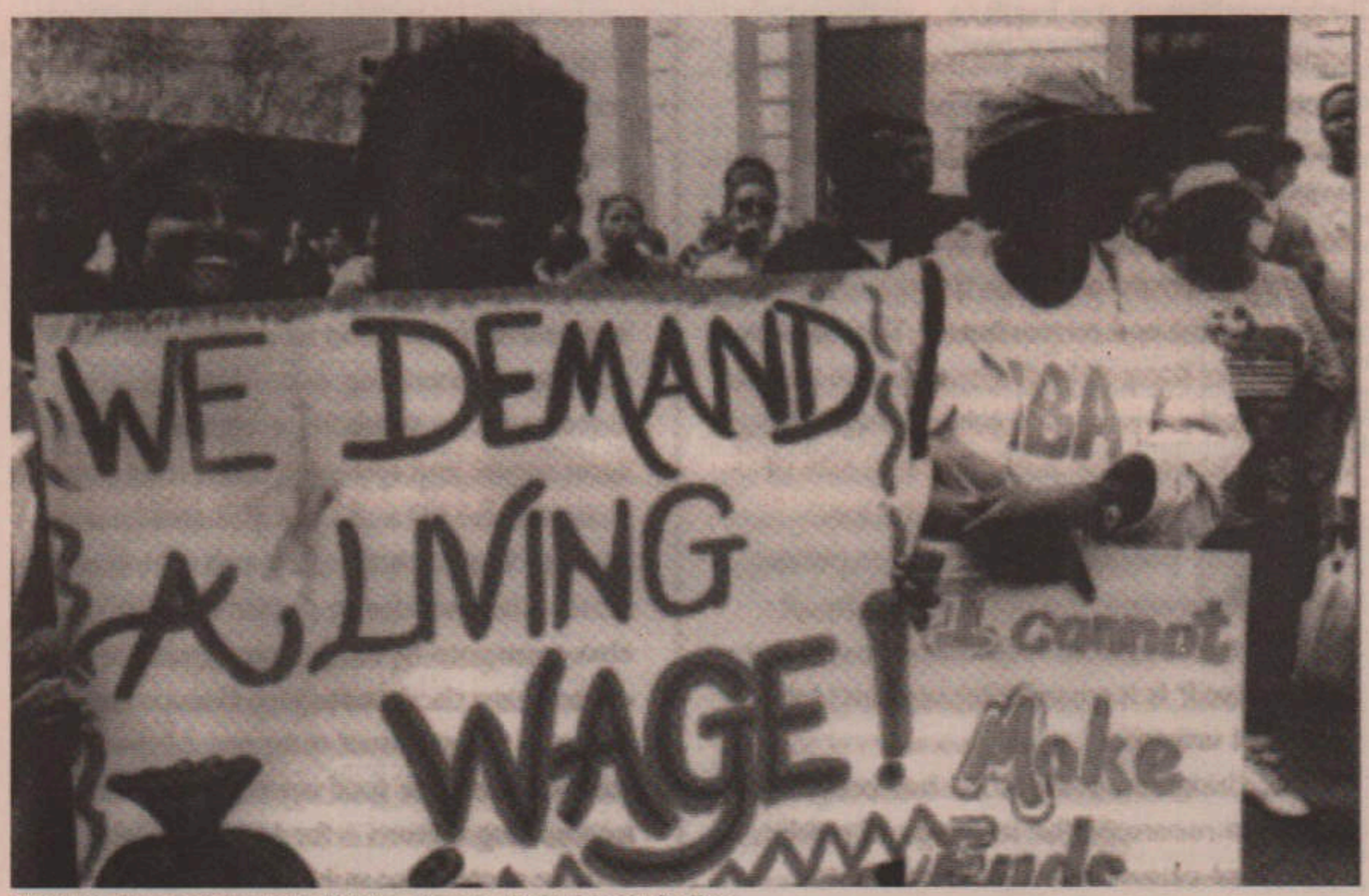
Workers should fight the ANC's proposed constitution, writes **Lesley Day**

THE ROW over South Africa's new constitution shows the increasing tensions between the leadership of the African National Congress (ANC) and the organised working class. The new constitution reflects the ANC leaders' determination to make South Africa safe for capitalism. Not only does the Bill of Rights include a clause guaranteeing the bosses' right to use lock-outs, but it also enshrines property rights.

The "lock-out" clause confirms the rights that employers have already won in last year's Labour Relations Act (LRA). It is supposed to "balance" the unions' right to strike! In fact, given the existing lock-out provisions in the LRA together with the protracted process of negotiation and arbitration, the employers could probably live without the lock-out clause in the Constitution. But its significance is not legal, so much as political; it is a signal to the capitalist class that they should trust the ANC.

Under the interim constitution, enforced power sharing gave the necessary reassurance. The ANC has to govern in a coalition with the National Party in the Government of National Unity. But now, as an out-and-out bourgeois party, the ANC can be allowed to govern on behalf of the bosses.

Its determination to do this has been shown over the last few weeks in the face of financial crisis. Doubts over planned growth, concern over Mandela's health, COSATU's planned general strike on 30 April against the new Constitution—all these sent the Rand tumbling. The markets were also temporarily alarmed by the resignation of finance minister Chris Liebenberg and his replacement by ANC member Trevor Manuel. In fact the bosses have nothing to fear from Manuel who has already declared himself a proponent of "fiscal discipline". Desperate to appease the bankers and speculators, Manuel went on a whistle stop tour of international capital cities to promise stability.



Workers lose out to Mandela's compromise with capitalism

The direction of the ANC has been even more graphically illustrated by the departure of Cyril Ramaphosa from parliament to join the board of black investment company New African Investment Limited (NAIL). Ramaphosa has moved from leadership of the National Union of Mineworkers, to heading the ANC, to parliament and now into being the spearhead of the new black capitalist class.

In itself, this journey would be unremarkable, a path well trodden by reformist politicians world wide. More significant is the attitude of the ANC leaders to this move. Ramaphosa will keep his job as Secretary General for the time being and his new job is being presented as a part of ANC strategy. It will, according to Mandela, "cement the relationship between the ANC, business and the unions". This cement involves more than just Ramaphosa's directorship. Unions are being encouraged to invest in the holding company.

Ramaphosa himself describes his new role as being in a "new area of struggle" which will be for "the benefit of our people and our country". It will certainly benefit Ramaphosa. NAIL is bidding for a slice of industrial group JOHNNIC, a part of the Anglo American empire which is being "unbundled". The black investors want to use union funds to fund at least half of their four billion Rand purchase. "The beauty of this is that unions are coming together with black investors", argues Ramaphosa.

Anglo-American's unbundling strategy is not just another form of corporate "downsizing". It is a deliberate strategy to encourage the creation of black capitalists and a black middle class. This has been a long term strategy of Anglo, the most important of South Africa's monopoly capitalists. Ramaphosa's move is the culmination of a process of transition which started with his fishing trips alongside Anglo's executives back in the 1980s.

These developments make even more urgent the need for the working class to break with the ANC. Far from empowering the black population as a whole, the new constitution and the lash-ups with big business all confirm that a layer of black politicians is joining the exploiters. But union leaders continue to argue that the Alliance between COSATU and the ANC must stay.

They argue that the unions can increase their influence through having a voice in the ANC and as part of the Alliance in parliament. South African Communist Party members have continued to press this line. "The ANC is a contested terrain, and contested properly has got the potential to inform a strong working class agenda", argues Enoch Godongwana of the metal workers union NUMSA.

This line is wearing increasingly thin. At shop steward level, there is increasing disquiet. Debates amongst Wits area COSATU stewards have shown that patience is fraying, with demands for an end to the Alliance being voiced. There is also criticism of the way the union leaders use mass mobilisations to exert pressure and let off steam—but not to provide a serious challenge to the administration.

Occasionally the pressure has an effect. The government was forced to backtrack over sweeping privatisation plans after COSATU protests. But the plans are only delayed, not shelved. With the South African economy in trouble, the room for manoeuvre will shrink. Already Mandela has moved against the ministry responsible for the Reconstruction and Development Plan (RDP), closing down its separate office and relocating funds back under treasury control.

In contrast to union demands for strengthening the RDP to encourage growth, and for taxes on the wealthy, a recent report from the top 50 companies called for a cut in the deficit, speeding up of privatisation and the dismantling of exchange controls.

The ANC leaders have shown their loyalty to big business time and time again. The working class cannot afford its continued ties to the ANC. The task of creating an independent workers' party around a programme committed to the overthrow of capitalism and its state machine, grows ever more urgent.■

Russia

Troops out of Chechyna!



Russian attacks have finally killed President Dudayev, but the Chechen people continue their resistance. **Mark Abram** explains the background to this bloody conflict.

IN LATE April Chechen President Dzhokar Dudayev, while speaking on a mobile telephone in the middle of a field, was killed by a rocket launched from a Russian army fighter jet. The attack on Dudayev came one week after Chechen fighters ambushed a Russian patrol of armoured vehicles, killing over 20 soldiers. These two incidents exposed the Russian "ceasefire" in Chechnya as a total fraud. The war is as fierce as ever since the day in December 1994 when Russian President Boris Yeltsin sent one of the largest and most heavily equipped armies in the world into Chechnya, which had declared its independence in October 1991.

That invasion turned into a near fiasco. Lightly armed Chechen fighters fought the Russians street by street in Grozny, capital of the breakaway republic. Yeltsin mercilessly bombed Grozny to rubble. In this bombing thousands of civilians were killed or injured and 100,000 fled into neighbouring Ingushetia and Dagestan. For six months the Chechen fighters held out and then the survivors broke through the encircling Russian forces and withdrew into the mountains. In June 1995 they humiliated the Russians in a hostage taking siege in Budyonovsk in southern Russia.

In January this year the Chechen guerrilla fighters launched a raid on an airfield in Kizlyar in neighbouring Dagestan. When forced to retreat they occupied a hospital and took patients and a platoon of Russian OMON "special forces" as hostages. After negotiations they were allowed to depart in a fleet of buses for the Chechen border, taking over 100 hostages and the OMON platoon.

Yeltsin faced further humiliation. Already beleaguered after last December's elections in which the Communist Party of the Russian Federation and assorted Russian nationalists trounced the radical market reformers, he had to act decisively. He said he would crush the "Chechen bandits". Unfortunately, for Yeltsin, the Russian "crack units" bungled the task and the stand-off lasted for days. The situation was only resolved with the total destruction of the border village of Pervomayskoye.

The battle for Chechnya has continued. Despite murderous attacks by Russian planes and artillery, a divided and demoralised Russian army has been unable to win a decisive victory.

Dzhokar Dudayev was a commander in the Soviet Airforce who joined the National Congress of the Chechen People in November 1990, a time when the nationalities of the USSR were in mass upheaval against decades of oppression. During the Yanayev Stalinist putsch of August 1991, Dudayev led the mass resistance, calling a 10-week general strike which ended with the ousting of the Chechen-Ingush Republic's old Stalinist leadership. Dudayev called for a referendum on independence and armed the population. His party Vainakh (Our People) won the 27 October elections with 85% of the votes. A week later he proclaimed Chechnya's independence and, when the Ingush objected, they were allowed to secede peacefully. Chechnya's 300,000 Slav population have not been subject to persecution or discrimination.

It is true that Dudayev's regime narrowed rapidly over the next two years into a military Bonapartist dictatorship, dependent only on certain clans and on the mafia. This is in part because the former ruling bureaucrats, the Chechen *nomenklatura*, continued to support pro-Moscow ruler Doku Zavgayev, installed at the head of a puppet regime in Chechnya by the Russians and "legitimised" by a blatantly rigged election last December. In addition, the pro-market Chechen intelligentsia was hostile to Dudayev because, although not opposed to capitalist restoration, he resisted privatising industry or the republic's natural resources until he could be assured of gaining the major part of the benefits.

Yeltsin has tried to sell his onslaught against Chechnya to the Russian people as a law-and-order measure aimed at rescuing the Chechens from a criminal dictatorship. This is a lie. His real intentions were made clear in his New Year address when he declared: "Russian soldiers are [in Chechnya] to defend Russian unity. Not a single territory has the right to withdraw from Russia".

Chechnya, lying on the northern face of the Caucasus mountain range, has tremendous economic and strategic importance for Russia. It does not possess huge oil reserves; there is a relatively small field around Grozny. But it does have large refinery complexes which produce aviation fuel for Russia and the other CIS states. In addition, the pipeline which links Russia to the enormous oil fields of Azerbaijan crosses Chechen territory. Yeltsin fears that if Chechnya goes, others may follow and the entire region could slip out of Russian control.

The Russian government therefore has done everything it can to suppress the elementary democratic right to self-determination, the right to secede from the Russian Federation. In this the government stands in a long and dishonourable tradition. The annexation of the Caucasus mountains by the Tsarist empire was finally completed in 1864. The Chechens put up the fiercest resistance. This century, the Stalinists systematically divided the many nationalities or language communities of the region, denying them real self-determination or a federation free from Russian domination.

In 1944 Stalin deported 400,000 people—almost the entire population of Chechnya—to Kazakhstan and Western Siberia. He did this as a collective punishment for the Chechen nationalist rising two years previously, when German forces entered the northern Caucasus. Only in 1958 after riots in Grozny did Krushchev allow the exiled Chechens to return home.

The Chechen people, rejecting centuries of Moscow's rule under the Tsars and then under Stalinism, clearly supported Dudayev.

Yeltsin was initially encouraged to intervene in Chechnya by the benevolent attitude shown by the Western imperialist powers who have insisted all along that "Chechnya is a part of Russia". They were willing enough to see him as the local policeman of the New World Order amongst the "barbaric" peoples of the former Soviet Union. Needing Russia's support to pressure the Serbs into a deal in Bosnia, the imperialist powers effectively signalled to Yeltsin that if he wanted to sort out his "internal" problems then he could go ahead.

But the imperialists are fickle friends. Once the invasion became bogged down in the bloody battles of Grozny, Kohl and Clinton started to criticise him for the bloodshed. These hypocrites are in reality not worried by the piles of Chechen dead, but by the prospect that Yeltsin himself might fail to be re-elected this June if the situation is not resolved. In addition, they are terrified that a prolonged war with a Muslim nation may ultimately embroil others, both in the Caucasus and beyond.

Socialists should support the Chechen's right to self-determination and their struggle for independence. But the Chechens, as the foremost fighters for national freedom in a region with many intermixed national minorities, cannot solve the question of their free and independent national life alone. An isolated Chechnya would be an economic disaster. Chechens should look towards a federation of all the peoples of the Caucasus.

Unless such a republic is based upon preserved and strengthened state ownership of large-scale production and natural resources, then it will continue to be plundered by the mafia, to have a heavy toll levied on its exports by Russia, and may even fall into the hands of the Western oil monopolies.

Such nationalised production requires efficient and democratic planning, which only the working class of all the nationalities can bring about.

An independent federation of the republics of the Caucasuses has to be based on the power of workers' councils and a workers' militia, allied to councils of the peasants and rural population.

This will prevent the national differences of the peoples of the Caucasus being used as divisive ploys by restorationist elites and the Kremlin.

Last but not least, the urban and rural workers of the region must unite with their Russian brothers and sisters to overthrow Yeltsin and his clique and all wings of the restorationist bureaucracy and reverse the restoration of capitalism, opening the road to a free and equal federation of workers' states across the entire former Soviet Union and beyond.

- All Russian troops out of Chechnya! For the unconditional right of the Chechen people to full independence!
- For an independent workers' republic of Chechnya!
- For a voluntary socialist federation of soviet republics of the Caucasus!
- For fraternisation between Russian conscripts and the Chechen people.
- Build mass demonstrations in Russia to stop the war and bring the troops home.
- Down with Yeltsin, Grachev and Chernomyrdin and Co!
- Down with Great Russian chauvinism! Support the Chechen right to self-determination!
- Halt and reverse the restoration process; for an emergency workers' plan.
- Imperialism and its multinationals out of the region!
- For a revolutionary Trotskyist party and international!

Yeltsin's crisis continues

YELTSIN'S CHECHEN crisis is a product of the broader political and economic crisis of capitalist restoration. The break-up of the old Soviet Union has seen a massive increase in immigration into Russia. The economy is ill-equipped to deal with the situation. Because of economic and political instability, over the next two years 400,000 are expected to flood into Russia from the Caucasus alone.

Already Russia is having problems coping with the military forces returning from Eastern Europe. Forty percent of the officers returning to Russia have no homes to go to. The potential political dynamite lodged in such statistics is clear to everyone. The extreme right is thriving on anti-immigrant racism. In the autumn local elections in the southern regions close to the Caucasus, Russian nationalists swept the liberal reformers from power. Across the board politicians are using the electoral successes of the right as an excuse to increase their own use of nationalism and racism. Many Russian cities stage frequent crackdowns on immigrants, arresting and deporting thousands.

The Russian economy is disintegrating. Attempts to restore capitalism may have created a few ruble millionaires but for the vast majority of Russians it has meant pauperisation, for some starvation. Inflation is still raging.

Russian industry is crippled by inter-enterprise debts, where enterprises cannot afford to pay each other for power, raw materials or finished goods. This year industrial output is expected to fall by 40%. But not only are the enterprises not paying each other, they are not paying their own workers. There have been a series of strikes, not over how much workers should be paid, but simply to get any wages at all. One shipyard owed the equivalent of $112 million in wages alone. Russia's capitalist restoration process is in deep crisis and Yeltsin's answer is an increasingly dictatorial government, using his Bonapartist powers to rule and trying to recover some mass support by stirring up national chauvinist feelings against the Chechens.

The war has provoked opposition and Yeltsin is worried that such opposition could grow as it becomes clear that the Chechen war is a disaster. He is increasingly hostile towards the press. Anyone in the press who is critical of Yeltsin is accused of being funded by the Chechen mafia. Yeltsin threatened to remove key figures in Russian television over critical coverage of the war. Reporters and photographers have been fired on by Russian troops and aircraft.

There have been regular street protests, some involving veterans of the Afghan war and mothers of conscripts. Whilst there are few signs yet that hatred of Yeltsin is being translated into mass action against him, Yeltsin, Grachev and the Security Council may resort to a self-organised, preventive coup if they see disaster looming.■



Lebanon

Zionist terror aimed at Syria

A cease-fire has been declared in Lebanon. **Dave Stockton** looks at the reasons behind last month's Israeli attacks.

ISRAEL'S MURDEROUS onslaught on Lebanon has left hundreds dead and tens of thousands homeless. What lay behind this carnage? Certainly the imminent elections in Israel made premier Shimon Peres keen to adopt a hard line. But behind this latest round of conflict is manoeuvring for the next stage of the grossly unjust peace deal, initiated by the Oslo agreements and brokered by the United States. This new stage will hinge on an agreement between the Zionist settler state and the Baathist dictatorship in Syria.

President Hafez al-Assad of Syria likes to pose as an anti-imperialist. In fact he is no better a fighter against imperialism or its Israeli gendarme than Egypt's President Mubarak or the Saudi royal family. His price for a deal is the return to Syria of the Golan Heights stolen by the Zionists in June 1967, and the recognition of a permanent Syrian protectorate over Lebanon— the financial and banking centre of the Arab world.

In return for this Assad will certainly be willing to guard Israel's northern borders and, if necessary, disarm the Hizbullah militia or anyone else who tries to take up the struggle against the Zionist state. But Israel has been stalling over the Golan, offering only cautious step by step withdrawals over a long timetable. Meanwhile, Assad has to demonstrate he can stand up to Israel.

The Syrian president is a Bonapartist dictator who has held onto power in part because he has played the role of anti-Zionist and anti-imperialist. He knows that to accept a deal where he has to perform a gendarme role for Zionism, before he "liberates" any stolen Arab lands, will make him vulnerable to the anti-Zionist and anti-American demagogy of the Islamist movements. He has to pose as the great liberator who stood up to Israel and gained major concessions. Assad's principal weapon is the conflict in southern Lebanon, waged at little cost to him by a few hundred guerrilla fighters belonging to the Hizbullah political Islamist organisation.

Pressure

With both Peres and Assad under pressure to act tough, Damascus and Jerusalem have conducted a "controlled" proxy war in southern Lebanon. This was not only to show who has the stronger nerves but also to try to break the impasse in the US-brokered secret negotiations.

Since 1993 an ongoing low level conflict had been waged within "rules" agreed in a deal brokered by US Secretary of State Warren Christopher. In this both sides tacitly agreed not to target civilians (Israeli settlements or Lebanese villages or refugee camps). But by 1996 Israel was chafing at this agreement. Over the last year Hizbullah had scored a few successes against Israeli troops, luring them into ambushes and killing a few.

Sensitive

After losing 600 troops in the Lebanese war of 1982 the Zionists remain very sensitive to casualties suffered by the Israeli Defence Force (IDF). Their spontaneously racist response is to hit back at the civilian population. As the Chief of Staff of the IDF recently remarked: "If you can't find a needle in a haystack then burn down the haystack". Killing large numbers of civilians is a natural form of "retaliation" for a settler state that thinks the population they are trying to displace is expendable.

Faced with these small scale losses, Israel "hit back" by killing some Lebanese civilians. Hizbullah then launched a few Katyusha rockets into northern Israel thus giving Peres a pretext for a full-fledged bombardment. But he had other very good reasons for military action. First, there was the need to take attention away from the difficulties posed by the internal settlement with the Palestinians. These difficulties came not from that pliant tool of Zionism, the PLO and Yasser Arafat, but from Hamas and Islamic Jihad—left out of the deal and subjected to Arafat's police as well as the Israeli forces of repression. In February and March these two organisations used suicide bombers to kill 59 Israelis. This overturned Labour's lead in the opinion polls in the run up to the 29 May general election.

Peres could rely on the complicity of the United States (and most European states). Although the Israeli opposition, Likud, has abandoned its previous total hostility to the peace process, a victory for them would undoubtedly slow the process down.

The long-term goal for Peres was to put pressure on Syria by baring Israel's sharp teeth and demonstrating that Israel would not allow Lebanon to become a stable and prosperous protectorate for Syria unless Assad came to terms over a permanent peace deal. He has to stop all support and encouragement for Islamist fighters whether within or outside Israel's borders.

Reconstruction

The bourgeois government of Lebanon is given little say in all this. With reconstruction underway, Beirut once again found itself a target as the Israelis bombarded the city, destroying two of its power stations. The message is clear – without a settlement with Syria, favourable to the Israelis, Lebanon will not be allowed to return to business as usual for the international bankers.

The United States has continued to press for a Syrian and Israeli deal. Warren Christopher has visited Damascus no less than 17 times over the past two years. Negotiations broke down in January and then the outbreak of open war temporarily halted the process. Once the shock of the Israeli onslaught had worn off, however, and in the wake of the Qana massacre, Christopher's shuttle diplomacy started again.

The US was adamant that it would be in charge of the deal. Russia, France and Italy offered suggestions for a cease-fire more amenable to Syria. This caused the *Washington Post* to exclaim that "It is mischievous of Russia, France and Italy. . . to be running around the Middle East tossing in proposals for the crisis in Lebanon, the United States. . . by its well-earned primacy in leading region-wide peace efforts is the country best situated to end this crisis now."

Humbled

The ceasefire may mean little more than a return to the low level conflict of last year. But the US's aim is speedier progress towards the longer term reactionary deal.

In the face of Israel's onslaught, the Palestinian Liberation Organisation (PLO) leadership could offer only further retreat. On 24 April Arafat convened the Palestinian National Council and bribed and browbeat it into voting by 504 votes to 54 with 14 abstentions to revoke all clauses which called for the destruction of the state of Israel or for armed struggle to liberate the whole of Palestine.

He further humbled himself in direct response to a public threat from Peres that he would not proceed with the peace agreement—the partial withdrawal of IDF troops from Hebron—if Arafat did not scrap the offending clause. Arafat did his duty. The Palestinian "left" registered only a formal protest. Is it any surprise that the only forces of courage and resistance amongst the Palestinian youth are being handed over to the reactionary forces of Hamas?

Never was there a more desperate need for a break from bankrupt bourgeois and petit bourgeois nationalism and decrepit, moribund Stalinism and a turn to real revolutionary communism. This means building a Trotskyist party committed to the programme of permanent revolution, an intransigent struggle against imperialism and its Zionist agents that goes all the way to an Arab and Jewish workers republic in Palestine as part of a Socialist Federation of the Middle East.■

What is Hizbullah?

LIKE HAMAS and Islamic Jihad, Hizbullah is a political Islamist movement. These movements are reactionary in every respect with regard to the democratic rights of the working class, women, and the non-Islamic population. But they have flourished due to the miserable failure of "secular" bourgeois and petit bourgeois Arab nationalism and of the Stalinist communist parties and guerrilla movements of the region, all of whom have capitulated to Zionism and imperialism.

The Islamists have used social demagogy alongside more tangible means such as the provision of schools, medicine and food handouts to the most impoverished sections of the population. Using the mosques as a cover and a forum for political propaganda they have built up mass sympathy and support. But their strongest card is that they are still in the field fighting when all the major regimes (apart from Islamist Iran and Libya) have made their peace with the USA and Israel.

Paid for by Iran, Hizbullah is rooted in the south Lebanese Shiite Muslim population who see in them their only active defenders. It is also a political party which won eight seats in Lebanon's 128-seat parliament in 1992.

Its militia relies on the tacit blessing of the 30,000 Syrian troops in Lebanon—and now on the increasingly warm support of the population.■

A World to Win

Pakistan

AN ALLIANCE of three railworkers' unions, the RLA, mounted a demonstration through the streets of Lahore on 11 April in defiance of a ban on political marches enforced by the presence of heavily armed riot police. The police had used the pretext of the shooting of a leading official of the fundamentalist Muslim League, most probably by the police themselves, to forbid the demonstration.

The marchers faced repeated baton charges and suffered numerous injuries as they sought to protest against the Bhutto government's privatisation policies and steep price rises on basic goods. Specifically, they had demanded the restoration of their sleeper passes on trains and entitlement to food in railway hospitals, as well as basic pay rises to compensate for price increases.

Among the 40 injured were union leaders and supporters of Militant Labour's sister organisation in Pakistan. The police arrested more union leaders as they smashed up the march. But the threat of a series of national demonstrations issued by Gulzar Ahmed Choudry, President of the Pakistan Workers' Federation, and other union officials won the release of those arrested.

The railway bosses have also agreed to talks with representatives from the RLA unions. The small but determined demonstration appears to have won an important concession, but far more sustained and widespread action will be needed to reverse the Bhutto government's vicious austerity programme.

Brazil

APRIL HAS been a month of growing struggles against the government of Fernando Cardoso in Brazil. Cardoso is a right-wing social democrat who led a centre-right coalition to power promising both economic growth and social justice.

More than half of Brazil's 155 million people live in poverty and regularly go hungry and are not convinced by Cardoso. The government has launched massive attacks on workers' pensions, failed to carry out any meaningful land reform, and is pursuing neo-liberal policies which slash welfare and education while boosting the already high unemployment.

At the end of March thousands of school students marched through Sao Paulo against education cuts.

A national strike of federal employees was called for mid-April. Also in Sao Paulo the unemployed engaged in two days of street fighting with the police who tried to "clear" the city centre.

In mid-April, landless peasants demonstrated across the country, demanding an end to the oligarchy's domination of the land.

The government showed just how strong its commitment to social justice was on 17 April when 25 peasants, including children, were massacred, and another 50 injured in an attack at Eldorado de Carajás, in the Amazonian region.

A similar massacre took place less than six months ago in Corumbira, when a hundred peasants fought back against police attacks.

The main opposition party, the Workers Party (PT) has failed to take a lead in resisting the government attacks, preferring the comfort of parliamentary opposition to mobilising the masses on the streets.■



May 1926: Mobilising support on the streets

Seventy years ago this month Britain was in the grip of a general strike. **Colin Lloyd** tells the story of the General Strike and explains the lessons for today.

May 1926

The General Strike

"I SUPPOSE my usual critics will say I was grovelling, and it is true. In all my long experience I have never begged and pleaded like I begged and pleaded all day today." These were the words of Jimmy Thomas, leader of the TUC, on May Day 1926.

Thomas had spent the day with Tory ministers in Downing Street, desperate for an excuse to call off the imminent general strike. Meanwhile over 100,000 workers massed in Hyde Park for the biggest May Day demonstration in living memory, determined to stop the bosses.

But Stanley Baldwin's Tory government gave Thomas and the TUC leaders no way out. The bosses were determined to force a showdown with the trade union movement. On Monday 3 May 1926, the TUC called the majority of organised workers out on strike. The decisive class confrontation of the decade had begun.

The Tories were driven by the logic of economic crisis and imperialist competition. Despite the harsh terms imposed after the First World War, British industry was unable to compete with Germany in the early 1920s.

Baldwin's Tory government came to power in December 1924 determined to take on and smash the unions.

On 30 June 1925, the owners of Britain's coal industry terminated all existing wage agreements, abolished the minimum wage and outlined a series of drastic wage cuts. The attack on the miners was seen by all sides as a test bed for a widespread assault on wages.

The TUC called solidarity strike action and, unsure of victory, the government retreated. It announced a nine month wage subsidy for the miners and a Royal Commission, under Sir Herbert Samuel, to decide the future of the mining industry. This backdown was hailed as "Red Friday".

But the Tories had no intention of giving in. Winston Churchill, then Chancellor of the Exchequer, explained:

"We therefore decided to postpone the crisis in the hope of averting it, or if not of averting it, of coping effectively with it when the time comes".

The government and employers began preparations. The country was divided into ten districts, each under a Minister who was appointed "Special Commissioner" in charge of strike-breaking. The Tories strengthened the army and police, creating a Civil Constabulary reserve of ex-soldiers. They set up the Organisation for Maintenance of Supplies (OMS) - a semi-official "volunteer" organisation of strike-breakers who were trained to run the rail and road supply system.

Timeline

1920: Strike action foils government plan to back Polish invasion of Soviet Russia
1921: "Black Friday" (15 April); union leaders climb down in face of wage cuts. 6 million suffer 20% cut in wages.
1923: First Labour government.
1924: National Minority Movement formed.
1925: "Red Friday", coal owners plans for wage cuts postponed.
1926: 3 May; General Strike begins.

Meanwhile, the TUC did nothing. The "left" union leaders on the TUC General Council included miners' leader A.J. Cook, TUC president George Hicks and builders' leader A.A. Purcell. But they did not prepare for the coming confrontation.

It was left to the rank and file, organised in the Communist-led Minority Movement, to strengthen union organisation from below.

By the eve of the General Strike the Minority Movement was able to hold a conference of delegates from 547 organisations, representing between them 957,000 workers. But while the growth of the Minority Movement signalled growing influence for the Communist Party (CP), the policy pursued by the CP - and backed by Stalin in Moscow - was deeply flawed.

To pursue the policy of "socialism in one country" inside the USSR, Stalin sought allies in the imperialist countries to ward off any possible attack on Soviet Russia. The "Anglo Russian Committee" (ARC) - an alliance of Russian and British trade unions - was used by Stalin to promote sympathy for Russia; but this policy had a price. The CP had to promote the left reformist trade union leaders and mute its criticism of them.

These left leaders proved incapable of fighting the sell-out policies of their right wing "brothers". The CP never prepared its members, or the tens of thousands of supporters in the Minority Movement, for fighting independently of the TUC leadership. Before and throughout the strike the CP's main slogan - "All Power to the General Council" - disarmed and confused the militants.

In March 1926 the Tories went onto the offensive. They recommended wage cuts across the coal industry.

The miners' leaders rejected the deal out of hand, but by now the TUC leaders were beginning to sound shaky in their commitment to organise general strike action. Though the left were in the leadership of the TUC, right wing trade union leaders like Jimmy Thomas and Ernest Bevin also had a powerful voice.

All knew that a general strike placed revolution on the agenda. To avert the crisis the lefts effectively ceded leadership to Thomas and Bevin, dispatching Thomas on his famous trip to Downing Street to "beg and plead" for a compromise. But the miners were already locked out and a printers' strike had started at the *Daily Mail* in protest at its anti-strike editorial. The Tories broke off negotiations and forced the TUC to call the strike.

The response was immediate, solid and overwhelming. The TUC plan was for a two stage walk out; transport, printing, building and manufacturing were to come out first, with shipbuilders and engineers held "in reserve". The next day the TUC reported:

"Not only the railwaymen and transport men, but all other trades came out in a manner which we did not expect immediately. The difficulty of the General Council has been to keep men in what we might call the second line."

And this was no ordinary strike. Once the working class has shut everything down it is immediately faced with the problem of who runs society. As Councils of Action, picket line Defence Corps and local strike bulletins mushroomed, millions of workers began to realise they could run society themselves.

The initial impetus for local Councils of Action came from the TUC. But they went far beyond simply co-ordinating the strike. They gathered delegates from all kinds of workers' organisations. They became real potential organisations of working class power, like the "soviets" which had seized power in Russia in 1917, or the workers' councils which had nearly done so in Germany in 1919.

The most effective Councils of Action organised themselves into separate "Commissariats". They distributed food. They organised workers' defence units to protect supplies and to stop police attacking pickets. They produced trade union bulletins and papers to counter the propaganda of Churchill's anti-strike paper *The British Gazette.* The TUC's daily paper, *The British Worker,* reached a circulation of one million by the end of the strike.

Mass pickets were organised to stop strike breaking at strategic workplaces, where, under police and army protection, the OMS had taken over.

In the Fife coalfield, in Scotland, the Trades Council formed a Workers' Defence Corps, along with sections for food, transport, information, prisoners' aid and entertainment. After the strike a member of the Fife Council of Action wrote:

"The organisation worked like clockwork. Everything was stopped - even the railway lines were picketed. The Council had a courier service second to none in Britain, with 3 motor cars, 100 motor cycles and as many push bikes as was necessary . . . After police charges on mass pickets, the Defence Corps, which 150 workers had joined at the outset, was reorganised. Numbers rose to 700, of whom 400, commanded by workers who had been NCOs during the war, marched in military formation through the town to protect the picket. The police did not interfere again."



"I have never begged and pleaded like I begged and pleaded all day today." **TUC leader J.H. Thomas**

Throughout the country the strike was gaining strength. But the union leaders' courage was waning. General and Municipal Union leader, Charles Dukes summarised their fear of a revolutionary outcome:

"Every day the strike proceeded, the control and the authority was passing out of the hands of responsible executives into the hands of men who had no authority, no control."

A revolutionary situation was developing. The strike did not just call into question the survival of the government, it called into question the survival of the system. And it began to answer the question of how workers could replace the bosses.

What was urgently needed was a revolutionary party that actively pushed this development towards its natural conclusion—the formation of a revolutionary workers' government. This would have entailed preparing the workers for seizing power and smashing the obstacles that stood in their way—the police, the OMS and army.

But there was no such leadership from the small and disoriented CP. Though its members threw themselves into the organisation of the strike they were as stunned as everyone else when, on Wednesday 12 May, the TUC delivered its unconditional surrender to the assembled cabinet. The OMS and police were not needed to crush the Councils of Action. The leaders capitulated long before a decisive showdown. Lord Birkenhead, present at the meeting, described the scene with snobbish accuracy:

"Their surrender was so humiliating that some instinctive breeding made one unwilling even to look at them".

The TUC lefts, staunch members of the Anglo-Russian Committee, were silent. Even A. J. Cook, General Secretary of the miners, refused to go over the heads of the TUC and call for continuation of the action from below.

The bosses went immediately onto the offensive, sacking, jailing and wage cutting as hard as they could.

The strike did not crumble immediately; on the day after it was called off 100,000 *more* workers came out on strike. But the damage was done. Though the miners stayed out for seven months longer, their strike was defeated by hunger and isolation. Thousands of workers were victimised. General strikes were outlawed. And the unions once again lost millions of workers.

The general strike was defeated not because the forces of the state were stronger than the working class, nor because the rank and file gave in, but because the union leaders were faced with a choice: the survival of capitalism or the fight for workers' power. They preferred defeat to the threat of revolution.■

LETTERS

WORKERS POWER 200 MAY 1996

"Overworked and underpaid"

Dear comrades

Socialists have often said that the Tories are bad for your health. But now it is official—the Tories are out to work us to death. The European Union wants to limit the working week to a maximum of 48 hours. The Tories, who oppose anything which could restrict the ability of bosses to exploit their workers, are refusing to go along with this.

But long hours are not only tiring, anti-social and, especially in the case of workers in emergency and caring services, dangerous. They are also very bad for your mental and physical health. A Japanese man recently killed himself after working for 17 months without a day off. His family has just won compensation. A junior doctor died in Britain last year, and his death was put down to long hours and little sleep.

In Denmark, a study of bus drivers found that those who worked more hours and with most stress had the highest sickness and death rates. In Italy the same patterns were found in a study of nearly 100,000 railway workers. The same was found in Sweden. Not suprisingly, the Tories have not funded research on this question in the UK!

In general, the people most at risk of ill-health and death from overwork are those with a lot of strain, long hours and little control over their work—in other words workers, not managers and bosses.

The struggle for a shorter working day was one of the first of the British working class movement, and led to major advances including the passing of legislation on the ten hour day. The arguments used by the Tories against restrictions now are the same as the manufacturing bosses used then. In 1845 Engels wrote, in *The condition of the working class in England;*

"The economic arguments of the manufacturers that a Ten Hours Bill would increase the cost of production and incapacitate the English producers for competition in foreign markets, and that wages must fall, are all half true; but they prove nothing except this, that the industrial greatness of England can be maintained only through the barbarous treatment of the operatives, the destruction of their health, the social, physical and mental decay of whole generations."

The bosses are constantly trying to claw back the gains that the labour movement has achieved. British workers, along with our sisters and brothers in the international labour movement, are going to have to keep fighting for shorter hours. As capitalism faces its inevitable and deepening crises the bosses will keep attacking; as Engels wrote "...the vampire will not let go while there remains a single muscle, sinew or drop of blood to be exploited".

In *Capital* Marx wrote the following about the struggles of the English working class in the 19th century:

"For 'protection' against the serpent of their agonies, the workers have to put their heads together and, as a class, compel the passing of a law, an all-powerful social barrier by which they can be prevented from selling themselves and their families into slavery and death by voluntary contract with capital."

Over a hundred years later, British and European workers need to put their heads together once again.

Helen Watson,
South London

Fighting the JSA

Dear Workers Power,

Having flicked through the April edition of your paper, we were quite surprised to notice that there was absolutely no mention of the Job Seekers Allowance (JSA), nor any mention or advert for the national march and demonstration against the JSA that took place in London on 9 April, which was called by London Against the JSA, and the TUC.

We are sure that you must be aware of the fact that the JSA is the latest trick up the Tories' sleeve in attacking the poorest sections of the working class in this country. The JSA means for those who are claiming benefit more hassle and harassment, further benefit cuts, compulsory training and being forced by job centres to take low paid jobs. If you refuse to accept a job with a low wage, then you will lose your benefit. For many this will mean not only poor wages and working in dire conditions, but being far worse off than they were when claiming benefit.

Up and down the country there has been widespread campaigning and resistance to the JSA which comes into effect from October 1996. Organised groups have successfully demonstrated inside (and outside) job centres, and on many occasions disrupted restart interviews. On top of this, anti-JSA groups have got together with benefit office workers who are also opposed to these new attacks. Workers have gone on strike in various job centres around the country. Recently a threatened strike in Middlesborough job centre put a stop to a JSA pilot test. In London benefit workers and anti-JSA groups have put together a joint leaflet and it is being handed out at job centres throughout the capital.

As we're sure you are aware, being working class and on the dole is bad enough as it is; being pushed around from pillar to post by the state and forced to live in poor conditions on a pittance. But there are many claimants and workers fighting back and they should be supported by your paper and its readers, as its our class under attack by this bastard government yet again. Far too often, the poorest sections of this society, those on the dole and on benefit, living on run down council estates, are discarded and forgotten or ignored by the majority of the left, and in our opinion this is pretty outrageous.

There are many groups all over London and elsewhere organising resistance and campaigning.

To be put in touch with the nearest group in your area then get in touch with the Unemployed Workers and Claimants Union who will pass on to you the address of your nearest group. Their address is Oxford Unemployed Workers and Claimants Union, East Oxford Community Centre, Princes Street, Oxford OX4 1HV.

Yours for class struggle anarchism and social revolution,

Tommy,
South Bristol Anarchists

● JSA Fightback—page 2

Wrong on Kollontai?

Dear comrades,

Comrade Heath's column on Kollontai (*WP* 199) certainly dealt properly with her contribution to women militants organising within the Bolshevik Party.

The history in the last four paragraphs, however, was one of the types of distortions which WP should rectify.

Some facts: Armand died in October 1920, Kollontai became director of the Zhenotdel in the November of that year and in the next February (of 1921) wrote the Workers' Opposition pamphlet.

This is a rather different scheme of events to Heath's "... 1921 ... Later in life Kollontai strayed from Bolshevism, leading the 'Workers' Opposition' against Lenin ...".

Interestingly, while the Workers' Opposition argued for an extension of the socialised economy under workers' control—this was the opposite of the NEP agreed at the March 1921 Party Congress. Some of the specifically gendered effects of the NEP on women should also be noted—especially as Kollontai in deference to the trade unionists who supported the WO programme did not address the gendered effects of the increasing bureaucratisation of the Soviet State.

In 1922, some 33% of women workers employed in 1921 lost their paid employment, with concomitant rises in the number of sex workers catering to the NEPmen. In 1922 also, the staff of the Zhenotdel was cut by almost half (to 21) and an affirmative action programme for women in Soviet and Party departments (as apprentices) scrapped. These effects were also seen in the participation of women at Party Congresses—from 5% in 1921 to 1% in 1923.

The personal accounts of the NEP in Kollontai's novels, such *Love of the Worker Bees*, are also worth noting—from the reinstitution of bourgeois personal relations to the ending of communal childcare and cooking.

So, Kollontai's "straying from Bolshevism"—is (at least in this period) an interesting question. Who should she be fighting for: rank and file workers, women and men—who formed the base of the WO, or . . . ?

But to reduce Kollontai to this is flawed. What of her work on sexuality or the role of reproductive labour within the economy? What too of the seeming ease of accommodation reached in the late 20's with Stalinism? That's another letter; here or in the A—Z.

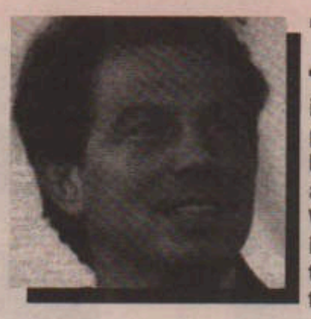
Nick Strauss
East London.

Where We Stand



Capitalism

is an anarchic and crisis-ridden economic system based on production for profit. We are for the expropriation of the capitalist class and the abolition of capitalism. We are for its replacement by socialist production planned to satisfy human need. Only the socialist revolution and the smashing of the capitalist state can achieve this goal. Only the working class, led by a revolutionary vanguard party and organised into workers' councils and workers' militia can lead such a revolution to victory and establish the dictatorship of the proletariat. There is no peaceful, parliamentary road to socialism.



The Labour Party

is not a socialist party. It is a bourgeois workers' party—bourgeois in its politics and its practice, but based on the working class via the trade unions and supported by the mass of workers at the polls. We are for the building of a revolutionary tendency in the Labour Party, in order to win workers within those organisations away from reformism and to the revolutionary party.



The Trade Unions

must be transformed by a rank and file movement to oust the reformist bureaucrats, to democratise the unions and win them to a revolutionary action programme based on a system of transitional demands which serve as a bridge between today's struggles and the socialist revolution. Central to this is the fight for workers' control of production.

We are for the building of fighting organisations of the working class—factory committees, industrial unions, councils of action, and workers' defence organisations.



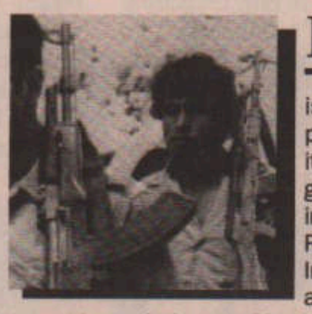
October 1917

The Russian revolution established a workers' state. But Stalin destroyed workers' democracy and set about the reactionary and utopian project of building "socialism in one country". In the USSR, and the other degenerate workers' states that were established from above, capitalism was destroyed but the bureaucracy excluded the working class from power, blocking the road to democratic planning and socialism. The parasitic bureaucratic caste has led these states to crisis and destruction. We are for the smashing of bureaucratic tyranny through proletarian political revolution and the establishment of workers' democracy. We oppose the restoration of capitalism and recognise that only workers' revolution can defend the post-capitalist property relations. In times of war we unconditionally defend workers' states against imperialism. Stalinism has consistently betrayed the working class. The Stalinist Communist Parties' strategy of alliances with the bourgeoisie (popular fronts) and their stages theory of revolution have inflicted terrible defeats on the working class world-wide. These parties are reformist.



Social oppression

is an integral feature of capitalism systematically oppressing people on the basis of of race, age, sex, or sexual orientation. We are for the liberation of women and for the building of a working class women's movement, not an "all class" autonomous movement. We are for the liberation of all of the oppressed. We fight racism and fascism. We oppose all immigration controls. We fight for labour movement support for black self-defence against racist and state attacks. We are for no platform for fascists and for driving them out of the unions.

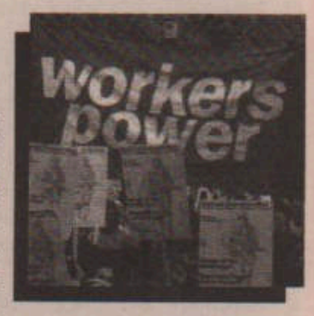


Imperialism

is a world system which oppresses nations and prevents economic development in the vast majority of third world countries. We support the struggles of oppressed nationalities or countries against imperialism. We unconditionally support the Irish Republicans fighting to drive British troops out of Ireland. But against the politics of the bourgeois and petit-bourgeois nationalists, we fight for permanent revolution–working class leadership of the anti-imperialist struggle under the banner of socialism and internationalism.

In conflicts between imperialist countries and semi-colonial countries, we are for the defeat of "our own" army and the victory of the country oppressed and exploited by imperialism. We are for the immediate and unconditional withdrawal of British troops from Ireland. We fight imperialist war not with pacifist pleas but with militant class struggle methods including the forcible disarmament of "our own" bosses.

Workers Power



is a revolutionary communist organisation. We base our programme and policies on the works of Marx, Engels, Lenin and Trotsky, on the revolutionary documents of the first four congresses of the Third International and the Transitional Programme of the Fourth International. Workers Power is the British Section of the League for a Revolutionary Communist International. The last revolutionary International (the Fourth) collapsed in the years 1948-51. The LRCI is pledged to fight the centrism of the degenerate fragments of the Fourth International and to refound a Leninist Trotskyist International and build a new world party of socialist revolution. If you are a class conscious fighter against capitalism; if you are an internationalist—join us!★

workers power

British Section of the League for a Revolutionary Communist International

No 200 MAY 1996 ★ Price 50p

INSIDE

★ Days of hope: 1926 General Strike
★ Yeltsin's Chechen nightmare
★ Where is Socialist Labour Going?

Israel out of Lebanon

"WE'RE ALL Hizbullah here," declared Jamula Zein, a mother of two and one of the 300 people who had taken refuge in the United Nations compound in Tyre. "The Israelis and the Americans are terrorists and the Arab governments are below the ground; at least our boys are defending our land."

This response from the refugee population of southern Lebanon is perfectly understandable. You do not have to be an "Islamic fundamentalist" to see that the only people who have resisted the aggression are the Hizbullah fighters.

Israel's onslaught on Lebanon has driven 400,000 Lebanese from their homes. That is 18% of the population in a state that has endured three massive Israeli attacks over the past 14 years. This time Israel killed a number of civilians using US-built Apache helicopter gunships.

Shells

Then, on 18 April, Israel fired six shells from a Dohar howitzer, using a state of the art targeting system, and hit a UN compound in Qana. More than 100 refugees, including many children, were literally blown to pieces. On the same day 11 civilians died in a hail of Israeli shells in Nabatiyeh.

The western press wrung its hypocritical hands briefly over these "unfortunate tragedies" before most continued with their expressions of support and understanding for Israel's actions.

Israeli premier Shimon Peres wasted little time regretting this "mistake", insisting that Israel was only exercising its right to "self-defence". In fact only 12 people have been killed in northern Israel by Hizbullah rockets since the first invasion of Lebanon in 1982. Many thousands of Lebanese civilians have perished in the same period. The timing of this latest round of the conflict did not arise from the firing of obsolete Katushya rockets by the Hizbullah in response to the killing of Lebanese civilians. The Israeli attack was timed to help Shimon Peres prove that he is a strong defender of Israel—in the run up to the elections on 29 May.

Rabid

It is no surprise that Israel's allies—from Clinton in the White House to the rabid British Defence Secretary Michael Portillo on an official visit to Israel—have given their wholehearted support to these brutal attacks. Yasser Arafat, now Zionism's most craven lackey, has not gone this far, but has failed to condemn Peres.

The leaders of the Arab world, whilst verbally condemning Israel, have done nothing whatsoever to help the Lebanese people. Syria's President Assad has tolerated Hizbullah's operations as part of his gambit for a deal over the Golan Heights, which will mark his full entry into the reactionary "peace process".

The rage of mothers like Jamula Zein against such wretched Arab "leaders" is completely justified. But they are wrong if they believe that Hizbullah will consistently defend their interests. The kind of Islamist state Hizbullah advocate for Lebanon would be a catastrophe for the working class, for women and for other religious or ethnic groups.

While we criticise the tactics and strategy of Islamist movements like Hizbullah in their fight against Israel, there is only one side we can be on in this conflict: against the Israeli occupation of Lebanon and the Zionists' murderous attempts to control the Middle East.

We support those who are resisting Zionism, and fighting to defeat the Israeli army and expel it from the Lebanon.■



Israel's arsenal of death



UN soldiers stand amid Zionism's victims

● Turn to page 13 for more on Israel's war in the Lebanon

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workers power

4 PAGE PULL-OUT

ISSUE 200

The revolutionary paper

A vital weapon in the class struggle

This is issue 200 of Workers Power. To celebrate this milestone in our history we present this special four page supplement.

It explains the importance of the newspaper to the building of a revolutionary socialist organisation. It looks back at what Workers Power said on the key issues of last two decades and explains our plans for the future development of the paper.

Today the media is ruled by millionaires like Rupert Murdoch. Newspapers have become scandal sheets assembled from the lecherous imaginations of overpaid journalists.

It is hard to believe that the press began life as a radical champion of democracy and the poor. But it did.

The earliest papers in Britain were born in a fight against the censorship of kings and aristocrats. They were propaganda weapons for the most radical sections of the bourgeoisie which, in its life and death struggle with feudalism, had to educate the masses and rouse them to revolutionary action.

The true heirs to those democratic papers of the late 18th and early 19th century are not the *Sun* or the *Mirror*, which today earn millions from telling lies to the masses, or the *Guardian* and the *Independent*, that defend the existing order with more refined prose.

The true heirs are the papers which, in the teeth of enormous obstacles, have exposed the rancid core of capitalist society and fight to overthrow it. They are the papers of the revolutionary communist movement—the Bolsheviks' *Iskra* and *Pravda*, the *Workers' Weekly* of the British Communist Party in the early 1920s and the press of Trotsky's Fourth International in the 1930s, such as the *Militant* and *Socialist Appeal* in the USA.

Tradition

Workers Power stands firmly in this tradition of the revolutionary communist press. It is an indispensable weapon in the fight against the bosses; it is an organiser of our work as we strive to build a revolutionary working class party.

The principle that guides the bosses' press can be summed up neatly in one word: deception.

Of course editors and journalists talk a lot about the "freedom of the press", about press crusades and investigative journalism, about objective reporting and impartiality. Indeed, there are individual journalists who genuinely try to follow these principles. But they are a rarity. And they cannot undermine the deceptive role played by the bosses' press as a whole.

First of all there are the blatant lies. For the tabloids, truth never gets in the way of a good news story. The catalogue of now proven lies denouncing "loony left" Labour councils, such as the accusation that they banned black bags because they are racist, shows this.

If they just told lies, however, the press barons know that people would simply stop believing them. Newspapers give us a lot of facts. But the presentation of those facts reveals the grand deception they are perpetrating.

Take the current coverage of the Northern Ireland "peace process". Every paper in Britain reports this as a story of "terrorists" versus "democratic politicians". And if the terrorists want to become democrats they must give up their weapons.



The fight to transform the unions is a key part of our work

These "facts" conceal the principal fact involved—namely that Britain, in defiance of a democratic vote of the Irish people as a whole in 1918, divided the island and created an artificial state (the six counties) that guaranteed a small minority of the people (the Unionists) permanent majority rule. The "terrorists" are fighting against this flagrantly undemocratic action. They are fighting for democracy.

This is never explained. Instead we simply get reports of bombings, of IRA terrorism and of how Britain stands for democracy. The capitalist press presents us with facts about the Irish situation, not an explanation of why it came about and certainly not an impartial account of the struggle that has raged for more than 25 years.

Its role is to dupe us into believing the British state's point of view. And this applies to its treatment of every class struggle. Every strike, every demonstration, every campaign by the working class may be reported factually, but the facts serve the same purpose. The journalists just substitute "militants" for terrorists and "moderates" for democrats.

The role of the capitalist press was well explained by a Hungarian communist in 1921:

"It achieves the systematic advancement of ignorance in the form of communicating an abundance of knowledge and information . . . The capitalist press seeks to shape the structure of the readers' consciousness in such a way that he will be unable to distinguish between true and false, to relate cause and effects, to place individual facts in their total perspective . . . In the process the readers' consciousness must be held in a state of continuous insecurity, perplexity and chaos."

That is why so many people say, after reading the papers, "I don't know what the world's coming to." They really don't; because the capitalist paper has deprived them of the means of knowing, of understanding. Against this systematic deception the revolutionary press fights to reveal the truth, because the truth is revolutionary.

Workers Power explains why bombs go off, why people have to go on strike just to get a decent living, why the parliamentary parties defend the rule of the capitalists behind a democratic facade, why racism and sexism exist.

Workers Power strives to equip class fighters with a general understanding of the world we live in and it fights for a solution to the evils of that world. It fights for a revolutionary programme as an alternative to those evils and as a practical course of action in the fight to rid the world of them.

To do this we base our paper on a totally different set of principles to those that guide the propaganda machine of the bosses.

The revolutionary paper as distinct from all other types of paper, begins with the historic needs and interests of the working class. It presents a class point of view. It doesn't hide behind "impartiality", because it knows that impartiality in the class struggle is a fiction.

When a strike is on you're either for it, or against it. The revolutionary paper doesn't conceal the fact that it stands with the strikers. It fights for their cause. That is why in recent issues of *Workers Power* you will find articles that say the Liverpool dockers must win. You will find their case explained. And you will find arguments that can help you win support for their cause.

Our paper tries to generalise from the experience of the class struggle so that the lessons of that struggle can be learned and acted upon by all class fighters. It exposes every aspect of capitalism: not just the exploitation of the workers at work, but its political oppression of them in all spheres of life; its oppression of women, lesbians and gay men; its vicious and endemic racism; its injustice to the youth; its moral hypocrisy; its violence against the mass of the people.

The revolutionary paper is, to use Lenin's phrase "a tribune of the people".

Nor is the paper only a means of propaganda and agitation. Around its ideas and its political message an **organisation** can be built. That is why we spend so much effort producing and selling *Workers Power*. It wins people to our ideas and organises them to fight for those ideas in practice. The paper is an organiser as well as a propaganda weapon.

This idea has a long history in the revolutionary press. A tinplate worker, Richard Carlile, imprisoned for writing radical articles in the nineteenth century paper the *Republican*, was against political parties and thought a paper sufficient. But in his fight to defend his paper from government repression even he appealed for:

"a phalanx around myself such as shall be strong enough to support me whilst I put into practice the common right of Free Discussion."

The Chartists, with their papers, such as the *Red Republican* and the *Northern Star*, understood better the need for the paper itself to be a weapon of the movement. Ernest Jones, the radical chartist, wrote that:

"the first and essential requirement of a movement is to have an organ..."

"It is the fundamental bond of union, the ensign of progress and the means of argument."

Message

The Bolshevik leader, Lenin, took such arguments and developed them still further, seeing in the revolutionary paper—through its writers, its distributors, its sellers and its readers—an essential means of organising the party and spreading its message:

"A newspaper is not only a collective propagandist and a collective agitator, it is also a collective organiser. In this respect it may be compared to the scaffolding erected round a building under construction; it marks the contours of the structure and facilitates communication between the builders, permitting them to distribute the work and to view the common results achieved by their organised labour."

continued on page ❶

ISSUE 200

THE FIGHT FOR R
REVOLUTIONARY

Defending our unions



"Across the whole labour movement the call must be for every battallion to advance. Forward into action with the miners"
(JULY 1984)

TODAY THE trade unions are declining in numbers and in strength. Listening to their new realist leaders you would think this decline was inevitable and that the "old" militancy of the 1960s and 1970s was a bad thing whose passing we should celebrate not mourn.

Workers Power has shown how, in every major struggle, the unions could have won, how they could have increased their strength and stopped the rot. It has exposed the bureaucracy's excuses as treacherous lies. The unions are weak today because their leaders led them to defeat.

This was not inevitable.

When the Tories came to power **Workers Power** explained their strategy:

"Wage rises will also be directly tied to the profitability of the employer concerned. The dole queues will be used to terrorise workers into submission and trim the unions' size and strength. However, the unions are already too strong, and before 'economic realities' can get to work the unions, and particularly the militants, must be decisively weakened ...The Tories thus promise confrontation with the strike committees and the pickets." (May 1979)

The answer was to meet the challenge head on linking solidarity with the strikes against the Tories with the need for a general strike to smash the anti-union laws. The resistance was there - steel workers in 1980, health workers in 1982, printers in 1983, miners in 1984-85, printers in 1986, seafarers in 1988, dockers in 1989. What was lacking was the strategy and leadership, not the will to fight.

Against the bureaucrats' ever more infrequent calls for days of inaction and empty Sunday parades we argued:

"The all out attack on the unions must be met with a general political offensive by the trade unions . . . The [first anti-union] Bill must be beaten before it becomes law - not merely opposed once it reaches the statute book. We must mount massive pressure on the TUC to call a general strike to defeat the Bill . . . The TUC has no intention of organising such action . . . we must build councils of action in every locality that can mobilise real support." (March 1980).

If our strategy had triumphed then Thatcher would not have spent the next ten years revelling in her victories over the class. And the plague of new realism could have been destroyed. The unions could have been transformed into fighting organisations of the class struggle. But for this to happen we needed an anti-bureaucratic rank and file movement in the unions.

Alone on the left **Workers Power** has fought to build such a movement in each and every struggle. In the health workers' strike of 1982 and in the miners' strike of 1984-85, for example, our paper played a pivotal role in organising rank and file conferences of these workers to build such movements. In every struggle we raised the fight for a rank and file movement linked to the tasks of the day and the fight for a revolutionary action programme to transform the unions. As new realism gained ground and the left in the unions shied away from a struggle **Workers Power** raised the banner of organised defiance:

"In this situation we need to organise around the central slogan: *Stop the Retreat!* We need to stop the drift towards business or service unionism with the TUC reduced to the role of arbiter in recruitment battles . . . The miners, busworkers in Scotland and London, postal workers and civil servants have all taken action in the last month. From these struggles we must create a co-ordinated network of militants, a rank and file movement, capable of spreading the action and taking on the back-stabbing bureaucrats." (September 1987).

The greatest battle that **Workers Power** had the privilege to support was that waged by the miners for twelve months, 1984-85. This was a fight that could have been won. It was the best chance to turn the tide on the Tories and begin a working class offensive. **Workers Power** went fortnightly for the duration of this struggle. It earned massive respect in the mining communities and it gave rank and file miners a platform. But it fought for a strategy that went well beyond Scargill's. Our paper campaigned for picket defence squads in the face of police brutality, for a rank and file movement inside the NUM itself and for a general strike alongside the miners to guarantee victory. The respect we won for these arguments amongst militant miners was no small feat given they were opposed by Scargill who, at that time, was considered to walk on water by virtually every striking miner.

Many on the left said that the miners' strike took them by surprise. *Socialist Worker*, then arguing that we were in a "downturn", couldn't understand how and why the struggle came about, let alone advance a strategy for victory. **Workers Power**, the revolutionary paper, was different. Before the strike began we wrote:

"There can be no doubting now that MacGregor wants to clear the way to the fulfilment of his plans, and taking on the NUM is a crucial way of doing that . . . miners can still be won to a strike. If they are not, between now and April, the bosses will be well pleased." (February 1984)

One month later the great strike had begun. And, almost alone on the left, we campaigned for the miners to become the organised army of militants fighting for a general strike that could take them to victory. When the dockers went on strike, and gave the miners the best chance for winning such a general strike, **Workers Power** argued:

"The miners and dockers must not fight the riot police and the army alone. We have argued throughout this dispute that the TUC should call a general strike in support of the miners, of indefinite duration, until both the miners' demands have been met in full and the Prior, Tebbit, King anti-union laws are completely repealed ...Across the whole labour movement the call must be for every battalion to advance. Forward into action with the miners. If we do this then the Tories - already weakened and divided - will begin to crumble." (*18 July 1984*)

This opportunity was missed. The bureaucrats sat on their hands. When they did intervene - at Scargill's belated request - it was on their own treacherous terms. The miners were kept isolated. Defeat followed and the entire working class paid the price.

Workers Power fought for an alternative to this. It was an alternative that was realistic and revolutionary.

It marked our paper out on the British left. No matter how difficult the fight for the revolutionary strategy, our paper carried out that fight. ■

Against reformism



"The Labour left is linked, flesh and blood, like a siamese twin, to the right"
(FEBRUARY 1982)

WORKERS POWER was launched during the fight against the wage-cutting policies of the last Labour government, in 1978.

In the wake of electoral defeat in 1979 came retribution against the right inside the Labour Party.

For three years the left had the upper hand. Tony Blair's role models like David Owen split to form the SDP. Blair stayed, won a seat in 1982 and vowed to wrest the party back from the left.

Most of the left, particularly centrist publications like *Socialist Outlook* and *Workers Liberty*, date the start of the demise of the left to the mid-1980s when Neil Knock started his witch hunt.

This conveniently ignores the role that left reformism played in preparing the ground for Tony Blair, and the role the centrists themselves played in promoting illusions in left reformism.

Workers Power has always advocated voting Labour in elections to enable the millions of workers who have illusions in Labour to put it to the test of office.

When the Labour left won constitutional reforms in the early 1980s we warned that they, along with the so-called revolutionaries who supported them, were ignoring the major attacks facing the working class in society at large.

Even within the Labour party we argued that the key to lasting change lay in the struggle to transform the unions.

We called for the democratisation of the union block vote at annual conference which decided policy and elected the leadership.

Nobody else on the left fought for this, since they trusted in left union leaders.

We fought to link the constitutional reforms to the struggle against the Tories.

Nobody else did.

We warned against the illusions that the left of the party and many workers had in Tony Benn. Nobody else did:

"The future of the reforms depends almost entirely on the direction of the block vote. This in turn depends on the pressure the militant rank and file can bring to bear on its leaders . . . Their prime concern is how to mount a successful counter attack to the Tories, how to drive the Tories from office. But the Bennite Labour left hardly addresses this problem." (*October 1980*)

When, in 1982, Benn did a deal with the right at a conference at Bishops Stortford, promising no further campaigns against the leadership, we were the only voice

FOR LEADERSHIP

200 issues of **Workers Power** have dissected the major events of the class struggle, nationally and internationally. We have fought to build a new, revolutionary leadership in the struggles of the British working class. Here we look back at what **Workers Power** said about the key industrial and political struggles over two decades.



Fighting imperialism

"The war is an imperialist war. it is being waged by and for profiteers. Victory for imperialism means defeat for us. Victory to Iraq will thwart their plans."
(MARCH 1991)

MOST OF the left claim to be internationalist. But the acid test of revolutionary internationalism in an imperialist country is to stand firm against your government when they wage war against other countries. All too often the left ran for cover when duty called. Not **Workers Power**.

For over twenty five years British imperialism has waged war on the anti-unionist people of the six counties of Northern Ireland. During that time the IRA have planted bombs in Britain. In the face of their campaign *Socialist Worker, Militant* and other papers on the left have conspicuously failed in their duty to defend the right of the IRA to wage war against the British state. For us the main enemy is British imperialism. For others it seems the main enemy has been "religious sectarianism" or a working class "needlessly divided by nationalism". **Workers Power**record is different. Our internationalism means we take the struggle against imperialism seriously and we support those fighting it.

Our policy has never wavered, even when the republicans themselves have decided to urge compromise on the British left in order to pursue its own diplomacy. It is summed up by something we wrote when the IRA blew up Lord Mountbatten in the summer of 1979:

"But there is only one solution. Get the troops out now. 'But, scream the Labourite politicians, a well as the Tories, 'that would mean a victory for the IRA.' So it would be. It would be a victory for every working class person in Britain as well." (*September 1979*).

During the terrible jingoism that marked Thatcher's war on Argentina in 1982, we wrote:

"Britain's war against Argentina demands only one response, "the main enemy is at home.' We recognise absolutely the right of the Argentine to repossess the Malvinas. We condemn the imperialist adventure of Britain in the South Atlantic, we are unequivocally for its failure, that is, for the defeat of British imperialism." (*May 1982*)

And when Major embarked on his own big adventure - trying to bomb Iraq into submission in the 1991 Gulf war **Workers Power** responded:

"The war is an imperialist war. It is being waged by and for profiteers.

It has nothing to do with the 'liberation of Kuwait' and everything to do with the subordination of Iraq and the whole Middle East. Victory for imperialism means defeat for us. Victory to Iraq could thwart their plans, could set back their grab for cheap oil and military domination . . . Defend Iraq! Defeat Imperialism! Imperialist troops out of the Middle East now!" (*March 1991*)

This is the authentic voice of revolutionary internationalism. ■



As Stalinism collapsed

WORKERS POWER'S big emphasis on international news has played a key role in building the League for a Revolutionary Communist International (LRCI).

We don't just commentate on the affairs of other countries. We focus our propaganda towards the real problems that face the workers of the world. Our coverage seeks, as best it can, to intervene in the international class struggle. That is how it has helped build an international organisation.

The value of such an organisation was demonstrated during the collapse of Stalinism. These momentous events, that marked the period from 1989 to 1991 and which still dominate the new world disorder today, posed socialists with enormous theoretical and practical problems.

National isolation pushed many socialists either into despair ("socialism is dead") or into over optimism ("the political revolution has triumphed").

With an international revolutionary tendency we were able to guard against such false reactions.

We were able to develop a clear understanding of the anti-Stalinist risings, chart a programme for political revolution and see the contradictions that were being piled up beyond the temporary triumphs for imperialism. We were able to test our policies in practice through an international organisation. As Stalinist rule collapsed in Russia we said:

"But we are not witnessing the death of communism. The events in the Soviet Union mark the death of a Stalinist dictatorship which was erected over the corpses of millions of real communists and working class fighters . . . The vital task for anybody still prepared to call themselves a Marxist, socialist or communist in the face of the onslaught of the bosses' press, is to carry on the real socialist fight against both capitalism and Stalinism...That is what the Trotskyists of **Workers Power** are fighting for along with our comrades in the LRCI." (*September 1991*) ■

on the British left that said: "Break Benn's Truce":

"Thus, the left of the Labour Party has shown yet again its congenital incapacity to take the leadership from the hands of the right. It is tied to the same means as the right - parliamentary and municipal electioneering which excludes the mass of workers except as voters and protesters. It is linked, flesh and blood, like a siamese twin, to the right." (*February 1982*)

Ours was the only warning raised about what was to follow - the systematic attack on every gain made by the left. The constitutional reforms, the policy decisions, the campaigning focus of the party -each of these came under attack.

In the face of this march to the right the left reformists and their centrist hangers-on were bewildered.

They placed all their hopes in Labour being transformed into a real socialist party. They buried themselves deep in its pores in an attempt to bring this perspective about. They uncritically hailed left reformists like Benn as the people who could bring about such a transformation.

Worst of all, they didn't fight.

They did not defy the witchhunt. The left allowed Kinnock to get away with imposing candidates in left constituencies without contesting these seats.

It didn't resist the closing down of the LPYS. It backed off from organising a mass campaign to organise against the right. It ran scared.

As Kinnock targeted the Labour Party Young Socialists (LPYS) we said:

"If Kinnock and co, attempt to close down the YS, or merge it with NOLS [the students] without the agreement of the YS conference there is only one answer. The YS must resist closure, continue to function as a national and local organisation, seeking money from and affiliations to local CLPs and trade union branches. It must demand of constituency GMCs that they allow voting delegates from YS branches, and defend this right up to and including disaffiliation from the party. There is no evidence that the Militant leaders of the YS will do this." (*April 1986*)

We were right.

Like the rest of the left *Militant* refused to take the fight against the right up to the point of organised defiance.

With every successful expulsion, every successfully imposed candidate and with the eventual shutting down of the YS, the right grew in strength and confidence.

Workers Power fought for a revolutionary tendency in the Labour Party and YS. And we tried to link the struggles in the party to the struggles of the class outside it.

We were right. The rise of Tony Blair proves it.■

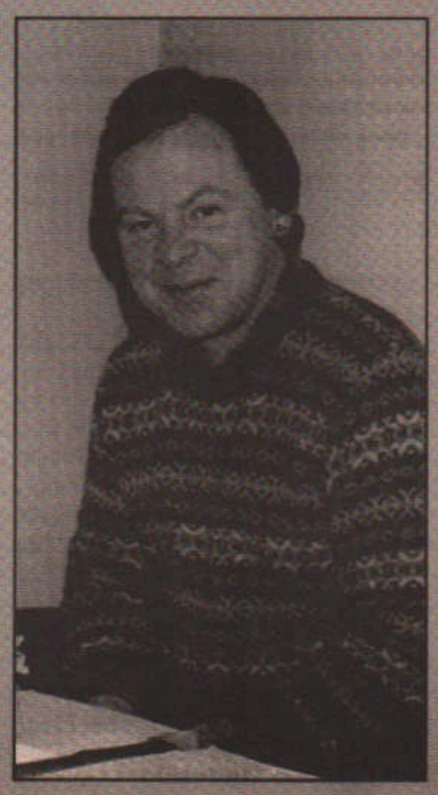
Dave Hughes

1948-1991

DAVE HUGHES was the first editor of this paper and a founder member of the Workers Power Group.
His broad political vision and personal dynamism had a major impact on the development of the paper.

Dave's tragic death five years ago, aged 43, robbed not just Workers Power but the international labour movement of one of its most talented and energetic militants.

We dedicate this issue to his memory ■



Build Workers Power!

OUR AIM IS to build a revolutionary party. A revolutionary party has to be many thousands strong and has to be rooted in the working class.

To be revolutionary in deeds and not just words, it has to have a well disciplined core of activists committed to an active struggle against all aspects of capitalism. And to guard against the inevitable pressures that the national class struggle exerts, it has to be part of an international organsiation.

Workers Power is committed to building such a party, but we are a long way from that goal today. We are a **fighting propaganda group**. We recognise that we are not in a position to lead the masses, but we try to explain to the advanced class fighters what our policy is for the masses.

Doing this means that we emphasise *propaganda*—many ideas about socialism and the class struggle to relatively few people. It means we cannot carry out the systematic mass work across the entire country that we believe is necessary. But this is not an excuse for passivity. We try to carry out revolutionary work, including mass work, where we can, to show in practice the value of revolutionary politics.

Clearly one danger for a small revolutionary organisation is sectarianism. The antics of other small groups—whose entire world revolves around denouncing other socialists—shows that danger. That is why Workers Power does much more than produce propaganda and try to argue against the centrists.

We try to build the revolutionary party now by intervening in the real class struggle where and when we can. Only such an intervention—one that puts us in contact with workers in struggle, one that binds us to those struggles—can ward off the danger of real sectarianism.

Through a network of branches in towns and cities across the country, co-ordinated by a democratically elected national leadership, we conduct centralised work in a whole range of struggles.

In the trade unions we organise our comrades to produce workplace bulletins. We try to build a rank and file movement against the cowardly bureaucracy—as we are currently doing in the Campaign for a Fighting Democratic Unison.

We take the lead in fighting for and organising strike action against the attacks of the bosses' and Tories. And whenever there is a struggle by workers our trade union comrades will organise solidarity.

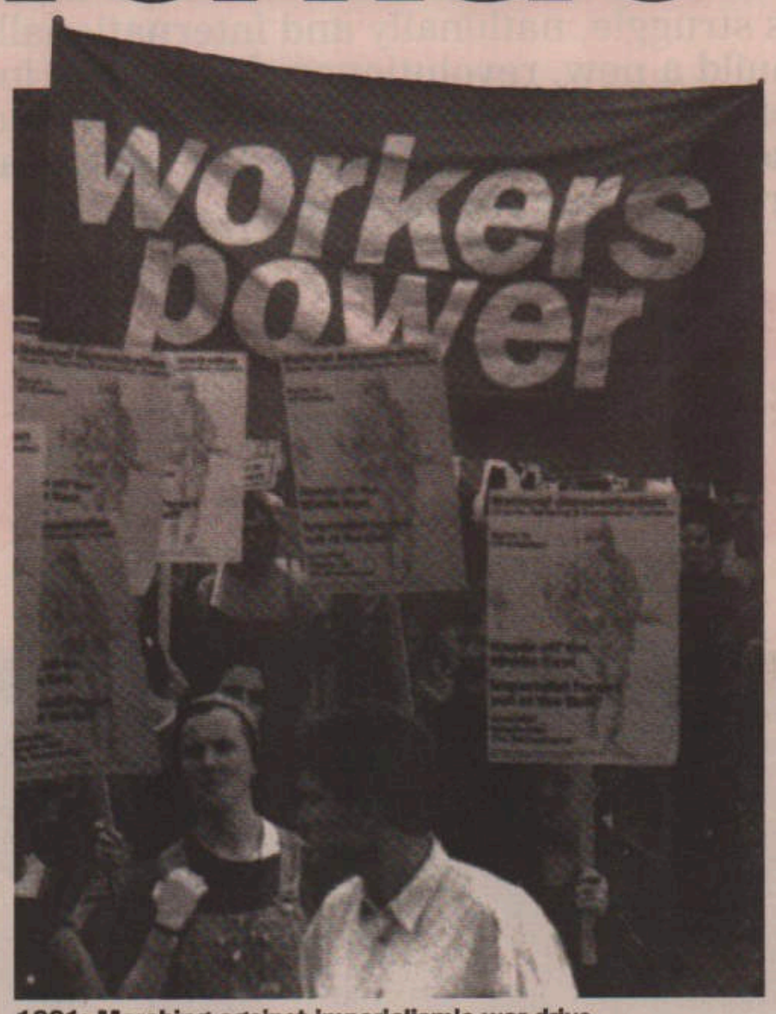
By these means we are working towards the building of a rank and file movement in the unions.

The struggle against racism takes many forms. Against Howard's racist Asylum and Immigration Bill Workers Power has built local campaigns to organise demonstrations, meetings and pickets. We have fought for, and won, non-compliance with the Bill in several unions.

Against racist police brutality Workers Power has played a big role in building support for campaigns such as the Justice for Brian Douglas Campaign and now the Ibrahima Sey campaign. We have been and are today at the forefront of a number of struggles against racist deportations.

As the councils pass budgets that make working class people pay for the Tory cuts Workers Power tries to build campaigns that unite service workers and users.

With our youth paper, *Revolution*, we have helped organise the struggles of school students against the closure of schools, like Hackney Downs, in 1995. Today we are organising against the government's attempt to allow police into the schools to deal with the supposed "blade culture".



1991: Marching against imperialism's war drive

And this is just a sample of what our comrades do.

In each of these campaigns and struggles we are demonstrating our commitment to the fight and arguing for the strategy that we believe can win. This means we are not just activists. We are activists with a purpose. Just as we guard against sectarianism through our active participation in the class struggle, so we guard against opportunism by directing our agitation towards revolutionary goals.

Part of our struggle is to convince people that the other groups on the left are wrong. After all, if we thought they were right, if we thought they were revolutionary, we would join them.

But we don't. We challenge what we believe to be the wrong ideas and practice of others on the left.

We do this, not because we are "sectarian" as the Socialist Workers Party (SWP) and Militant Labour claim, but because their errors can lead to disasters.

The SWP's refusal to organise a proper defence of a mass demonstration against the Nazis in Welling lead to hundreds of broken heads on our side and panic amongst thousands of undefended anti-fascists.

Militant Labour's refusal, when they were in the leadership of Liverpool Council in the 1980s, to link their struggle with the miners' strike and open a second front against the Tories, was a criminally wasted opportunity that helped keep the miners isolated and eventually led to the defeat of Liverpool Council.

These errors had practical consequences. They were errors that we believe flowed from the **centrist** politics of these organisations—vacillating between revolutionary politics and reformism. Arguing against them was not a sectarian squabble. It was a revolutionary duty if defeat was to be avoided.

Workers Power has played a key role in building an international revolutionary organisation, the LRCI. We didn't do this because we enjoy foreign travel.

We did it because we knew that lasting success for any party that wants to be revolutionary has to be based on active internationalism, on international solidarity in the class struggle—such as the contacts we have tried to organise between British and Argentinian striking dockers—and on building an international revolutionary organisation.

A revolutionary International operates like its national sections on the basis of democratic centralism—maximum democracy in taking decisions, maximum centralisation in carrying them out once agreed.

Not only does it open up new scope for activities and initiatives in the class struggle, it helps guard against the pressures of the national labour movement.

In Britain the two established institutions of the labour movement—the unions and the Labour Party—have pressurised most of the left in adaptation, either to Labourite reformism or to limited trade union consciousness. Active internationalism, through the LRCI, is a vital means of assisting Workers Power to resist the pressure to adapt to one or the other.

Our activities, our propaganda and our internationalism mark Workers Power out on the British left. They are signposts to our future—the successful building of a revolutionary party. You can help move more quickly along the road to our future by joining us. Do it now!■

We need your money

PRODUCING 200 issues of *Workers Power* is a major political achievement for our organisation. But it has cost us considerable amounts of money. We rely on our supporters and sellers for this money.

We have no big business backers, no income from lucrative advertising deals. And we sell the paper at a price we believe workers can afford—not a price that reflects the enormous hikes that have occurred in the cost of newsprint and printing.

Our paper has been kept afloat by the financial sacrifices of our members and readers. No capitalist paper has ever survived courtesy of such support. And no capitalist paper would be able to defy commercial logic with the commitment and creative imagination that has enabled us to produce *Workers Power*.

We cannot rest content, however. *Workers Power* is a monthly. We want to produce it more regularly so that our ideas and influence can grow. To do this we need to meet more printers' bills, we need more equipment, especially in these days of constant updates in computer technology. Most importantly, we need a new office.

Today, in a miracle of ergonomics, *Workers Power* is produced in a small two room office. As the paper has expanded, as Workers Power has grown, as our activities have increased, this is no longer sufficient. We need a bigger office to produce the paper and to produce the other publications of Workers Power and the LRCI, such as the youth paper *Revo* and the highly regarded theoretical magazine *Trotskyist International*. We need space to produce our leaflets, our placards and banners for demonstrations and campaigns, our workplace bulletins. And we need rooms to meet in.

To get an office that meets these needs will cost us a small fortune. We cannot bank on a lottery win or on any other intervention by fate and fortune. We have to raise the money from our supporters and readers. We are setting a target of £20,000 to be raised between May 1996 and May 1997.

That is a lot of money, but it is the minimum we will need to get a decent sized office at London prices.

And we believe we can raise it if our supporters and readers dig deep and put a real effort into fund raising. Everything that can bring in a few pounds should be tried—car boot sales, fund raising parties, raffles, second hand book sales, sponsored bike rides, sponsored hair cuts—you name it, you try it.

To get the fund started we are appealing to all of our readers to send in a lump sum donation and take out a standing order to give us money on a monthly basis over the year of the fund drive.

We are appealing to all readers to take out a solidarity subscription. Send us £25 for 12 issues and we will send you the next three issues of *Trotskyist International* free of charge. We will report on the progress of this fund every month and tell you how close we are to getting the office we need.■

DON'T DELAY!



- Send your donation/solidarity subscription now to Workers Power, BCM Box 7750, London WC1N 3XX.
- Make cheques payable to Workers Power and mark them "Premises Fund" or "Solidarity Subscription" (as appropriate) on the back.
- Standing Order forms available from Workers Power at the above address.

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To fulfil this function the revolutionary paper has to be the product of our members' support—financial, through selling the paper, and through contributing to the paper. It is not a specialist product, hived off from the life of the organisation and written by "literary" individuals. It is a party paper, the property of the organisation.

That is why the collective contribution of the whole organisation to the paper is more important than the most cleverly wrought prose of a talented individual. Writing—good and bad—is just that, writing. Writing by and for an organisation using the propaganda to advance the class struggle and build a revolutionary party is something much more valuable. It is put to use: it educates, it guides practice, it helps spread support for struggles and it helps win recruits to the organisation.

The aim of party papers, magazines and bulletins is to reach the masses. It is to spread the message of socialism and internationalism to the masses of workers and convince them of the need to act.

But if it is not to indulge in its own form of deception the paper has to correspond to the actual stage that the party is at. A paper read by a few thousand advanced militants is not the same as the daily paper of a mass communist party read by hundreds of thousands of workers. If you try to pretend it is you end up not with scaffolding but with a gallows on which the party can hang itself.

Workers Power aims to become a mass paper, the sooner the better. But we do not delude ourselves that we have a mass paper now. Rather our paper addresses a combined audience of political and trade union militants with experience of socialist ideas and the class struggle as well as workers and youth just coming into battle against the system. Our paper has to reflect this combination.

The Trotskyists in the USA in the 1930s and 1940s faced a similar problem. One of their leaders, James P Cannon, explained how they had initially tried to run with a mass paper before being able to walk with a "combination" paper:

"On the one hand the masses were not yet ready to hear us. On the other hand, we had first to fit the party for revolutionary mass work."

Until this could be done the *Militant* had to serve several different roles:

"... we should deliberately plan it as a variegated combination paper which has something in it of special interest to all of its readers in all stages of their development; which conducts the new reader by stages from agitation on the burning issues of the day into all the more profound questions of the class and party and continues to interest him after he has assimilated them."

This is priceless advice for a revolutionary organisation that is not yet a mass party. And it is advice well taken in the pages of **Workers Power**.

In our paper the new reader will find an entry point into revolutionary Marxism, such as our series "The A to Z of Marxism", or in an article relevant to a particular section of the class struggle that they are directly involved in. But they will also find a lot more, and will begin to understand a lot more through the wide range of articles that mark our paper out from all of the others on the left.

They will find a paper that explains and argues for the revolutionary programme in the day to day struggles; a paper that never for a minute concedes to existing national prejudices but rather has an internationalist spirit running through it like a red thread.

They will find a paper that patiently explains the interconnected aspects of the class struggle, that draws lessons from the past in order to arm us for the present. They will find a paper that does not flinch from taking sides in the life and death struggle between the workers and the bosses.

Above all they will find not only an inspiration to fight for socialism and revolution, but an explanation of how to win victory in that fight. Forward to **Workers Power 300**!■