

Workers power

INSIDE:
*From stock
market crash to
global slump?*

Socialism, Internationalism, Revolution

British Section of the League for a Revolutionary Communist International

No 216 November 1997 ★ 50p



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EDUCATION IS A RIGHT

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STUDENTS: As NUS leaders block action

Occupy against fees and loans

NEW LABOUR'S plans to make students pay for college education will be set out in the government's White Paper on education funding this month.

Despite intense opposition from students, Labour still plan to introduce a £1000 tuition fee and scrap what is left of the student grant altogether.

The campaign strategy of the National Union of Students (NUS) leadership has not worked. NUS leader Douglas Trainer supports the abolition of the grant. Cynically, he avoids fighting for grants by claiming it would be a diversion from the fight against the tuition fees. Yet even over fees the NUS leaders have undermined student resistance, refusing to organise the scale of action necessary to beat the government.

In an attempt to dissipate student anger, they organised a series of regional demonstrations and festivals on 1 November rather than a massive national demonstration at the heart of government in London. Their only other form of protest has been occasional lobbying of Labour MPs together with a hopeless legal challenge. NUS officials in the colleges have been frantically blocking any signs of direct action or militant resistance that have emerged.

The NUS leadership – sabbatical officers earning far more than the income of the average student – are stooges for Blair. With four former NUS leaders now in parliament and one in the cabinet, they are more interested in their future parliamentary careers than in defending the students they are supposed to represent. The NUS leaders will not organise an effective fight against fees.

We need a strategy that can win.

● ORGANISE THE CAMPAIGN

Every student opposed to tuition fees and the abolition of their grant should organise emergency general meetings at their colleges and universities to prepare for the publication of the government's white paper.

● CHALLENGE THE NUS LEADERSHIP

We should push for an emergency conference of NUS. The Blairite sell-out of the struggle for the education of working class people's sons and daughters, brothers and sisters has gone on long enough. We should boot out the bureaucrats and replace them with people who

BY STEVE
MANCHESTER UNIVERSITY

are willing to stand up to Blair and Blunkett, not cower before them.

● BUILD THE NATIONAL DEMONSTRATION

The national demonstration called by the Campaign for Free Education, Stop the Fees and Save Free Education on 26 November is an important focus for the campaign. We should all attempt to get as many students and workers there as possible. We should show the NUS Blairites that ordinary students want to defend the grant and fight tuition fees.

● OCCUPY THE COLLEGES

Demonstrations on their own are not enough. On the day the White Paper is published we need thousands of students from all over the country to take control of their universities and occupy. There is no other option if we are to win.

● UNITY IN ACTION

This means co-operation and unity between the anti-fees campaigns and rank and file students. Such unity can be built. At a recent general meeting at Manchester University an amendment from Workers Power students was passed arguing for the defence of our grants, support for the national demonstration and an occupation.

When officials blocked this with bureaucratic manoeuvring, Workers Power called a meeting and succeeded in getting a united campaign. Attended by rank and file students, Stop the Fees, Socialist Workers Students and others, a united front has been established to co-ordinate the response to the white paper and to fight for policies that the students in the union need. This fighting unity needs to be developed and repeated at every college and every university.

● BUILD ACTION COMMITTEES

We need to extend this unity to establish action committees including school students, education workers, representatives from estates and local areas.

There is no alternative. To defeat these plans we need maximum unity amongst students opposed to the sell-outs of NUS and maximum support from those who will be worst hit – the working class.

National Demonstration

Stop tuition fees!
Save student grants!
Education is a right!

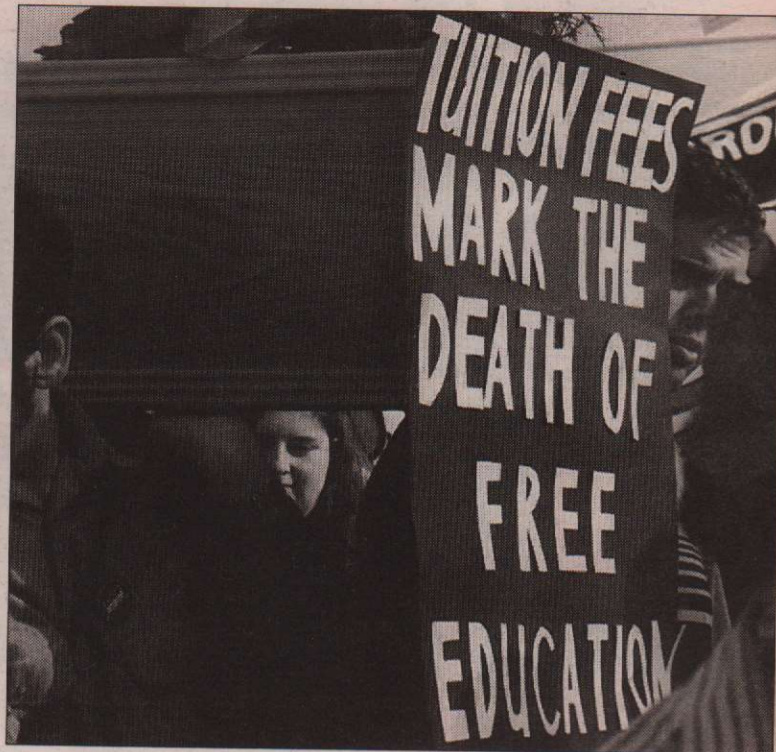
London, Wed 26 November,
Assemble 12 noon, ULU,
Malet St, WC1

● WE CAN WIN!

Students at the Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology in Australia showed this summer that a determined campaign against fees can force a climb down. They occupied their college administration and made links with local electricity unions who refused to cut off the power to the occupied building.

All it needs is courage, and a determination not to shirk from confrontation and direct action.

These plans can be defeated. It is up to us to make sure it happens!



Pay as you learn

Labour's lies

LABOUR HAS sent out a circular to trade unions on why they should back the scrapping of the grant and welcome the introduction of the £1000 tuition fee. They clearly feel that they need to win over trade union support for their most recent attack on the working class.

The paper, *The Dearing Report and Student Support: Briefing for Trade Unions*, gives some background to the Dearing Inquiry and its report published in July, which recommended the introduction of fees and retention of the current system of 50% grant and 50% loan of £4,000 per year to cover living expenses. It goes on to explain why Labour proposes to go even further: scrapping all grants and, despite previous commitments, imposing tuition fees of £1,000 per year.

The briefing paper is a pack of bare-faced lies.

Labour say they have grasped the nettle on funding. To return to the 1970s "would cost 3p on income tax" in 20 years' time.

Not true. Why should taxes have to go up for working class people to pay for the system? There is an alternative

they never mention – put the higher rate up for the rich few, or better still, impose a swingeing wealth tax on the profits and property of the multinationals and millionaires.

Labour say students from lower income families will not pay tuition fees.

Not true. Education secretary Blunkett has announced that children of parents whose joint income exceeds £23,000 will have to pay. That would include, for example, an office or factory worker whose partner does a part-time cleaning or caring job. And even if you don't have to stump up the £1000, it is included in your loan. So you'll have to pay it back once you start earning.

Labour say the current system is "not working and is unfair". They say workers' taxes are subsidising middle class kids and that because students benefit from college they should pay for it.

Not true. Students do pay. If they get a very highly paid job after college they could be charged even more by a progressive tax system. But Labour won't even raise the higher rate of income tax which Thatcher cut to just

40%. In fact, students have to start paying their loan back when they earn more than £10,000 a year... which is half of the national average wage.

The paper boasts that Labour's policy is guided by four principles: "quality, access, equity and accountability".

Quality will be damaged as students are recruited on the basis of whether they can pay, rather than academic ability. Access will be restricted to the middle class, most working class families will not be able to afford the fees. Equity is a nonsense when students at Scottish universities will have to pay £4,000 for a degree if they are English and £3,000 if they are Scottish. Accountable? Maybe to middle class parents who don't want to pay higher taxes, but not to working class students and parents.

The principle of loans and fees is all wrong. Education, like health care and social services, should be free for everyone. The funding crisis that is putting the whole welfare state in jeopardy can be solved almost overnight by reversing the massive redistribution of wealth from poor to rich that occurred under the Tories and by taxing the rich. ■



Ban this killer spray

IN THE wake of last month's finding by an East London inquest jury that police had indeed killed Gambian asylum seeker Ibrahima Sey, Ibrahima's family and supporters have launched a campaign to ban CS spray from the arsenal of police forces across Britain.

Ibrahima died in custody in March 1996 at Ilford police station after Metropolitan Police officers had sprayed him with a highly concentrated dose of CS gas. On Wednesday 29 October dozens attended the launch of the National Campaign against CS Gas, where spokesperson Kevin Blowe argued that a death like Ibrahima's "was bound to happen and is bound to happen again".

Blowe explained that the spray used by police in England is up to 25 times more powerful than the substance by many police forces in the US, where CS has been blamed for a number of fatalities. The meeting also heard from a local black youth, Stephen Nicholls, who survived a police attack with CS spray. He described how he stood pressed against a wall, temporarily blinded, while police sprayed his brothers and sisters, aged four to 14.

Both Liberty and Inquest – an organisation which campaigns around deaths in custody – have endorsed the drive against CS. Leyton Labour MP Harry Cohen has also voiced his support for the campaign. But Home Secretary Jack Straw announced after the inquest ver-

dict in the Sey case that he saw no reason to withdraw CS, while Metropolitan Police Commissioner Paul Condon has now pressed ahead with the introduction of CS across the whole of the force.

Workers Power fully supports a vigorous campaign, focused on the labour movement and black communities, to force Jack Straw to change his mind on CS spray. He should also be forced to prosecute the cops who killed Sey.

The fundamental question, however, is not about CS, long-handled batons or any other potentially lethal weapon in the police arsenal. The police in Britain operate first and foremost to defend the bosses' rule of private property. They carry out that function in a

systematically racist way. They need to be combated by the working class.

Deaths such as Ibrahima's and the experience of young black men like Stephen Nicholls highlight the need for constant monitoring of police activities by the labour movement and the local communities at the sharp end, combined with organised self-defence against attacks on minority communities and the working class as a whole from whatever quarter and by any means necessary. ■

● For further information about the National Campaign against CS Gas, contact the Newham Monitoring Project, PO Box 273, London E7 8NW Tel: 0181-555 8151.

EDITORIAL

WORKERS POWER 216 NOVEMBER 1997

Brown says yes and no

Labour's Euro dilemma



"BROWN MONDAY" screamed the headlines as millions were wiped off share values following confusion over the government's European policy.

Whatever it meant for the share price bubble (see page 14) it looked as if New Labour's bubble might have burst. European Monetary Union (EMU) – the issue that tore the Tory administration apart – appeared to wreak havoc on Labour.

Lord Simon, minister for competitiveness in Europe, had told the pro-European *Financial Times* that Labour was in favour of joining EMU. A few weeks later, chancellor Gordon Brown and his spin doctor, Charlie Whelan, suggested to the anti-European *Times* that Labour would not join during this parliament. "Is it all just spinning out of control?" asked the *Observer*.

Paddy Ashdown called the government "irresponsible". Tory leader William Hague demanded parliament be recalled early and Labour MPs seized the opportunity to set the hated spin doctors at each others' throats.

And then Brown delivered his speech. The press seemed to like it, Labour MPs united behind it and the Tories started resigning, defecting, calling for unity with the government and generally ripping each other to shreds all over again. What was going on?

Labour's European policy, as outlined by Gordon Brown on 27 October, is in fact a careful balancing act. On the one hand, it is a continuation of Major's "wait and see" position, refusing to commit Britain to joining the single currency. On the other, it is also a statement of intent to join EMU (depending on five suitably vague conditions and after a referendum) probably in 2001 or 2002.

"If a single currency would be right for British jobs, business and future prosperity, it is right, in princi-

ple, to join", said Brown, adding, "We are the first British government to declare for the principle of monetary union."

To ensure big business did not get the jitters at this, the chancellor also announced that the whole preparation period would be overseen by a steering committee incorporating the governor of the Bank of England and the heads of the CBI and the Chambers of Commerce.

And it wasn't just their welcome into Labour's corridors of power that pleased the bosses. Most of Britain's financial and industrial chiefs want to join EMU as quickly as possible but believe this is not possible in 1999, when 11 of the EU countries are likely to launch the Euro.

The single currency will give the capitalists greater clout when competing with Far East and US multinationals. By linking investments to the collective strength of European capitalism through the Euro, the bosses hope to secure themselves against market scares. Trade across Europe is also expected to grow as a result of doing away with monetary conversions and the associated uncertainties.

Delayed entry does have its drawbacks: Britain will lose its seat on the European Central Bank and be excluded from some important decisions. EU president Jacques Santer warned, "the sooner the UK joins, the better", emphasising that the Euro will benefit from Britain's participation.

So, why the delay? Brown argues that it's because the British economy is currently growing whilst the major European economies are sluggish. This affects interest rates, which are set at 7% in Britain, but 3.3% in France and Germany. If Britain lowered her interest rates now, the economy would "overheat" leading to inflation and eventually lost profits. If the other coun-

tries raised theirs, their economies would sink back into recession.

However, the real reason for Brown and Blair's "period of preparation" is political, not economic. They are quite happy to see the Tories split – possibly permanently – over the question of Europe. About 20 MPs in the Tory Reform Group are ready to follow Clarke and Heseltine out of the Conservative Party if the Eurosceptics stick to the "not in ten years" line.

The Labour leaders can ignore its own band of little Englanders on the backbenches. The likes of Denzil Davies and Austin Mitchell, both fearful of giving away Britain's "sovereignty", are not going to cause Brown many sleepless nights, even though Europe is set to remain a source of tension between the right-wing reformists of "old Labour" and the closet Tories of New Labour for years to come.

But the Labour leadership is concerned that it would probably lose a referendum held tomorrow on the question of abandoning the pound and joining the Euro. The British ruling class is still seriously split on the issue. Britain has far more trade with and investment in non-EU countries than its neighbours have. One section of the bosses is worried that EMU would strategically damage their profits.

For example, Rupert Murdoch, who as owner of News International and Sky is the single biggest "opinion former" in Britain, is still not convinced that the Euro is good for his business. That's why the *Sun's* headline advice to Gordon Brown on the morning of his speech was, "Don't give in to the Germans". The Labour leaders clearly don't fancy their chances on a Euro referendum if Murdoch is still dragging World War II into the equation!

Socialists need to use the coming

period to prepare politically for the battle over the Euro and the austerity package that will accompany it. Brown has made clear that, in or out of the single currency, Labour and the bosses are intent on a programme of attacks on the working class.

Eddie George, governor of the Bank of England, and CBI boss Adair Turner have been handed the reins to drive a coach and horses through our employment and welfare rights.

British workers have more in common with our European sisters and brothers than we do with either the xenophobic Eurosceptics or the pro-big business Europhiles. Both wings of British capitalism are determined to increase casual working, drive down public spending and hound the unemployed off benefits. With or without the Euro, they want Britain to have the edge over its rivals inside and outside of the EU. And that means attacking the working class.

Our response is simple: "You can have your Euro, but not at our expense!" We will line up, shoulder to shoulder, with the French lorry drivers, the German miners and the Belgian car workers in resisting the pan-European austerity drive.

But we will not line up with sections of the British bosses to resist the Euro in the name of Dunkirk and Agincourt.

We have to build our own European union: a union of revolutionary socialist parties across and beyond Europe.

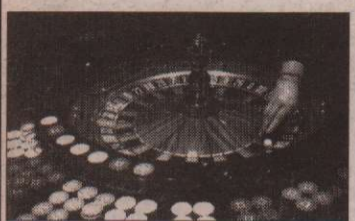
Workers should fight for a different Europe, a Europe where the super rich will have no say – a socialist Europe. The impending move to found a single currency means that Europe is an issue no worker, trade union militant or socialist can ignore. But the real question is not in or out of Europe, nor even for or against the Euro, but who will run Europe: the workers or the bosses? ■

in this issue



The Bolsheviks and working class power

Eighty years after the Russian Revolution **Richard Brenner** examines how the masses made the revolution – centre pages



From crash to slump?

Colin Lloyd takes a look at the recent upheavals on the world stock markets and asks whether we are on the verge of a new world slump. – page 14



The Pentonville Five and the 1972 dockers strike

Twenty-five years ago the Tory government of Edward Heath was rocked by the action taken by thousands of workers in support of the five dockers jailed for striking. **Dave Stockton** describes the events of that year. – page 13



Profits for industry

The government proposes to continue and expand the PFI initiative to privatise local services. **Jeremy Dewar** reports. – page 6

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UNISON: Press and leadership lies

Fight the witch-hunt

Leaders of Unison, the public sector workers union, have launched a witch-hunt against rank and file militants with the help of journalists from Rupert Murdoch's union-hating *Sunday Times*. The union fat cats are running scared of the gains made by the left at recent union conferences, and are desperate to cover up their own role in betraying the Hillingdon Hospital dispute. **GR McColl** reports

A CLASSIC piece of red-baiting journalism by the so-called "Insight" team at the *Sunday Times* has confirmed what many activists in Unison had begun to suspect: the leadership of Britain's biggest union has unleashed a witch-hunt of militants both locally and nationally.

The *Sunday Times* article, which appeared on the 26 October front page, repeated a series of often absurd allegations of abuse of union funds against Unison members in the Socialist Workers Party (SWP) and the Campaign for a Fighting and Democratic Unison (CFDU). The CFDU is the most powerful electoral force to the left of the union's General Secretary Rodney Bickerstaffe, and includes members of the Socialist Party, Socialist Outlook and Workers Power, as well as individual Labour Party members and non-aligned activists.

The journalists who authored the story could only have concocted it with the help of someone with extensive inside-knowledge of Unison, most probably a leadership loyalist at the union's Mabledon Place headquarters in central London. According to the article, the CFDU now controls "more than 150 of the union's 1,200 branches" and has "six members on the union's ruling national executive committee (NEC)" - a gross exaggeration on both counts.

Weeks before the publication of the article, Bickerstaffe informed a September meeting of the NEC that he had authorised an investigation of the CFDU even though there had been no formal complaint against it. In addition, he issued a circular to all branches denouncing the 29 September lobby of the Labour Party Conference called by the Unison branch at University College Hospital in London, and advising branches to have nothing to do with it.

While this was clearly an attack on the

SWP, whose members played a leading role in building the demonstration, the actual demands of the demonstration did not go beyond the union's existing national policy.

In another salvo against the left, Bickerstaffe has written to branches about supposedly illegal contributions to *Socialist Worker*. The state-appointed trade union certification officer has been notified and the order has gone out that local branch officers are responsible for retrieving any such donations to the SWP's paper. The action is richly hypocritical, given Unison's large contributions to the *Morning Star*, house organ of the Stalinist Communist Party of Britain.

The most fantastic claim retailed by the *Sunday Times* concerned the Nottingham Council branch where regional officials appear to have collaborated with the local police in a raid on the branch offices. The police are evidently accusing the branch, which has an impressive record of anti-racist activity, of setting up a bogus neo-Nazi organisation called "White Rage" in order to justify contributions to anti-racist campaigns. In turn, the fictional extreme right group has apparently been distributing pornography and virulently racist literature to local schools and even scout groups.

The fabrications of the *Sunday Times* and its informants have come in the wake of a number of witch-hunts against union militants across the country. A regional official in London appears to have planted an article in the pages of the listings magazine *Time Out* to pursue a vendetta against SWP member Brian Butterworth, the secretary of the local authority branch in Brent. The article offered no persuasive evidence for its main charge that Butterworth had been undemocratically elected.

Elsewhere in local government, the

union has instituted disciplinary proceedings against three former officers of the old Leeds No.10 branch, whose "crime" appears to have been nothing more than affiliating the branch to the CFDU. The Unison bureaucracy has also closed the accounts of the Lewisham branch in South East London, having given no warning to its officers.

Meanwhile, in Birmingham, two shop stewards face continuing disciplinarys. One, Tracy Twist, stands accused of "bringing the union into disrepute" for

ment of the Hillingdon Hospital strikers whom it abandoned in January of this year. The women had applied collectively to renew their union memberships, which is perfectly within Unison's existing rules, but they have been told that each of them must reapply individually. The aim is to weed out those who have been most vigorous in denouncing the leadership's withdrawal of official backing for their fight against the effects of privatisation in the NHS.

The national leadership has also

looks increasingly determined to undermine the autonomy of branches and to ensure that the left within the union does not become a thorn in New Labour's side.

With a national membership of nearly 1.5 million, heavily concentrated in the NHS and local government, Unison is well placed to halt further attacks on public spending and the welfare state. Its members could easily put the brake on New Labour's revamp of CCT (so-called Best Value) and backdoor privatisation through the extension of the Private Finance Initiative (see page 6).

On 28 October the union's Greater London Regional Council adopted an emergency resolution opposing the witch-hunt in principle, following the publication of the *Sunday Times* article. While this is a welcome development, Unison activists will have to mount a serious national campaign against the leadership's attacks.

Some local and regional officials, and even members of the NEC can be relied on to give some measure of support, but it is essential that such a campaign wages a fight in the branches, explaining to rank and file members what is really at stake.

The witch-hunt should also dictate a cessation of petty hostilities between the CFDU and SWP. There is a desperate need for a unified campaign, whatever the political differences, with these rivals pooling their resources. To its credit the CFDU has extended offers of support to SWP members in Unison under threat from the bureaucracy, but the SWP appears to have spurned the assistance.

The CFDU should call an open national conference as soon as possible, specifically around the defence of branch autonomy and the right to organised campaigning within the union. The bottom line should be unequivocal public opposition to the current witch-hunting within Unison.

At the same time the bureaucracy's abuses of power highlight the need to go beyond a defensive struggle and build a rank and file movement within Unison that fights not just for union office but for a root and branch democratisation of Britain's biggest union. ■

Bickerstaffe has written to branches about supposedly illegal contributions to *Socialist Worker*. The action is richly hypocritical, given Unison's large contributions to the *Morning Star*, organ of the Communist Party of Britain



mounting a campaign against the Compulsory Competitive Tendering (CCT) of a council service. The Unison bureaucracy's protracted battle against the "Liverpool 4", stewards who have faced action for organising a strike against racist management in a council workplace, is also continuing - nearly four years after the events.

In a crudely cynical manoeuvre, the bureaucracy continues its petty harass-

pushed through a code of conduct for lobbies and demonstrations, which includes a section on events outside union premises. In January, staff at Mabledon Place called the police to "shield" the building from the wrath of the Hillingdon women after the sell-out.

At the NEC's October meeting, senior bureaucrats cited a legal opinion that only individuals, rather than organised groupings, could seek to change union policy. This will doubtless be seized on to justify an intensification of attacks against the CFDU and SWP, but in theory this could also mean that branches can no longer composite resolutions to union conferences.

What lies behind this vicious and sometimes bizarre assault on union democracy? The Unison bureaucracy

DERBYSHIRE: School meals dispute

Bosses get their just desserts

MORE THAN 1,000 Unison members in Derbyshire's school meals service have voted for a series of one-day strikes in response to the county council's refusal to drop a £2.6 million cuts package. More than 70% of the school "dinner ladies", who make up the bulk of the workforce, voted two-to-one in favour of action after months of fruitless talks with council management.

The first strike was due to take place on Tuesday 4 November, with subsequent action planned for the two following Mondays. The school meals battle marks the second time in just over a year that Derbyshire's Labour leader, Martin Doughty, has chosen to provoke a fight with a section of the council workforce. In 1996, Doughty's attempt to push through cuts in the county's fire service triggered a long-running series of strikes by the FBU.

Since February the council bosses have been trying to impose new contracts on the dinner ladies in an attempt to increase so-called flexible working, while slashing the wages' bill by cutting hours for the largely part-time workforce. Derbyshire's management adopted the cuts package after shelling out for a consultant's report which reached the conclusion that school kitchens were "too clean" due to overstaffing!

The bosses have also mounted a failed legal challenge to the strike ballot, while some councillors have publicly branded the women workers as "ignorant and uneducated".

The TGWU and GMB represent a minority of the workers and have so far not balloted their members. Regional officials have, however, indicated that they would urge members not to cross picket lines. Meanwhile, the main teaching unions, the NUT and NAS-UWT

have declared they are sympathetic to the dinner ladies' cause, but have made no pledges of concrete support.

A defeat for the dinner ladies will hit nutritional standards for some of the county's poorest pupils and leave the door wide open to still more attacks on the education service as a whole.

That must not happen. The best way to translate expressions of sympathy into the kind of solidarity that could close up to 300 schools and force the council bosses to climb down will be large and lively pickets. These could put paid to the plans of some head teachers to break the strikes by shipping in sandwiches and also persuade other education staff to join in the action.

■ Messages of support, donations, etc. to: Lindsay Common, Derbyshire County Unison, County Hall, Matlock, Derbyshire DE4 5AG; Fax: 01629 580322.

NATFHE

Vote Andrea Keneally

VOTING IN the ballot to elect a new General Secretary of NATFHE, the college lecturers' union, takes place over the coming weeks.

Of the five candidates, only one provides an opportunity to cast a vote against the "going nowhere" leadership of the union. That candidate is Andrea Keneally, an NEC member, victimised after the Southwark College strike and a member of the Socialist Workers Party (SWP).

A vote for Keneally gives militants a chance to campaign for national strike action over pay and conditions and show their opposition to the leadership's perspective which is little more than waiting passively for a few more crumbs of funding from Labour.

It will also give an opportunity to start discussions again with SWP members about building a rank and file movement in the union - some-

thing the SWP has ruled out ever since it wound up the "Fight the Contracts" campaign it led two years ago.

The SWP continues to argue that it is not the right time for such a movement within the union. Such a position is beginning to look more ludicrous in the light of recent disputes. The defeated Southwark strike, for example, showed just how necessary it is to organise against the bureaucracy if we are to win crucial battles against the employers' offensive on jobs and conditions.

A campaign to elect Keneally should be built around the need to organise the rank and file and stop the sell outs of the current leadership. Such a campaign will also need to state clearly our readiness to take on the anti-union laws which are preventing serious national action. ■

The unions under Blair

Left alliance or rank and file movement?

SIX MONTHS after Labour's landslide the Trade Union Left Alliance is calling a conference on 15 November at the University of London Union. This is the second conference called by the Alliance.

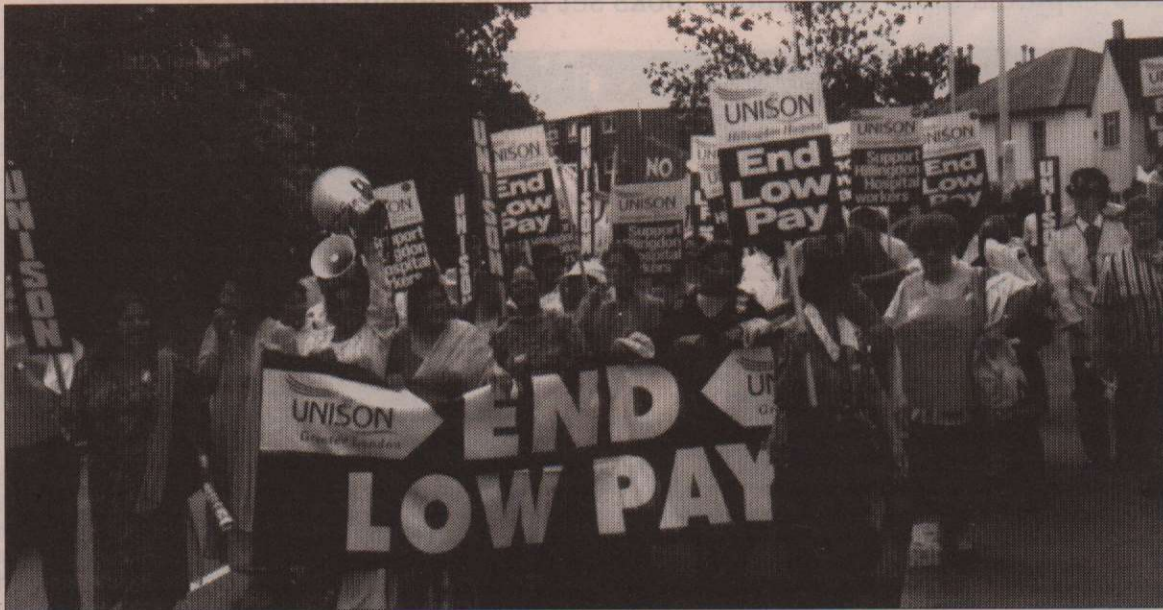
The Alliance is the brainchild of the Socialist Teachers Alliance (STA - a left group within the teachers' union, the NUT) and is supported by various similar organisations in unions such as the CWU, GPMU, Unison, CPSA and PTC.

The organisers claim the conference will discuss how trade unionists can organise more effectively in the light of the opportunities and dangers posed by New Labour in office. But the experience of the original conference in February suggests that the event will be an impotent talking shop, rooted in the failed politics and personalities of Broad Leftism.

The time is certainly ripe for a meeting of left activists with the fight around the level and age range for the minimum wage taking shape, the prospect of extremely modest employment rights legislation on the horizon and the outlines of Labour's "welfare-to-work" programme becoming clear. Blair has also made plain his intention of retaining the whole arsenal of anti-union laws inherited from the Tories.

Will the conference offer any way forward after Labour's election victory? Many affiliates to the Alliance have in fact been disorientated by Labour's election victory. The Campaign for a Fighting Democratic Union (CFDU) and the Broad Lefts in CPSA and PTC all refused to call for a Labour vote in the elections.

Some leading activists have even argued that it is wrong to put demands on Labour as this would sow illusions in a bosses' party. All predict that members will quickly see through Labour and be ready to fight.



These perspectives can only lead to further isolation and despondency for the left. Of course, Labour is a bosses' party, but fundamentally it always has been. Blair himself does want to transform the party and eventually sever the union link.

But for the moment Labour remains a party tied to the unions. Millions of workers who voted Labour into office, after 18 long Tory years, are prepared to give them the benefit of the doubt.

The hospital cleaner who thinks that Blunkett has her interest at heart by forcing those "privileged" students to pay tuition fees needs convincing that Labour is really playing a game of divide and rule. In part this means placing demands on the government that would begin to meet her needs.

A fight for a £6 an hour minimum wage, linked to the demand that Labour implements it, rather than bowing to the bosses' demands for a lower figure,

is the best way to win that argument.

The task of socialists in the unions today is to focus on concrete demands on Labour and patiently agitate for the kind of action needed to win them. It is to organise the militants against the Labour and trade union bureaucrats who stand in the way of such action.

Unfortunately the conference in November is unlikely to discuss such a strategy. It is likely to be dominated by an agenda acceptable to the existing or would-be "left" union leaders.

In February this meant that the organisers refused to debate a resolution passed by Leicestershire County Unions calling for an anti-bureaucratic rank and file movement, committed to fighting for strikes and breaking the anti-union laws.

Leicester's motion called for a break with Broad Leftism's failed strategy, which has relied on building electoral machines to capture the existing union

structures:

"This conference recognises that the trade union machines cannot be simply captured by the left. Rather, the bureaucracy as a whole has to be politically defeated and organisationally overthrown so that the trade unions can be transformed into fighting, democratic organs of class struggle."

The STA epitomises the sorry state of Broad Leftism. It shows little or no interest in building itself through class struggle activism. Its energy is spent on winning seats on the union's executive. Yet where it has won leadership at a local level, for example in Tower Hamlets in East London, it has squandered opportunities to lead an effective fight against cuts.

The STA has not tried to build the actual Alliance conference. It has not raised the conference with members, nor tried to win motions to send delegates from workplaces or associations.

It is as if the conference did not concern "ordinary" members, only the self-appointed leaders of the STA.

In contrast to this an initiative to construct a real rank and file movement across the unions would start by encouraging all those workers in dispute to call a conference to discuss the state of the unions and how to transform them. This could attract a wider layer of trade union militants, who might not attend an event organised by a left tendency.

The rank and file movement in today's climate should begin by recruiting the best fighters from disputes, armed with workplace and regional bulletins to promote solidarity and militant policies, while exposing bureaucratic sell-outs. We need to turn anger into a fightback through strike action, taking a leading role in disputes with the arguments for effective action, even where this means breaking the anti-union laws. We need to ensure that workers control their own disputes through strike committees to stop sell-outs.

Our strategy bases itself on workers' democracy and self-organisation and a belief in the ability of millions of workers to mobilise and defeat the bosses. This is combined with a sober analysis of the extent to which the control and influence of the union bureaucracy has been strengthened by the serious defeats inflicted on workers in the past 20 years.

We know our aim cannot be achieved overnight. It is not possible to shake off years of decline and retreat in our movement in one go. But we can and must make a start now if we are to build a movement capable of repelling New Labour's anti-working class agenda. ■

If you agree, write to us at the box number on page 3.

Socialist Labour: Second Congress

A stagnant Stalinist pond

THE SECOND congress of the Socialist Labour Party (SLP) takes place in mid-December. There will be none of the air of excitement or high hopes that surrounded the first congress, only 18 months ago. Arthur Scargill has seen to that.

In the public domain the SLP's brief existence has been characterised by a pitiful and failed attempt to put stale left-reformist politics on the electoral map. Internally, it has been dominated by witch-hunts, purges and suspensions of whole branches.

An exodus of SLP members, disgusted or demoralised by the leadership purges, has left the branches shrivelled and the party itself largely inactive as a campaigning force. Scargill's pompous bluster cannot conceal the irrelevance of his party.

Like a small lake that has become a stagnant pond, the SLP has become a perfect breeding ground for all manner of unpleasant and foul-smelling creatures. The Stalin Society, Royston Bull's rabidly homophobic Economic and Philosophic Science Review, and other virulently Stalinist groups are encouraged by the Scargill leadership.

They serve as spies and footsoldiers to purge suspected oppositionists, to destroy democratic debate and to help Scargill fulfil his objective of ensuring the party becomes a Stalinist sect run as his own private fiefdom.

Peddle

These unrepentant Stalinists are now allowed to peddle their anti-working class views as the policy of *Socialist News*, the SLP's paper. A recent article on Hong Kong's return to China informed readers that the 1989 massacre of students and workers that followed the Tiananmen Square demonstrations in China was in fact a fiction, a "CIA slander". What really occurred, according to *Socialist News*, was "the most brutal violence against the Chinese state" conducted "under the fraudulent disguise of a democracy movement!"

This insulting lie, which spits on the memory of the thousands of students and workers killed and imprisoned after Tiananmen, rightly caused outrage amongst some SLP members. Cardiff SLP branch correctly decided that they would not sell an issue that openly sided

with the Stalinist dictatorship in Beijing.

They were quickly admonished by Scargill, who declared that while the SLP in fact had "no policy" on China, they certainly had to sell the paper that carried this wretched article because selling it was a binding policy on all members.

Scargill's bureaucratic "Catch 22" policy has also been used to rule out of order over a quarter of the resolutions submitted to the congress.

A concerted effort had been made by many branches to overturn, or amend out, some of the worst elements of the constitution that was imposed on the SLP without a vote at the first congress. However, amendments that attempt to change the constitution to allow members to combine together to change party policy or to allow affiliation of other political tendencies have all been ruled out of order.

The methods used are classic bureaucratic manoeuvres aimed at stifling debate and democracy in the party. Branches, for example, are only allowed one constitutional amendment. Where they stuck to this, aiming to remove one aspect of the constitu-

tion, they were told their amendment failed because it was contradicted by other clauses in the constitution.

Where branches tried to make their amendment consistent by removing and amending several clauses of the constitution they were told it was out of order because this was more than one amendment.

This "Catch 22" was extended to one branch that moved an amendment rejecting the constitution in total, called for a new constitutional drafting group and a special constitutional conference to discuss a new draft. This was ruled out of order because . . . it contradicted several clauses in the constitution!

Debate

Certainly, there will be political debate at the SLP congress. The left have resolutions calling for "opposition to all immigration controls" (Selly Oak CSLP), while all the resolutions on Europe try to overturn the existing position of the SLP. The SLP calls for complete withdrawal from the EU. The branch resolutions all refuse to line up behind nationalist slogans in defence of "British sovereignty" and counter-

pose the need for workers' struggles across Europe in or out of the EU.

Unfortunately, the outcome of such debates has already been decided in advance. The Scargill leadership, through their purges and expulsions, have guaranteed themselves a majority in a shrunken organisation. Their willingness to prevent any challenge to their bureaucratic constitution expresses their determination to continue these methods against any opposition to the reformist Stalinist policies of the SLP.

The coming congress will merely put the seal on these developments in the SLP. It will confirm its evolution into a Stalinist sect which will repel any class fighters breaking from Labour looking for a socialist and democratic alternative to Blair's right wing, anti-democratic New Labour Party.

The SLP's second congress will provide final proof that it has become an obstacle to the building of such a revolutionary alternative. Any revolutionaries left within its ranks should seek to encourage a genuine left split at the December congress. Otherwise, the SLP has become just a waste of a revolutionary's time. ■

Labour's privatisation programme

PFI: profits for industry

New Labour were clear that when they formed the government there would be no return to "beer and sandwiches" at Number 10 for the trade union leadership. Not that many of us wanted a return to the days when our union leaders drank all the beer and we ended up paying the tab. Nevertheless, millions of public sector workers did expect some respite from the endless attacks on our jobs, wages and conditions. **Jeremy Dewar** explains that New Labour looks set to disappoint them.

IN OPPOSITION Labour always said it stood against the "dogma" of Tory privatisations. Surely they would stop any further privatisation? On the contrary it lies at the heart of government policy.

Privatisation is built into the Tory public spending limits, which Brown and Blair have rigidly stuck to. It comes in the form of outright privatisations, like the Civil Aviation Authority, but primarily through the Private Finance Initiative (PFI).

The PFI is an arrangement under which private sector investment in the public sector will mean that the private firms will be accorded management and control over the sites they have invested in. The Treasury projects that by the year 2000 an annual £4.3 billion (19.5%) of all public sector investment will come from the private sector.

New Labour is supporting PFI despite the fact that it attacks the working class.

The working class pays for the profits made from PFI. As Jim Armstrong of John Laing Construction put it:

"There is no way that a private organisation can take on the same level of risk as the state without massively increasing costs."

As tax payers, workers are paying for Laing's profits.

Once they are in, these contractors can increase their costs even more. Andersen's costs for the National Insurance contract have mushroomed from £200 to £1,400 million. We even pay when no contract is awarded. Guy's Hospital in London spent over half a million on PFI before shelving the option.

Threaten

Charges can also shoot up. The contract for the Skye Bridge allows the owners to increase charges if low traffic levels threaten their profit margins.

Health, safety and quality of service are all seen as areas that can be cut, shaved or ignored. Hospitals Management Group won a £43 million contract to build the 474-bed Carlisle Hospital, only to ask for an extra £1.5 million. The Trust could not afford this and is saddled with a hospital which squeezes 88 beds into wards designed for 76, where there is one toilet for every 38 beds and where you can't turn a trolley around in the corridors. Doctors and staff described it as "more like a doss-house". Yet, because of the long contract, the Carlisle working class are stuck with these conditions in their hospital for decades.

For those whose jobs are privatised in the process, or who get work on these sites, the picture is even worse. Since the cost of the initial investment is so high – much higher than it would be for the government – contractors must cut jobs, wages and conditions to maximise their profits. You only have to look at the plight of the Hillingdon cleaners, on strike for two years against wage cutting private contractors, to imagine this spread throughout an entire hospital.

PFI represents a clear threat to union organisation. David Willets, when he was a Tory MP, wrote of the PFI that "many firms involved would not wish to negotiate with NHS unions". Unlike Compulsory Competitive Tendering (CCT) and market testing, consultation with the unions is not mentioned in any PFI guidelines. In fact, it is implied that the TUPE regulations, which the unions



PFI will mean more fat cats

have to date relied on to protect rights after privatisation, may not apply to the PFI. They certainly cannot protect staff for the expected 25 years of a PFI contract.

The big public sector unions, Unison, TGWU, GMB and civil service unions, CPSA and PTC, are the most threatened by PFI. All of them have produced pamphlets, run courses for branch activists and drawn up guides to action. As far as it goes, this has proved to be useful, for example advising members on how to spot a lurking PFI proposal in apparently innocuous management plans. But there are important weaknesses in the unions' response to date.

Misery

The union bureaucrats try to persuade the government that there are more efficient ways of injecting market forces into the public sector. Public borrowing is advocated as an alternative to PFI capital investment, despite the fact that this approach led to the IMF-

imposed cuts in the 1970s. In-house bids are championed, forgetful of the self-imposed cuts this has led to in the past, not to mention the misery of job insecurity that endless rounds of CCT bring with them.

The unions even quote a report commissioned by Customs and Excise, suggesting only the assets should be privatised as "this potentially gives capital injections without privatising people." Have the union chiefs developed collective amnesia? Do they not remember the workers killed in the construction of the Channel Tunnel because of the unsafe procedures the contractors insisted on?

Linked to this refusal to fight all attempts at privatisation is the unions' second great weakness: their refusal to advocate all-out, indefinite strike action to smash each and every PFI attack and bury the policy once and for all.

Earlier this year, PTC and CPSA members in the Courts Service voted for a series of week-long strikes when they discovered that an invitation to

tender had been issued for all IT and administrative jobs. Very quickly, the administrative jobs were taken out of the equation, leaving the IT workers in the lurch as the unions called off the strike. This divide and rule policy discredits the union and strike action in members' eyes and sells out the unfortunate few.

Strategy

The union leadership has shown itself incapable of promoting a strategy which could resist the savage attacks being prepared through the PFI. On a card vote at the TUC conference in September total opposition to PFI was ruled out. An alternative, revolutionary, answer is required.

PFI should be abolished now. Public services should be completely owned by and accountable to the public. They should be fully nationalised under workers' control. All sections of the public service that have been privatised should be renationalised with no compensation to the privateers and placed under workers' control.

No one should make an obscene profit out of sickness or incarcerating prisoners. We should demand that Labour declares a complete moratorium on all PFI, CCT and privatisation projects and scraps the policies that enforce public sector managers to seek out private sector solutions.

All-out strike action is the surest and quickest way of securing these demands and preventing divisions in our ranks. Wherever possible, such strikes should be linked together and raise demands for the abolition of the PFI as a whole.

Strike committees, linking up with representatives of working class service users, can also show how public services could be run under the direct control of workers and their community. That way, we could not only bin PFI, CCT and the other Tory policies Labour hide behind, but we could begin to control the services we rely on. ■

What is PFI?

THERE ARE three types of PFI. Financially free-standing PFIs are totally funded by the private sector, who get their profits from charging for the service. The Channel Tunnel and the Skye Bridge were built like this.

Joint ventures, like the Channel Tunnel Rail Link and several city regeneration schemes, receive a government subsidy but the private partners must retain overall control.

The final, and most important, type of PFI is where a private consortium sells a (public) service to the public sector! Bizarre as this sounds, it is actually going on. Group 4 and Securicor are building three prisons. They will provide all services except for prison officers.

The only restrictions on PFI are that it should provide value for money and involve a transfer of some genuine risk to the private sector. Although this usually involves some investment, it is wrong to think that the PFI is just about buildings and roads. Government computing has been particularly devastated.

Extension

After the contract, the assets also generally remain with the contractor. For example, Andersen Consulting will own the National Insurance computer system even after its contract with the DSS has finished. Needless to say, they'll be in a good position to win an extension... or pull the plug.

The PFI contracts tend to be very long indeed. CCT promoted the idea that it is good business to review contracts every couple of years. Under PFI, because of the need for guaranteed profit on the initial investment, most contracts last for 25 to 30 years. Some are even longer: the Norfolk and Norwich Hospital contract lasts until 2057!

Rather like the creative accounting of the town halls in the 1980s, the government is buying services now but paying for it in decades to come. A baby born in the Norfolk today will still be paying for the privilege when she or he retires!

Incentives

Even so, the bosses have been reluctant to take up PFI with any enthusiasm. Of £1.9 billion of work planned for 1996-97, only £1.1 billion was contracted for. But the PFI is so crucial to the government that this has just led to further incentives – sweeteners on the one hand and compulsion and inducement on the other. The government has underwritten all NHS contracts in case the Trusts go bust, allowed councils to exclude PFI in spending targets and ordered all civil service chiefs to always consider private finance options.

Old fashioned sweeteners, of course, remain in vogue. London and Continental have been handed £5.7 billion of public funds and assets to build the Channel Tunnel Rail Link. As Clare Short said just before the election, "the tax payer is contributing £5.7 billion for a £3 billion project that we could have had for £1 billion in 1989". Labour are now safeguarding this piece of daylight robbery. ■

How it started

THE 1980S saw Thatcher's onslaught against loss-making nationalised industries and her promotion of popular capitalism. Privatisation seemed unstoppable. Profits and costs soared and jobs and conditions went down the tube.

From the mid to late 1980s onwards, CCT and market testing were introduced. Under the guise of ensuring "value for money" these "privatisations by the backdoor" ensured further profits for the bosses and bought further tax cuts for them into the bargain.

The only problem for the Tories was that the in-house bids started to prove better value for money. Of £2.6

billion of civil service work put out to tender between 1992 and 1995, half of it remained in-house. The bosses lost millions in unsuccessful bids.

In 1992, the Tories found a solution: the PFI. The PFI explicitly precludes any in-house bid. The PFI is also far more upfront about privatisation being always and everywhere the first option. The Private Finance Panel, the quango set up to push the PFI, wrote that:

"The starting point is a clear presumption that the PFI approach will generally be better than a traditional procurement; the better management inherent in a PFI project will give better value for money." ■

THE YEAR WITCEVIN

cheap childcare



AT THE end of October a court in Cambridge, Massachusetts found 19-year-old Louise Woodward guilty of second degree murder. She faces at least 15 years in prison, unless the judge can be persuaded to overturn the verdict. Much of the British media has rallied behind Louise Woodward, with tabloid headlines proclaiming she was "Stitched Up" and demanding her immediate release. The coverage has sometimes had ugly anti-American overtones and a strong whiff of British chauvinism, as if the British criminal justice system could not produce grotesque miscarriages. As the *Guardian's* crime correspondent, Duncan Campbell, pointed out, the media never extends the least bit of sympathy to women from Latin America and West Africa banged up in Holloway for drugs offences, while white British women in foreign jails become national martyrs.

And where were the tabloid backs while the Birmingham Six and Guildford Four were rotting in jail? Where is the moral outrage over the continuing imprisonment of Winston Silcott and the M25 Three? There has never been any hint of an apology from the likes of the *Sun* for its complicity in the jailing of those wrongfully convicted of Carl Bridgewater's murder.

Whether or not the Massachusetts jury reached the right conclusion after 27 hours of deliberation over a welter of conflicting forensic evidence, what should

be stressed is that the trial was in no way especially flawed or unfair. Certainly the local district attorney cynically decided to pursue a first-degree murder conviction to boost his campaign to become the next Attorney General of Massachusetts on a tough law and order platform. But neither this, nor the media circus surrounding the trial, should obscure the fact that the trial itself was scrupulously fair.

Trials, however, do not take place in social vacuums. Socialists and consistent democrats should be concerned with numerous aspects of the Woodward case. The trial itself became compelling melodrama on Sky News, yet it also highlighted a range of key social issues including the essential brutality of the judicial system beneath the courtroom niceties. Few who heard Woodward's inconsolable sobbing after the jury returned its verdict could have been unmoved by the plight of a naive 19-year-old facing the possibility of a long prison sentence.

Above all, however, this tragic case has underscored the real crisis in affordable child care that exists in most capitalist societies, but has become especially acute in the US. Even middle class professionals like Sunil and Deborah Eappen, both saddled with huge student loan repayments from medical school, cannot afford to pay for a trained nanny. The cost of a qualified British nanny in the US is currently nearly \$800 a week.

The US has no certified courses for the training of nannies, despite the fact that the vast majority of parents with young children now work outside the home.

The case also fuelled a misogynist backlash in the US against professional women who remain in the workforce after childbirth, orchestrated by the "Christian Right" and talk radio commentators. Ironically, this coincides with the drive by both the Clinton and Blair administrations to force single mothers on welfare back into the labour market.

Enter Louise Woodward - one of around 10,000 young women from Britain and other European countries who come to the US every year under the aegis of eight "au pair agencies", licensed by the federal government's United States Information Agency (USIA).

Most of those who come to the US are taking a year out of education before going on to university. Many come from lower middle class or working class homes and have to work to pay for the experience. Whatever her real attitude to children, Woodward had no experience in dealing with the often stressful demands of a pre-verbal infant, sometimes for more than ten hours a day. In fact, she appears to have had nothing more by way of formal training than a four-day crash course after her arrival in the Boston area. Yet US immigration laws meant that it was far easier for her

to get a job caring for someone else's baby than serving behind a Boston bar.

The Eappens hired Woodward after clashing with a Swedish au pair in late 1996. She was receiving about \$140 (less than £90) a week on top of room and board. Many au pairs who have returned from similar placements report working 55 hours or more a week. In short, Woodward was cheap labour.

The USIA has repeatedly proposed tighter regulation of au pairs, tied to modest improvements in their basic training and pay. But the agencies such as EF Au Pair, which recruited Woodward and whose insurers forked out for her lawyers, effectively resisted such changes and so the minimum wage for these young "guest

workers" has remained frozen.

We do not know "beyond a reasonable doubt" what actually occurred on 4 February when eight-month-old Matthew Eappen was rushed to hospital. But what is crystal clear is that there are a number of immediate victims in the case from the bereaved Eappens through to Louise Woodward's family. To avert similar tragedies in the future requires addressing the crisis in child care.

In both the US and Britain, it means fighting for a massive increase in state-funded nurseries, with the goal of creating freely available, 24-hour a day child care, provided by adequately trained workers paid the equivalent of at least £6 an hour. ■

Labour and Legal Aid

Robbing the poor of a fair hearing

THE GOVERNMENT is set to scrap Legal Aid for most civil cases, effectively privatising a key plank of the welfare state.

The move denies hundreds of thousands of working class people the chance to sue for damages. The legal system will be still more biased in favour of the rich.

Legal Aid was set up in 1950 to provide access to the law for everyone, regardless of income. The Legal Aid fund pays lawyers' fees - with clients making an income-related contribution. A legal aid certificate will not be granted if the board thinks the case has no reasonable chance of success. Certain types of case such as Industrial Tribunals have been unfairly excluded from Legal Aid. If you win your case, the fund gets reimbursed by your opponent, or from your damages.

New Labour now plan to save £300 million a year by withdrawing legal aid from all claims for money or damages. Instead, lawyers are being encouraged to take cases on a "no win, no fee" basis. If you win, your lawyers will be paid by your defeated opponent. But if you lose, the lawyer gets no fee at all.

Superficially, this may seem reasonable. But in reality it means solicitors will be highly unlikely to take on cases

from anyone but rich individuals and companies unless they are almost guaranteed in advance to win.

Claims for damages for injuries are often straightforward and many solicitors will take them on this basis. But many claims are fraught with risk. Because of this, lawyers will not want to take them on in the first place, leaving many of the most vulnerable people unable to go to court.

The poor will be unable to spend money investigating whether their case is likely to win. They will not be able to afford the private insurance now on offer against the risk of having to pay your opponents' costs if you lose. Children who are brain-damaged at birth will not be able to get a lawyer on a no-win, no-fee basis because their cases are difficult to prove.

Labour's Lord Chancellor - Lord Irvine of Lairg - has had to defend these indefensible measures. As with David Blunkett's arguments over tuition fees, Irvine has tried to suggest that these changes are aimed at saving taxpayers' money from going to privileged layers - in this case "fat cat lawyers".

But Irvine - hardly a slim kitten himself with a ministerial salary exceeding £100,000 a year - is just trying to divert attention away from the real

effects of the proposals. Everyone knows lawyers earn far too much money. Their income has risen on average by 20% a year over the last six years. But why should this mean refusing legal aid to poor people who can't afford a lawyer? Why not just tax the fat cats?

The people who lose out from the abolition of legal aid are the very poorest. They lose out financially, and they lose the basic right to justice.

This is not just a question of money. A democratic principle is at stake. The working class faces another obstacle to access to the capitalists' legal system. The power of the employers over the exploited and oppressed will be strengthened even further.

Justice in capitalist Britain is and always will be justice for the ruling class. But that does not mean that revolutionaries should sit back and let Labour erode our democratic rights. We demand of Labour:

- no cuts to legal aid
- tax the rich to massively expand free legal services
- extend legal aid to cover representation at industrial tribunals
- for a national legal service under democratic control
- election of all judges. ■

British prisons

Young girls jailed by the dozen

THE BRITISH media has expressed hypocritical outrage that Louise Woodward is locked up in an American jail "alongside junkies and rapists". When it comes to the reality of conditions for teenagers in British prisons there is silence.

The truth is that teenage girls - some as young as 15 - are languishing in adult jails, in breach of the UN Convention on the rights of the child.

The Howard League for Penal Reform has revealed that the number of women under 18 sentenced to prison has more than trebled in the last five years. Nearly half have no previous convictions or are in jail for the first time.

One in six of the girls interviewed by the Howard League were black - black women of all ages are grossly over-represented in the prison population.

Many of the girls were convicted of violent crimes, but most involved fights with other teenagers. Most have actually been victims of a abuse or neglect in the family or in care. But there is no rehabilitation or support in British prisons.

There are no special programmes in place for young women, who are "at risk of emotional bullying, physical assault and self-harm". Self-harm and "cutting up" are endemic in women's prisons. One probation officer said that for young people, "There is a danger that [self-harm] in an adult prison becomes learned behaviour."

One 15-year-old told interviewers that she was often locked up alone for

18 hours a day and had had to hang herself. Another 16-year-old had been sexually abused by her father and had attempted suicide three times in two years. In 1996 there were 1,054 incidents of self-harm in women's prisons in a population of 2,010.

Hard drugs like heroin and crack are widely available. In fact, heroin use is growing in prisons.

The introduction of mandatory drug tests, which routinely involve humiliating body searches, has actually increased heroin use. Heroin remains in the body for only a few days, so prisoners are switching to it from cannabis, which lingers for weeks. Positive tests result in time added on to sentences.

In one of the interviews, a 17-year-old explained that she had been jailed despite never having been in trouble with the police before. She spent an hour telling the interviewer how "dirty and useless" she felt, having been subjected to sexual abuse as a child. After discovering that a 40-year-old woman who had befriended her was in prison for child abuse, she wrote to the Home Secretary arguing that young women should not be jailed.

Jack Straw never bothered to reply.

This report proves, beyond doubt, that prison does not work. It reinforces the very worst experiences of the abused and damaged young women. The whole labour movement should back the Howard League's call for Jack Straw to ban the use of prison for women under 18. ■

Louise Woodward trial

The real price of cheap childcare

AT THE end of October a court in Cambridge, Massachusetts found 19-year-old Louise Woodward guilty of second degree murder. She faces at least 15 years in prison, unless the judge can be persuaded to overturn the verdict.

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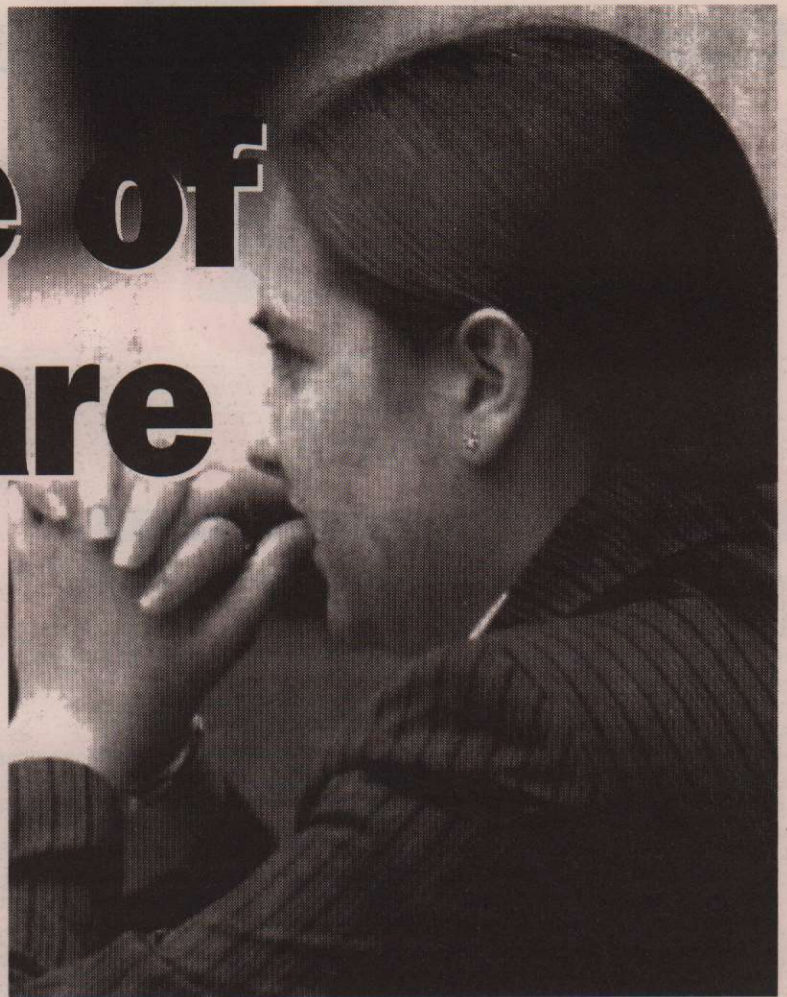
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from anyone but rich individuals and companies unless they are almost guaranteed in advance to win.

Claims for damages for injuries are often straightforward and many solicitors will take them on this basis. But many claims are fraught with risk. Because of this, lawyers will not want to take them on in the first place, leaving many of the most vulnerable people unable to go to court.

The poor will be unable to spend money investigating whether their case is likely to win. They will not be able to afford the private insurance now on offer against the risk of having to pay your opponents' costs if you lose. Children who are brain-damaged at birth will not be able to get a lawyer on a no-win, no-fee basis because their cases are difficult to prove.

Labour's Lord Chancellor - Lord Irvine of Lairg - has had to defend these indefensible measures. As with David Blunkett's arguments over tuition fees, Irvine has tried to suggest that these changes are aimed at saving taxpayers' money from going to privileged layers - in this case "fat cat lawyers".

But Irvine - hardly a slim kitten himself with a ministerial salary exceeding £100,000 a year - is just trying to divert attention away from the real

effects of the proposals. Everyone knows lawyers earn far too much money. Their income has risen on average by 20% a year over the last six years. But why should this mean refusing legal aid to poor people who can't afford a lawyer? Why not just tax the fat cats?

The people who lose out from the abolition of legal aid are the very poorest. They lose out financially, and they lose the basic right to justice.

This is not just a question of money. A democratic principle is at stake. The working class faces another obstacle to access to the capitalists' legal system. The power of the employers over the exploited and oppressed will be strengthened even further.

Justice in capitalist Britain is and always will be justice for the ruling class. But that does not mean that revolutionaries should sit back and let Labour erode our democratic rights. We demand of Labour:

- no cuts to legal aid
- tax the rich to massively expand free legal services
- extend legal aid to cover representation at industrial tribunals
- for a national legal service under democratic control
- election of all judges. ■

British prisons

Young girls jailed by the dozen

THE BRITISH media has expressed hypocritical outrage that Louise Woodward is locked up in an American jail "alongside junkies and rapists". When it comes to the reality of conditions for teenagers in British prisons there is silence.

The truth is that teenage girls - some as young as 15 - are languishing in adult jails, in breach of the UN Convention on the rights of the child.

The Howard League for Penal Reform has revealed that the number of women under 18 sentenced to prison has more than trebled in the last five years. Nearly half have no previous convictions or are in jail for the first time.

One in six of the girls interviewed by the Howard League were black - black women of all ages are grossly over-represented in the prison population.

Many of the girls were convicted of violent crimes, but most involved fights with other teenagers. Most have actually been victims of abuse or neglect in the family or in care. But there is no rehabilitation or support in British prisons.

There are no special programmes in place for young women, who are "at risk of emotional bullying, physical assault and self-harm". Self-harm and "cutting up" are endemic in women's prisons. One probation officer said that for young people, "There is a danger that [self-harm] in an adult prison becomes learned behaviour."

One 15-year-old told interviewers that she was often locked up alone for

18 hours a day and had tried to hang herself. Another 16-year-old had been sexually abused by her father and had attempted suicide three times in two years. In 1996 there were 1,054 incidents of self-harm in women's prisons in a population of 2,010.

Hard drugs like heroin and crack are widely available. In fact, heroin use is growing in prisons.

The introduction of mandatory drug tests, which routinely involve humiliating body searches, has actually increased heroin use. Heroin remains in the body for only a few days, so prisoners are switching to it from cannabis, which lingers for weeks. Positive tests result in time added on to sentences.

In one of the interviews, a 17-year-old explained that she had been jailed despite never having been in trouble with the police before. She spent an hour telling the interviewer how "dirty and useless" she felt, having been subjected to sexual abuse as a child. After discovering that a 40-year-old woman who had befriended her was in prison for child abuse, she wrote to the Home Secretary arguing that young women should not be jailed.

Jack Straw never bothered to reply. This report proves, beyond doubt, that prison does not work. It reinforces the very worst experiences of the abused and damaged young women. The whole labour movement should back the Howard League's call for Jack Straw to ban the use of prison for women under 18. ■

Eightieth anniversary of the Russian Revolution

Bolshevism and fight for workers

Eighty years ago this month, the Russian working class, led by the revolutionary Bolshevik Party, took state power into its own hands and began to build the world's first workers' state.

From 1917 to 1923 that state was a beacon of liberation, achieving more progress for millions of people in six years than capitalism in Russia had in almost a century.

Millions of workers outside Russia were inspired by these events and the international communist movement was forged as a mass alternative to the tame official "socialist" parties that had finally made their peace with capitalism when the First World War erupted in 1914, three years before the Russian Revolution.

The subsequent descent of the Soviet Union into bureaucratic tyranny under Stalin and his colourless

successors has been used by the enemies of revolutionary socialism – the reformists and the bosses themselves – to spread the lies that the Russian Revolution was inevitably doomed, that the revolutionary Bolsheviks were the political parents of the Stalinist bureaucrats and that capitalism is a superior economic and political system to socialism.

Today, the collapse of the Soviet Union is cited as the ultimate proof of these lies.

But Stalinism was born out of the isolation of the Russian Revolution. To achieve his victory Stalin had to destroy Bolshevism – literally murdering the old Bolsheviks as well as crushing all forms of working class democracy and independent political life. Stalinism was the enemy of Bolshevism, not its continuation.

And the Soviet Union's collapse was, above all, the

collapse of Stalinism not the collapse of socialism. It is not proof that revolution is doomed or that socialism is impossible. It is proof of what Bolshevism had always argued – that without the international victory of revolution without an international revolutionary Bolshevik party, capitalism will survive, and with it poverty, insecurity, famine, oppression and barbaric cruelty.

In commemorating the eightieth anniversary of the Russian Revolution (7 November according to the modern calendar) we Trotskyists make clear that we do not mourn the passing of Stalinism. Our tradition is that of the Bolsheviks.

Their leadership of the Russian Revolution, as **Richard Brenner** shows in this article, was pivotal to its victory. The lessons of their role will be pivotal to our victories in the future.

ON THE evening of 24 October 1917 (old style calendar), the forces of the Military Revolutionary Committee of the Petrograd Soviet were ordered into action against the Provisional Government of Alexander Kerensky.

Fearful of the independent organisation of the workers and soldiers in their democratic councils of delegates (Soviets), and aware of the threat of a rising, the bourgeois government ordered the arrest of the Military Revolutionary Committee (MRC) and the closure of the Bolshevik party's printshop. Troops and Red Guards loyal to the Soviet were dispatched to reopen the printshop, and throughout the night the revolutionary forces occupied railway stations, junctions, the telephone exchange and (having learnt from the failure of the Paris Commune to do so) the state bank.

The government covered in the Winter Palace, bereft of any significant mass support. On the morning of 25 October soldiers, sailors and Red Guards loyal to the Soviet stormed the Winter Palace, virtually without having to fire a shot. That morning the Second All-Russian Congress of Soviets voted to accept power from the Petrograd Soviet and the MRC. The first workers' state was born. Victory followed in towns and cities across Russia in the days and weeks to come.

The objective basis for the triumph of the revolution lay in the class dynamics of Russian society. The Tsarist monarchy, its bureaucracy and the remnants of the feudal nobility were rotting away. The exhaustion of their historical role in the face of the development of capitalism in Russia was accompanied by their political, intellectual and moral decay. As a ruling class, they were incapable of taking society forward.

Intervention

The industrialisation of Russia had taken place at an accelerated pace through the intervention of foreign European capital. The domestic industrial bourgeoisie, small, lacking roots in the mass of the people and thus politically weakened, faced a proletariat, which even though it constituted a relatively small proportion of the overall population was nevertheless highly concentrated in large scale manufacturing enterprises. Its very existence and concentration enabled it to lead the whole of society forward.

Alongside the workers existed a vast

land-hungry peasantry. The fact that prior to the revolution a mere 30,000 private landlords owned as much land as 50 million peasants constituted, as Trotsky was later to remark, "a ready-made programme of agrarian revolt". Last, but by no means least, the revolutionary democratic character of the struggles of subject nationalities against Tsarist and Great Russian oppression added to the instability of the existing social order.

Major tasks of the bourgeois revolution remained unsolved in Russia in 1917. Yet the bourgeois class was too weak to resolve them. The revolutionary overthrow of the Tsar in February 1917 did not lead to the consolidation of a stable bourgeois regime able to expand and develop the forces of production on a capitalist basis. It produced a prolonged period of instability, of dual power, in which only the working class was able to defend and extend the democratic and revolutionary gains.

Experience

Yet the maturity of the objective conditions for social revolution would not alone have been sufficient to resolve the crisis in the interests of the working class. The instrument of the October revolution was the Bolshevik party, a mass workers' party founded on scientific socialist principles. The positive experience of the October victory and the negative experience of subsequent revolutionary defeats from Germany and Spain through to Bolivia and Iran serve only to emphasise the indispensability of this subjective factor.

Not one critic of the role of Bolshevism in the revolution has ever been able to demonstrate, either in theory or in practice, how it is possible for the proletariat to take power without the leadership of a vanguard party armed with a clear conception of its aims and the political resources to achieve them.

Central to the Bolsheviks' success was the party's correct strategic understanding of the nature of the revolution that unfolded after February 1917. This understanding was forged through democratic debate within the party and through the living experience of struggle.

The initial response of the leading cadre of the party to the overthrow of the Tsar and the establishment of a bourgeois Provisional Government demonstrated their political confusion in the new situation. The editors

of the Bolshevik paper *Pravda* – Kamenev, Muranov and Stalin – wrote on 7 March that the main aim of the revolution was the overthrow of the Tsarist autocracy and feudalism, not the overthrow of capitalism. This task was relegated to the distant future. For this reason the paper argued that the Provisional Government should not be overthrown, and that it was, despite being staffed by bourgeois ministers of the conservative and liberal parties, a force for the defence of the revolutionary gains of February.

Among the Petrograd worker militants this line was deeply unpopular. Leaflets were issued proclaiming the urgent necessity of advancing towards the struggle for socialism. Likewise Lenin, deeply alarmed by the conservatism of the "old Bolsheviks", argued against the Kamenev and Stalin line. He struggled to re-arm the party theoretically to face its revolutionary tasks.

Even before his return to Russia from exile, he wrote in his *Letters from Afar* that the Petrograd Soviet, far from endorsing and accepting the power of the Provisional Government, should regard itself as the basis for a new government counterposed to that of the bourgeoisie:

"Side by side with this government – which as regards the present war is but the agent of the billion-dollar 'firm' 'England and France' – there has arisen the chief, unofficial, as yet undeveloped and comparatively weak workers' government, which expresses the interests of the proletariat and of the entire poor section of the urban and rural population. This is the *Soviet of Workers' Deputies* in Petrograd, which is seeking connections with the soldiers and peasants, and also with the agricultural workers, with the latter particularly and primarily, of course, more than with the peasants."

He went on to write that anyone arguing that the workers should support the Provisional Government would be "a traitor to the workers", because the government was bound hand and foot to imperialist capital, and therefore to the continuation of the war and the consolidation of the rule of the property owners, even through the restoration of the Tsarist monarchy if necessary.

Upon his return to Russia, Lenin submitted to the party his document *Tasks of the Proletariat in the Present Revolution*, known as the *April Theses*. Realising the need for the embryonic organs of working class rule to be used

for the purpose of smashing and supplanting the repressive apparatus of the capitalist state, he argued for the revolution to go forward to a second stage. The dual power existing between the Soviets and the Provisional Government was to be terminated by the transfer of all power into the hands of the Soviets.

It took many weeks for Lenin to win the party to his strategic conception of the next stage through which the revolution must pass. When he first read the *April Theses* to party leaders he was greeted with stony silence, many muttering to each other that he had taken leave of his senses. Against him the schematic argument was raised by right wing Bolsheviks such as Kamenev, echoing the arguments of the Mensheviks, that the bourgeois democratic revolution must first be completed before the workers could pass on to the seizure of power.

Democracy

This argument has been since raised by "Communist" parties in revolutionary crises the world over as an excuse for ceding power to the national bourgeoisie in the name of "democracy" or "national liberation". Yet Lenin, in the *April Theses*, recognised that with the formation of Soviets the proletariat had developed organs of power that represented, for the workers, a higher form of democracy than any bourgeois parliament; and which could enable the working class to exercise its own dictatorship over the bourgeoisie. He wrote:

"Not a parliamentary republic – to return to a parliamentary republic from the Soviet of Workers' Deputies would be a retrograde step – but a Republic of Soviets of Workers', Agricultural Labourers' and Peasants' Deputies throughout the country, from top to bottom. Abolition of the police, the army and the bureaucracy. The salaries of all officials, all of whom are elective and displaceable at any time, not to exceed the average wage of a competent worker."

Eventually Lenin's strategy for advancing the revolution triumphed in the party. Without this triumph there would have been no October Revolution. But the Bolsheviks could not have come to power simply by virtue of having developed a correct strategy. When the Tsar was overthrown the Bolsheviks were the party of only a minority of the vanguard workers. Even in Petrograd at the end of March only 40 of

the 3,000 delegates to the Soviets adhered to the Bolshevik fraction.

In order to win the majority within the Soviets for their assumption of power, the Bolsheviks adopted principled but flexible tactics, designed to force the Mensheviks and Socialist Revolutionaries (SRs) to cease equivocation and compromise and to expose them if they did not. Bolshevik slogans directed at these parties demanded they either form a workers' and peasants' government based on the Soviets, or make way for those who would. This adoption of correct tactics was the second condition for the Bolsheviks' success.

The bourgeoisie was unable to deal with mounting problems of war, land reform and national liberation struggles. Aware of the weakness of the Provisional Government, the openly bourgeois parties concluded a deal with the Menshevik and SR leaders of the Petrograd Soviet for the entry of Soviet representatives into the government. This "popular front" was supposed to tie the workers to the bourgeois regime. But it had the opposite effect.

The Soviet "compromisers" steadily undermined their own support in the working class and the peasantry. They continued support for the war and even prepared a deeply unpopular and costly offensive. They postponed calling elections to the Constituent Assembly and sought to limit the power and authority of the Soviets.

Sabotage

By making concessions to the bourgeois and feudal landowners the Mensheviks and SRs failed to satisfy peasant land hunger, which exploded yet again from the time of the harvest onwards in violent land seizures by the peasant masses. As the capitalists looked to sabotage the economy in order to break the organisation and militancy of the workers, factory committees asserted authority over the operation of management at a plant level.

Aware of the growing contradiction between the interests of the workers and peasants and the policies of their principal parties, the Mensheviks and SRs, the Bolsheviks utilised tactics which went far beyond mere denunciation and literary exposure of their opponents. They sought to exploit the disparity between the illusions that the masses entertained in their leaders and the concessions to the landowners and bourgeoisie that those same lead-

Down with the Bureaucrats' power

ers were making.

The demand "Down with the Ten Capitalist Ministers" was designed to force the Mensheviks and SRs to break their coalition with the openly bourgeois parties. As Trotsky was later to explain this in no way reflected Bolshevik illusions in the role of the Mensheviks and SRs, but was a method of exposing them:

"When the Petersburg masses, led by our party, raised the slogan: 'Down with the Ten Capitalist Ministers!' they thereby demanded that the posts of these ministers be filled by Mensheviks and Narodniks [SRs]. 'Messrs Bourgeois Democrats, kick the Cadets out! Take power into your own hands! Put in the government twelve (or as many as you have) Peshekhonovs, and we promise you, so far as it is possible, to remove you "peacefully" from your posts when the hour will strike - which should be very soon!"

Programme

Similarly the demand "All Power to the Soviets!" was both a call on the existing Soviet leaders to assume full power independently of the bourgeoisie, and a programme for the proletarian revolution itself.

Through its tactics, which were carried into life during every crisis of the regime, through its daily agitation on every issue confronting the workers, peasants and soldiers, the Bolsheviks gained ever more support in the ranks

of the masses. On the eve of the October insurrection they had secured a clear majority in the Soviets for their policies. They embarked upon the insurrection as a genuine mass revolutionary party of the working class.

The accusation that the October insurrection was not a workers' revolution but a mere Bolshevik coup is as old as the revolution itself. It was raised immediately after the insurrection at the Second Congress of Soviets on 25 October by Martov, the leader of the Menshevik Internationalists. It has been the stock-in-trade of imperialist propaganda ever since.

In reality Lenin and the Bolshevik leaders were, throughout 1917, careful to distinguish between a seizure of power based on a majority in the Soviets and a mere conspiratorial putsch in the tradition of Auguste Blanqui. In July 1917 the Bolsheviks sought to avoid being provoked into a premature rising in view of the lack of support throughout Russia for the assumption of power by the Soviets.

On 20 July Lenin argued that if the Petrograd Bolsheviks were to utilise mass discontent against the war and disenchantment with the Provisional Government in order to seize power, they would be unable to hold it. His words should be imprinted on the memory of every revolutionary socialist who has ever faced the lie that October was no more than a coup:

"We have said more than once that

the only possible form of revolutionary government was a soviet of workers', soldiers' and peasants' deputies. What is the exact weight of our fraction in the Soviet? Even in the Soviets of both capitals, not to speak of others, we are an insignificant minority."

The Bolshevik leaders attempted to restrain soldiers, workers and sailors who were carried away by an insurrectionary mood in July, encouraged by anarchists and the adventurist majority in the Bolshevik military organisation who had opposed Lenin's arguments. Unable to prevent an ill-timed insurgency, the Bolsheviks rightly placed themselves at its head, seeking to ensure the maximum discipline. Yet the July rising led to a serious tactical defeat and the temporary imposition of counter-revolutionary repression.

It was in the aftermath of the reactionary revolt of General Kornilov in August that the Bolsheviks regained and greatly increased their influence and prestige. Calling on the Soviet leadership to arm the workers in defence of the revolution, the Bolsheviks again utilised a form of the united front tactic, combining unity in action with supporters of the Soviet leadership with a relentless critique of the SR leader Kerensky for his vacillation and cowardice.

Vanguard

The result of this policy was that in September the Petrograd Soviet voted overwhelmingly for a Bolshevik resolution calling for a revolutionary workers' and peasants' government. As the masses lost patience with the compromisers and conciliators of the Menshevik and SR parties, the Bolshevik party steadily took over the leading political role in the majority of Soviets across Russia. It was as the party of the majority of the industrial working class that Bolshevism led the October insurrection. As Lenin put it:

"[In July] we still lacked the support of the class which is the vanguard of the revolution. We still did not have a majority among the workers and soldiers of Petrograd and Moscow. Now we have a majority in both Soviets. It was created *solely* by the history of July and August, by the experience of the ruthless treatment meted out to the Bolsheviks and by the experience of the Kornilov revolt... We have the majority of a *class*, the vanguard of the revolution, the vanguard of the people, which is capable of carrying the masses with it."

This was not the voice of Blanquist *putschism*, but of the workers' revolution. To the various critics of Bolshevism and of Lenin's party in 1917, present day revolutionaries must give a clear response. In history no class has ever taken power other than through its vanguard. The October Revolution had the support of a clear majority of the working class, due to the tireless campaign of the Bolshevik party to raise the political consciousness of the Russian proletariat to the level of its historic tasks.

Without the Bolshevik party, its intransigent insistence on the strategic aim of Soviet power and its tactical flexibility, there would have been no October and no assumption of power by the working class. ■



Trotsky addresses the workers of Moscow in Red Square... in the days before the bureaucrats built their lofty podiums

Y is for Youth

BY DAVE GREEN

YOUNG PEOPLE suffer systematic oppression in capitalist society.

In Britain young workers earn, on average, far less than their adult counterparts. Employment protection is minimal. You have to work in a job for two years before you are protected against unfair dismissal, which leaves young workers without basic rights such as compensation for redundancy.

The government is considering a lower minimum wage for workers under 26. State benefits were abolished for all under 18-year-olds by the Tories. There are no plans to reinstate them. The Jobseekers' Allowance has been cut by £10 a week for young people.

In the former colonies of Asia, Africa and Latin America, young people suffer even more brutal and unrestrained exploitation. The case of the blind girl of 10 earning under £1 a day sewing "Eric Cantona" footballs in India is just the most recent example of this everyday injustice. Nor is it the worst.

Rights

In the slums and shanty towns of Brazil, homeless children huddling in doorways are the target of organised assassinations in a murderous campaign of "social cleansing" by police and paramilitary gangs.

Youth are denied basic democratic rights. In Britain people who are old enough to fight and die "for their country" are deemed too young to vote for the governments which decide on war and peace. A propaganda campaign against "youth crime" justifies the current move by Jack Straw towards curfews - the suspension of young people's civil rights. In school, youth are prevented from exercising any control over the administration or content of their education. Blind obedience is instilled as a positive virtue. This prepares the future worker for the labour discipline that capitalism demands, and gives servitude its ideological legitimisation.

Sexual repression is also fundamental to the oppression of young people. In the family the sexuality of the child is taboo - condemned to silence and ignorance. The sexually active youth is persecuted - masturbation and under-age sex are stigmatised as shameful and "damaging".

At the same time, silence and the culture of obedience create the very conditions in which the sexual exploitation and abuse of children can flourish - whether under the tyrannical prison-conditions of "care" institutions or within the smothering moral confusion of the family.

All of this oppression is rooted in the material conditions and social relations that shape our lives. The fundamental source of this oppression lies in one of the base units of capitalism: the family, one of the most important institutions for what Marxists call the *reproduction of labour power*.

The main productive work of capitalism is carried out in the factory, mine and office. But the vast amount of work that must be done to get today's workers back to work the next day and to nurture the workforce of tomorrow is carried out in the family home. Domestic work is done at no cost to capitalism. And in the isolation of separate families, the

ideology of discipline and obedience is instilled in the future generation.

Capitalism reinforces this family unit through the systematic oppression of women and homosexuals; alternatives to the nuclear family are discriminated against in law. Young people are prevented from living where they want, they are paid less than other workers, are stopped from going out at night in order to reinforce their subordination to the family wage, the family regime and the family's care.

But oppression produces the spirit of rebellion. Young people are often to the fore in movements of resistance. The predecessor of the Bolshevik Party - the RSDLP - made great headway among radical students in the late 1890s. The Bolshevik party itself was made up predominantly of teenagers and young workers when it took power in 1917.

Today, from the streets of Northern Ireland to the townships of South Africa and the refugee camps of Lebanon and the West Bank, young people everywhere are in the vanguard of revolutionary struggles against racism, oppression and imperialism.

The reason for this lies not only in the weight of oppression that young people face. Their relative lack of conservatism is because they have not experienced the full weight of bourgeois ideology or the accumulated defeats that can demoralise and exhaust older generations. The youth are by nature directly concerned with the future. This makes them especially receptive to revolutionary ideas.

Organise

At the same time the conditions under which young people live can create real barriers to their recruitment to a revolutionary political party. This is why in the history of the revolutionary movement special efforts have been made to reach out to young people and organise them in the struggle for socialism - in a revolutionary working class youth movement.

This movement should be organisationally independent of the party, while the party should endeavour to persuade the youth to adopt a consistent Marxist world view and a principled programme.

In 1916, Lenin explained why this is necessary, not merely as a tactic but as a principle:

"The middle aged and the aged often *do not know how* to approach the youth, for the youth must of necessity advance to socialism *in a different way, by other paths, in other forms, in other circumstances* than their fathers. Incidentally, that is why we must decidedly *favour organisational independence* of the Youth League, not only because the opportunists fear such independence, but because of the very nature of the case. For unless they have complete independence, the youth will be unable either to train good socialists from their midst or prepare themselves to lead socialism forward."

The task of revolutionaries today is to reach out to the new generation in whose hands the future of the planet lies, to apply the rich lessons of the history of the revolutionary movement and organise the working class youth for the obliteration of all oppression, exploitation and war. ■

ITALY: Communists rescue government

From chaos to compromise

LED BY the former Stalinist Democratic Party of the Left (PDS), the ruling "Olive Tree" coalition in Italy wants vicious public spending cuts as part of a plan to get Italy inside the public spending limits for membership of the European single currency.

Key to the spending cuts is an attack on pensions. Prime Minister Romano Prodi brought forward a draft budget that would savage working class pension entitlements. The main trade union leader allied to the Prodi/PDS government, Sergio Cofferati, agreed – in an unprecedented move – to put pension rights up for negotiation in the 1998 budget, thus removing the threat of a French-style trade union upsurge in response to the pension cuts.

The Olive Tree coalition, made up of the PDS and fragments of Christian Democracy, is propped up by the votes of the Rifondazione Comunista, the left wing Stalinist party led by Fausto Bertinotti. On Thursday 9 October Rifondazione threw the Italian government into crisis. Having propped up the Prodi government for 16 months, Rifondazione Comunista was faced with a point blank decision: vote for the budget or see the fall of the first ever government led by a mass bourgeois workers' party in Italy.

For months the left inside Rifondazione and in the unions had been calling for Bertinotti to end his informal support for the ruling coalition. On 9 October he did just that, denouncing Cofferati as a class traitor and precipitating the resignation of the Prodi government.

As well as an end to pension cuts, Bertinotti demanded: the creation of 350,000 jobs for unemployed youth in the south of Italy, to be paid for by a clamp down on middle class tax evasion; a reduction of the working week to 35 hours with no loss of pay; a removal of all hospital charges for the chronically ill, pensioners and unemployed; and a commitment to the defence of state education.

On TV, on the evening of the rupture, with the whole of the Italian press, parliament and stock exchange lined up against him, Bertinotti was in fighting form, taking on all comers and spouting Marxist rhetoric. The atheist Bertinotti, indulging in more than a little irony, told journalists that "only God can save this government".

But, as the left in the Italian workers' movement knows well, whenever Bertinotti is at his most combative, it means that he is looking for a concession from the ruling class, not its destruction.

In just one week in October Italian politics swung from governmental collapse to rotten compromise. The working class got a promise of a 35-hour week some time early next century. The ruling class got its vicious anti-working class budget through parliament and avoided an early election.

Paolo Barbone reports from Italy.

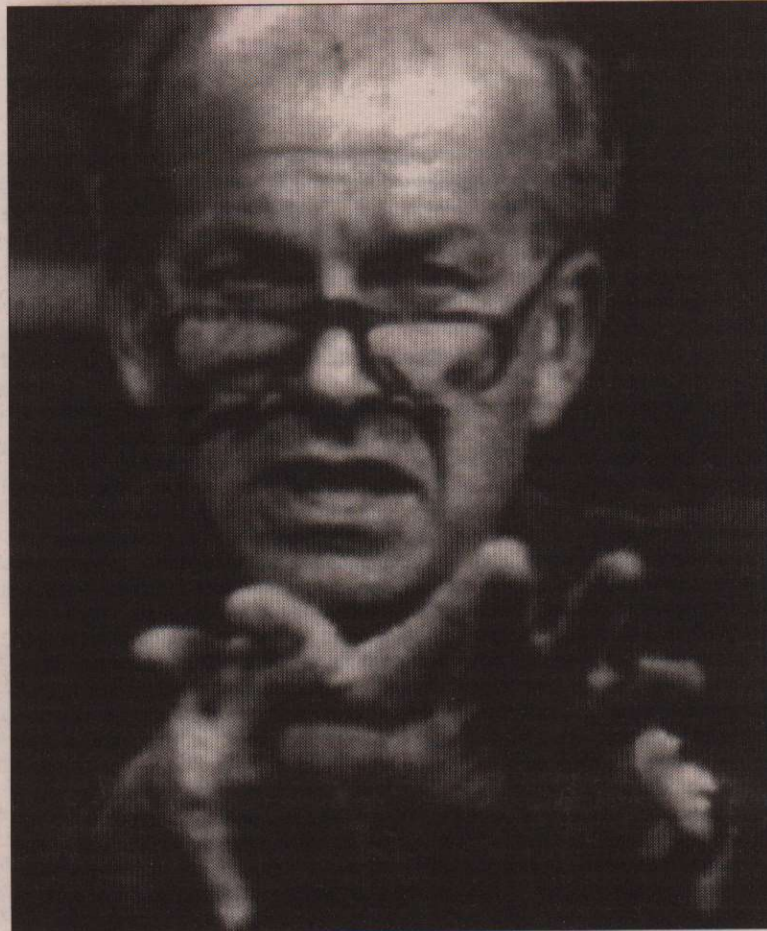
Within a week Bertinotti got his concessions. On 15 October Prodi announced that agreement has been reached with Rifondazione for a one year governmental programme that will take this government up to the end of 1998.

In return for Bertinotti's continued support for the anti-working class policies of the Olive Tree government, Prodi promised to legislate for a reduction in the working week to 35 hours by 2001 and to exempt manual workers from the pension cuts. In addition he agreed to divert £1.7 billion from the privatisation of Italy's Telecom industry to a new job creation scheme in the South, and to put the privatisation of the state electricity company on hold.

Not God, but plain old secular reformist horse trading, saved the PDS-led government. Bertinotti's "victory" was to ride out a growing wave of opposition to his collaboration with the Prodi government.

Was it a victory for the working class? Undoubtedly the Italian bosses were heavily critical of the concessions wrung from the Prodi government. And many Italian workers were keen to see the first supposedly pro-worker government continue. Bertinotti knew he risked losing support if Rifondazione were seen to be the ones to bring down the government.

But more far-sighted commentators have seen the episode, rightly, as "a small hold up on the road" to their real goal, early entry into the single currency with the working class made to foot the bill. By helping resolve the government crisis and by diverting the anger of



Bertinotti, leader of RC and saviour of the bourgeoisie

the working class into a compromise on the budget, Bertinotti has performed a sterling service for the Italian ruling class.

Since the collapse of the post-war system of corrupt, coalition rule through the Christian Democrats and

Forza Italia, the cleaned up ex-fascists of the Alleanza Nazionale, and the far right bigots of the Lega Nord – ended in electoral catastrophe. The only remaining option, and the one best guaranteed to succeed, is the current government of right-reformists and centre-liberals. Only they have the chance of persuading the Italian working class to make the sacrifices needed to pay for Maastricht.

Faced with the possibility of mass resistance to the cuts, combined with a governmental crisis and an early election (the Olive Tree could not survive without Rifondazione's informal support), the bosses took the soft option held out by Bertinotti. Promises of palliative job creation schemes and 35-hour legislation three years down the road were made.

By that time, however, the bosses fervently hope that a new coalition of their own right wing representatives will be in power and Prodi's promises just so much torn-up paper.

As for the left in Rifondazione, Bertinotti's moment of glory has currently taken the wind out of its sails. The RC left is made up of three tendencies: a hard-line old Stalinist tendency around Giovanni Bacciardi and two ostensibly "Trotskyist" groups. The largest consists of supporters of the USFI, led by Livio Maitan around the magazine *Bandiera Rossa*; the other is *Proposta Comunista*, a group of former USFI members led by Marco Ferrando and Franco Grisolia.

Together the three groupings had formed the official opposition at the last congress of Rifondazione, combining to put forward the "Second Motion" – for a break with the Olive Tree coalition – which, though defeated, got more than 8,000 votes.

A long-planned conference of the groups supporting the Second Motion coincided with the governmental crisis. About 300 oppositionists turned up

to Teatro Vittoria in Rome, to hear their leaders, assembled under the banner "Progetto Comunista", badly disorientated by the left turn of the party leadership.

They had collectively refused to confront the Bertinotti leadership over its support for Italian imperialist intervention and immigration bans during the Albanian uprising. They chose instead to fight Bertinotti on pensions. But by the time the conference met, the situation had changed.

Bacciardi received a rapturous applause when he said that Rifondazione was a neo-Keynesian and reformist party and that Progetto Comunista needed to be a revolutionary opposition to it and to clearly demarcate its own politics from that of Rifondazione. However he then revealed to the audience his hope that "by next Tuesday, Wednesday or Thursday we will all be in the streets under the banner of Rifondazione being held by comrade Bertinotti".

Less than a month after he made that speech, Bacciardi left RC, accusing the party of undergoing a "genetic mutation". Bacciardi quit without a fight because he was incapable of fighting Bertinotti.

Livio Maitan also won rapturous applause at the Rome conference of the left, after a virtuoso display of pseudo-Marxist hot air. But the only concrete thing he said was that for "tactical reasons" Rifondazione shouldn't break the coalition with the Olive Tree at the local elections. He said communism was "a long way off" and therefore Rifondazione had to be a "plurality" encompassed in a "common vision".

Ferrando had recently opposed Bacciardi and Maitan when they had supported Bertinotti's call for an end to the informal coalition in government, but its retention for the local elections. But Ferrando offered no other than continued loyal opposition to Bertinotti within RC.

Ferrando's intervention was a classical piece of centrism. While talking of the "need for revolution" he did little more than cover Bertinotti from the left by using precisely Bertinotti's rhetorical devices: i.e. he attacked the PDS and trade union leaders as traitors while only saying that Bertinotti needed to lead RC into opposition "with coherence".

The lesson for the working class is clear. Rifondazione, held up by its supporters as the last best hope on earth for Stalinism and left reformism, is a failure. At best it can only divert working class anger into reformist double dealing. At worst it can become the last best hope for the ruling class in the true tradition of all left reformist parties.

The concessions wrung from the government by Bertinotti are minor compared to the major attack on living standards contained in the whole budget designed to meet the single currency criteria.

As for the left, their schema that Rifondazione is the only vehicle through which the Italian revolutionary party can be reconstituted continually hampers the creation of a real revolutionary pole of attraction, whether inside RC or outside it. It leaves them prey to the constant swings and turns of a wily left-reformist leader who has no intention of leading the working class through anything other than a series of sell outs. ■

WHO'S WHO

PDS: Democratic Party of the Left - former mass communist party (PCI), now leading the coalition government.

Rifondazione Comunista (RC): Smaller split off from PDS, gained 12% of votes at last election.

Socialists, the Italian ruling class has been without a political machine that could effectively carry through the big attacks on the working class that are needed in order to qualify for the Maastricht criteria.

The right wing option – the alliance between the right wing Thatcherites of

Ireland: Disband the RUC!

PEACE PROCESS or no, the nationalist community in the Northern Ireland remains under threat from loyalist killers.

In County Fermanagh local people who had been on a nationalist march have been warned by the RUC that their personal details may have fallen into the hands of loyalist paramilitaries.

The security files were stolen from an RUC vehicle. Not only are the RUC unable to explain how the files went missing but they are also

unclear as to why these files, with personal details about some of the marchers, were in a dog handlers' van on a legal parade from Enniskillen to Roslea.

This is the police force in which nationalists across the north are being told they must trust for their security.

Around 2,000 people have been warned over the years that personal details have fallen into the hands of loyalists. A significant number of these have later been murdered. The files

were all courtesy of the RUC.

This latest incident proves beyond doubt that the RUC can never be trusted, least of all during the "peace process". It shows why every socialist and republican in the Six Counties must fight for the disbandment of the RUC and why every British socialist and democrat should support that fight.

■ Troops out of Ireland now!
■ Self determination for the whole Irish people

Ontario: general strike looms

Teachers defy bosses' law

“WE'RE QUITE prepared to be out for some time”, announced Ontario Teachers' Federation President Eileen Lennon as 125,000 Canadian teachers began an illegal, indefinite strike.

The unofficial walk-out without strike pay, involving five different unions across Canada's most populous province and affecting 2.1 million pupils, started on 27 October in the midst of wind-whipped snow.

By 30 October, the stakes had been dramatically raised. Ontario's Attorney General, posing as a champion of “the public interest”, had obtained an injunction, which the unions have so far resisted.

The unions originally called the strike against a piece of legislation known as Bill 160, introduced by the provincial Tory government of Mike “the knife” Harris. His self-styled “Common Sense Revolution” has unleashed an endless series of cuts in welfare, health and education spending since 1995.

His relentless pursuit of a Thatcherite agenda has also fuelled an unprecedented wave of protest by public sector workers and service users, which last year included a rolling programme of provincial and city-wide one-day strikes, culminating in a 300,000-strong march through Toronto (see *Workers Power* 205, November 1996).

Bill 160 began as the brainchild of then Education Minister John Snobe-

BY G. R. McCOLL

len, a high-school drop-out turned entrepreneur, whose confrontational style eventually got him the sack from Harris' cabinet. With the provincial Tories' popularity in opinion polls in freefall, Harris appointed his key fixer Dave Johnson to replace Snobelen.

At first, the teaching union bureaucrats voiced the hope that Johnson was someone with whom they could do business.

They were swiftly proved wrong as the new education boss made it plain that he had no intention of making any substantive changes in a 262-page bill which dramatically undermines local school boards, increases provincial government control over spending levels and erodes union gains over preparation time and teacher/pupil ratios.

Amid negotiations supposedly aimed at averting the strike, Harris let slip to the media that his government was committed to stripping another \$500 million (£215 million) from Ontario's education budget, which he had already slashed by 8% the previous year. Cuts of this magnitude could mean the loss of some 10,000 teaching jobs.

If there had been any doubt beforehand, Harris' bombshell ensured that the strike was on.

The Ontario Tories are clearly gambling on winning back public opinion during a prolonged confrontation on the basis of the inconvenience caused

to parents and the perception that teachers are a pampered elite. More importantly, major concessions to the teachers over Bill 160 could fatally damage the Harris government's pit bull reputation with Canadian bosses.

The Tories' decision to use the law to try and kill the strike is a high-risk strategy. The teachers may lack majority support in opinion polls, but they are part of an Ontario labour movement which remains largely undefeated.

“there's more at stake than the teachers' strike”.

Union militants in CUPE, the CAW and elsewhere must work flat out to ensure that Ryan's radical rhetoric is translated into action. They need to pile the pressure onto the OFL bureaucrats to call a general strike without delay, while at the same time independently laying the basis for such an all-out fight to succeed.

Meanwhile, however, there is the very

The Ontario strikers urgently need to exercise control over this crucial fight through the creation of cross-union strike committees in every locality

Members of other unions honoured and frequently joined teachers' picket lines in a number of cities in the first week of the strike.

The leaders of both the Canadian Union of Public Employees (CUPE) and the Canadian Auto Workers (CAW) have made verbal pledges of solidarity strikes in the event of the courts moving to sequester the teachers' union funds and/or jail officials.

Declaring that “we all have a stake in this strike”, CUPE's Sid Ryan has called for an urgent meeting on Monday 3 November of the Ontario Federation of Labour (OFL) to discuss a province-wide general strike. Ryan is absolutely right when he thunders that

real danger that the teachers' union leaders could bow down in the face of a court ruling upholding the Attorney General's initial injunction. Rank and file teachers are extremely angry at the damage done to their own conditions and Ontario's education system by the provincial Tories, but so far the union leaders have bureaucratically stage-managed the struggle against Bill 160.

The Ontario strikers urgently need to exercise control over this crucial fight through the creation of cross-union strike committees in every locality, democratically elected by and accountable to strikers' mass meetings.

These in turn should form the basis for a province-wide strike committee

to scrutinise and challenge the performance of the union leaders. The aim must be to ensure that Eileen Lennon and co. do not lose their nerve when faced with the prospect of losing their personal freedom or union expense accounts. Or, if they do, others who are prepared to fight must be ready and able to take their place.

Given what is at stake for the whole of Ontario's labour movement, delegate-based support committees involving representatives of all the major unions need to be convened as soon as possible.

These should transform themselves into local committees of action which would administer the day-to-day running of a general strike – from deciding which essential services to maintain to organising the defence of picket lines against attack whether by scabs, the Ontario Provincial Police or the Mounties.

Committed class fighters in Ontario are rapidly approaching a crossroads. After 18 months of guerrilla warfare, both sides are squaring up for a decisive showdown. There is every reason to believe that, with determined leadership and appropriate tactics, a famous victory can be won.

Such a victory would spell the end of Mike Harris' “Common Sense Revolution” and with it the most vicious ruling class regime in modern Canadian history. It would also send a shock wave right through the ranks of Canada and North America's rulers. ■

Congo-Brazzaville: civil war

No support for rival warlords

LAST MONTH the latest stage in the continuing battle for influence among the big western powers in Africa unfolded in Congo-Brazzaville.

The interests of French imperialism had been damaged by events in Rwanda and in the Democratic Republic of Congo. But in Congo-Brazzaville French imperialism saw its loyal agent, General Denis Sassou-Nguesso, sweep to power after a four-month civil war.

What was once the capital city, Brazzaville, is now a rubble-strewn ghost town. Its 800,000 inhabitants have fled to the countryside. The remaining forces of ex-President Pascal Lissouba have been driven out.

Unlike the scenes in neighbouring Congo, earlier this year, there were no jubilant crowds to greet the victorious rebels. Sassou-Nguesso had been dictator until 1992 when his regime was overthrown and Lissouba was elected as president. That ended years of one-party rule under which a vast and bloated state bureaucracy had grown up.

Even after these events, Sassou-Nguesso maintained his own militia and bodyguard of 45 men. No wonder the workers of Brazzaville didn't consider themselves “liberated”.

It was the attempt by President Lissouba to disarm this bodyguard on 6 June which sparked the recent civil war. Sassou-Nguesso and his supporters took to the streets and fighting continued August.

In August, Lissouba extended his term in office which was due to expire and formed a government of national unity made up of 40 opposition parties with Bernard Kolelas as prime minister.

Sassou-Nguesso countered this



Taking cover in war-torn Brazzaville. Civilians were the real victims in the war.

move with a call for a transitional prime minister with extended powers and the support of all parties. When his proposal was rejected, his forces took up arms again.

Alongside the fighting, both sides set up their own mediation processes. Lissouba called in his ally, Laurent Kabila, the president of the Democratic Republic of Congo. Kabila and Lissouba called for an African “Interposition Force” including Angola, Rwanda, Congo and Uganda – all countries now backed by the USA and Britain.

Meanwhile, Sassou-Nguesso rejected this and enlisted the support of Gabon, Equatorial Guinea, Cameroon, Chad, Central African Republic, Sen-

BY KEITH SPENCER

gal Togo and Benin – all Francophone countries. In September, they issued a statement calling for a cease-fire and for a UN peacekeeping force.

By this time, however, Nguesso had decided his best chance was to press ahead for a military solution. He dismissed the UN solution, saying:

“There have to be two people to sign a cease-fire. The last time we signed an accord which we honoured it was Lissouba who broke it by sending in helicopter gunships.”

Laurent Kabila replied with border raids, ostensibly to clear troops who were shelling Kinshasa which lies just across the river Congo from Brazzaville.

However, Sassou-Nguesso's troops were the only forces who were attacked. Lissouba was also backed by rebel troops of the Angolan enclave of Cabinda and possibly Unita forces as well.

But the involvement of Angolan rebels only served to broaden the conflict as the south of Congo-Brazzaville was quickly overrun in October by Sassou-Nguesso's forces in alliance with regular Angolan troops. By mid-October the civil war was over with General Sassou-Nguesso proclaimed President.

The very next day France officially recognised Nguesso's government. At the outset of the conflict France called for the sending of African troops from

eight countries to Congo-Brazzaville, its own troops having been withdrawn from Africa this year. This proposal was vetoed by Britain and the United States.

However, France can now resume its relationship with one of its older allies. Furthermore, the French oil company Elf, which had its monopoly of extraction rights removed by Lissouba, will again be able to look forward to a more profitable relationship with Sassou-Nguesso.

Overall the victory of Sassou-Nguesso will have the effect of temporarily halting the progress of the Uganda-Rwanda pro-US axis in Africa. For France, it has proved a much-needed boost to its flagging interests in Africa.

For the people of Congo-Brazzaville, however, the future is more of the past: misery and poverty. Unlike the recent events in Mobutu's Zaire, this war was not a legitimate struggle for survival by part of the population as with the Banyamulenge in eastern Zaire. Nor did it become a popular uprising against a hated dictator.

It was two warlords, each with their own private militia, fighting it out for who would rule over the country and profit from the subordination of the people. The masses had no interest in who won. Defending the limited rights they have won since 1992 necessarily meant giving no support to either Sassou-Nguesso's Cobra militia or Lissouba's Zulus.

The people of Congo-Brazzaville have nothing to look forward to in either Sassou-Nguesso's one party state or Lissouba's presidential dictatorship. Their future lies in a workers' republic, as part of a socialist federation of African states. ■

Colombian oil workers' strike

Fighting for their union and their lives

THE COLOMBIAN oil workers' union, Union Sindical Obrera (USO), has called a national strike in defence of the union and the lives of its members.

Following a dramatic increase in repression against union activists, including death threats against the union's President Hernando Hernández, a national delegate conference, meeting in the capital city Bogotá, voted to convene a nation-wide strike.

The union has seen its members murdered, jailed and threatened in the past but now there is a new offensive to stop the unionisation of new oilfields. The government is also trying to renegotiate the contracts it has with the multinational oil companies.

Current contracts share the profit made from the extraction of oil, with 70% going to Colombia and 30% going to the private company. Now it wants to change this, allowing the multinationals to gain 75%, leaving the government with just 25%!

Both the Colombian government and the multinationals, which include all the major oil companies in the world, see the USO as an obstacle to their plans.

Previously the union had been able to call a halt to the changing of national contracts with these oil companies.

The national delegate conference has been forced to call national action even though the risks to strikers are enormous. In one oilfield paramilitaries invaded the workers' living quarters. In Cantagallo workers were crossing the river Magdalena; they were forced to disembark and show their identity documents by paramilitaries. The paramilitaries checked off the identities against a list of names they were carrying.

Two local leaderships in Bucaramanga and Puerto Boyacá have virtually stopped functioning due to threats by paramilitaries who made it clear the union is the enemy.

These paramilitaries and death squads have told the union it is not free to organise in these areas. In Sabana de Torres workers affiliated to the union have been given an ultimatum by a death squad to disband the local committee.

Faced with this situation the union had to either fight or see the union slowly broken apart through the use

of terror.

The demands of the strike are for the right to trade union organisation and in defence of the lives of USO members and the existence of the union itself. Secondly USO has demanded an end to the surrendering of national wealth to the multinationals and in particular that the agreed contracts with these companies are not renegotiated for their benefit.

The USO realises that it is fighting against the odds as it is facing the combined might of some of the biggest companies in the world and a state with a bloody history of repression.

But it also knows that it is not alone and that already there has been international interest over what is happening in Colombia and the connections between oil production, the destruction of the environment and the violation of human rights.

That is why the union has called on organisations internationally to take the following action:

- Trade unions, student organisations, environmental groups, human rights groups and individuals should demand the immediate liberty of the 17

USO prisoners that currently languish in Colombian jails.

- Trade unions and other organisations should send delegations to Colombia and specifically to the areas where the USO is trying to organise to monitor and report on what is happening there.

- Workers and their unions should boycott any Colombian oil. This is particularly important among maritime, transport and oil industry unions. The USO is also asking that workers boycott any oil bound for Colombia.

- All trade unions, student groups, etc should organise protests, pickets of embassies, demonstrations and meetings in solidarity with the USO struggle.

Finally the union will need financial assistance. This will be especially important for the strikers and their families as it is very likely that the union will have its funds frozen during the strike.

The USO does not have a bank account where money can be sent direct for the strike fund. Money can be sent to Freddy Pulecio, the USO's representative in Britain at present. ■

Send money and messages of solidarity to:

Freddy Pulecio
c/o The Coalition Against BP in Colombia, BCM Box 7750,
London WC1N 3XX.

Cheques should be made payable to the "Coalition Against BP in Colombia" and marked "Strike Fund".

Send letters of protest against the intimidation of the USO and demanding the release of the 17 prisoners to:

Señor Presidente Ernesto Samper Pizano,
Presidente de la República
Palacio de Nariño
Carrera 8 No. 7-26
Santafe de Bogotá, Colombia.
Telegrams: Presidente Samper Pizano, Bogotá, Colombia
Telexes: 44281 PALP CO
Fax nos: + 57 1 284 2186/
289 3377/286 7434

Fax messages of support/solidarity or copies of protest letters to:

USO National Office
Fax no: +57 1 287 1861

Dockers greet Colombian brother

FREDDY PULECIO, a representative of the Colombian oil workers union, spoke to Liverpool dockers last month.

Hundreds of striking dockers and their supporters gave Freddy Pulecio a standing ovation as he explained the situation he and his fellow trade unionists face in Colombia. Freddy was invited to speak at the Liverpool dockers' weekly mass meeting to put the case for international solidarity.

The meeting started with reports of the solidarity action the Liverpool dockers were themselves receiving and it became obvious why the dockers rate international links so highly. Terry Teague, from the Stewards' Committee, reported to the meeting that one ship which had left Liverpool had reached its intended destination, California, only to find that the longshoremen there were refusing to unload ships from the Liverpool docks.

The ship diverted to Canada, only to meet the same response from the dockers there. Finally on arrival in Japan the ship was unloaded onto the quayside but still the dockers refused to transport any of the goods with connections to the Merseyside Docks and Harbour Company.

The meeting showed that the dockers remain determined to carry on their fight against casualisation and for the reinstatement of all the sacked workers. Both Freddy and the other invited speaker, Nigel Cook, demonstrated the results of successful implementation of casualisation and the denial of trade union rights. Nigel Cook had been sacked after attempting to organise low-paid, mainly Asian, women and young workers who were being paid £3 an hour for 12 hour night shifts. Nigel himself had been forced to take the job as a result of the JSA.

Freddy Pulecio started his speech by saluting the Liverpool dockers for what he described as a fight against the world-wide casualisation of labour. He continued saying that in the pursuit of



Freddy Pulecio of the Colombian oil workers' union

oil and mineral wealth the multinationals in Colombia had persecuted those who attempted to join or organise trade unions. Now every significant oil company is in Colombia and the government has been pursuing a policy of privatisation of the oil industry for over ten years.

Above all, he argued, it was necessary for trade unionists in Colombia to make contact with workers in Britain because it is the heartland of the most aggressive multinational, British Petroleum (BP). Along with other multinationals and the state oil company, Ecopetrol, BP had helped set up a security apparatus that now contained 10,000 personnel. The Colombian army was also present in the oil fields along with scores of death squads.

His union, Union Sindical Obrera (USO), had opposed the selling off of the oil industry from the start. They did not want to see the multinationals sucking Colombia dry. The USO pointed out that Colombia is a country amazingly

rich in mineral deposits yet this wealth was not reflected in the living standards of the ordinary people.

For daring to stand up to both the government and some of the biggest corporations in the world the USO had earned their hatred. It has been the target of repression both legal and illegal. Eighty three USO members have so far been murdered. A total of 128 USO members and activists have been "displaced", that is they are told at gun point to stop their union activities. They refuse to do this but have to leave their job.

Seventeen of their comrades are currently in jail facing sentences of between 40 and 60 years under the charge of rebellion. This is in a justice system where the defence cannot even cross examine the prosecution's witness.

This level of repression has become more acute over the past period and there has been an offensive against the union leadership. USO's President, Hernando Hernández, had recently

received death threats. Other activists trying to organise the union in the newer oil fields had been told in no uncertain terms by leaders of the death squads that the union was not welcome and was in fact the enemy.

Freddy Pulecio made it clear the USO is not prepared to stand idly by and see its members and leaders threatened, jailed or be shot in the back. The USO had called for a national delegate meeting to vote for strike action in defence of the very life of the union and its members.

Freddy finished his speech stressing

the common attack that workers face all over the world. The oil workers in France get a monthly wage of \$3,000, he said, and the capitalists say that is too much. In Colombia the oil workers wage is about \$800 and they say that is also too much. Even the average monthly wage of \$200 for a Colombian worker is too much. How low will the capitalists try to force our wages?

The dockers replied with a standing ovation and Jimmy Nolan of the Stewards' Committee declared that Freddy was a brother of the Liverpool dockers. ■

Dockers reject Morris' sell out

LAST MONTH the Liverpool dockers refused once again to sell their jobs. They voted, in a secret ballot imposed by their own union, by 213 to 97 to reject an offer from Mersey Docks and Harbour Company (MDHC). The deal which the company were offering was a £28,000 pay off to each sacked dockerman or 40 jobs.

After forcing the ballot on the dockers, TGWU boss Bill Morris tried to further distance the union from the dispute stating that:

"On the basis that the company has decided to withdraw its offer, I regret that it has not proved possible to find a negotiated settlement to this dispute."

He may now attempt to cut off the hardship money being sent to the dockers. If he does he should be met with strong resistance. The dockers know what to expect from the likes of Morris. Bobby Moreton, one of the stewards, declared that if the union "pull the plug on us, we will go to every trade union in the land for money".

Labour continues to

refuse to use the government's shares in the MDHC to put pressure on the company to reinstate the sacked dockers.

The dockers are determined to continue their fight to win back their jobs. They are continuing to picket the port, raising money and winning international solidarity. The mood on the picket line is one of determination. In the words of one of the sacked dockers:

"We are standing here every day because an injustice was done to us. We were sacked unfairly and we want to be back in there. They are trying to blackmail us, telling us to take the money or fuck off. But it doesn't work that way."



Liverpool dockers march on

The Pentonville Five and the 1972 dockers' strike

Beating the anti-union laws

IN 1974 Labour won a general election on a tide of working class militancy. Ted Heath's Conservative government was effectively driven from office by repeated defeats it suffered at the hands of the working class.

The miners' victory in 1972 started the process of the Tories' disintegration. The miners' strike of 1974 delivered the killer blow. But it was the dockers' struggle in July 1972 that humiliated the judiciary as well as the government and brought Britain to the verge of a general strike for the first time in half a century.

Heath came to power in 1970 with an early version of what we now call Thatcherism – high unemployment, anti-union laws and free market economics. The anti-union laws were contained in an all-inclusive Industrial Relations Act (IRA). In one fell swoop it banned blacking and solidarity strikes and imposed strike ballots. These laws were all enforced through a special National Industrial Relations Court (NIRC), headed by a high court judge, Sir John Donaldson.

Policy

The TUC and the big union "barons" like Jack Jones and Hugh Scanlon adopted a policy of "non-recognition" of the Act or the Court. This policy of protest and non-compliance was supported more vigorously from below than from above. The shop stewards' movement and organisations like the Communist Party led Liaison Committee for the Defence of Trade Unions (LCDTU) mobilised against the anti-union legislation, while the official leaders sat on their hands.

Various one day actions, mobilised around the slogan "Kill the Bill" (the Industrial Relations Bill) drew workers into overtly political strike action. In December 1970, 600,000 struck. In February 1971, 130,000 marched against the Bill. In March 1971 two million went on strike.

In February 1972 the sections of the IRA against blacking and secondary picketing became operative. They were too late to use against the miners.

The dockers, though, were already engaged in guerrilla warfare against the port employers and the wave of containerisation that was destroying their jobs. Containerisation threatened dockers' jobs because one docker and a crane lifting a container could do the work of 20 men. Hull dockers were blacking a container firm and their shop stewards' committee chairman, Walter Cunningham, was summoned before Donaldson and the NIRC. He defied them and refused to attend the court.

On Merseyside the St Helens firm, Heaton Transport, was being blacked too. In this latter case the TGWU was arraigned by the NIRC and fined £55,000. This provoked an undignified scramble to climb down by the top union officials.

The TGWU Executive issued a circular ordering its stewards to respect the law. Jack Jones was on the verge of withdrawing the militant stewards' credentials to prove his compliance. Vic Feather, the TUC General Secretary, announced that the TUC "had not realised" that the NIRC had the status of a high court when they decided to ignore it.

Picketing

The rank and file and their shop stewards were not having any of this grovelling. Attention shifted to the Chobham Farm Container Depot that the London dockers were picketing. The NIRC acted again. On 14 June it ordered the arrest of three shop stewards. The LCDTU, the car workers, the printers and the Scottish miners immediately threatened strike action if the arrests went ahead.

In the face of this determined resistance the Tories lost their nerve. An

Twenty-five years ago five dockers – all of them shop stewards – were jailed under the anti-union laws brought in by the Conservative government of Edward Heath. Within days mass strike action had freed them and the Tories were humiliated. **Dave Stockton** recalls this great event and draws the lessons for the fight against anti-union laws that continues to this day with dockers, this time the heroic Liverpool strikers, again at the forefront.

obscure legal functionary, the "Official Solicitor", appeared from nowhere. His kindly duty, it seemed, was to represent the unrepresented. He appealed "on behalf of" the defiant dockers and lo – the court was moved to mercy. In Shakespeare's words "the quality of mercy was not strained" that summer! The Appeals Court simultaneously let the T&G off its £55,000 fine.

Perhaps the courts and the Tories thought Jack Jones and Vic Feather would prove Christian gentlemen and proceed to obey the law in future. Left to them this would undoubtedly have happened. But the National Ports Shop Stewards' Committee – representing 42,000 dockers – was engaged in a serious struggle against the employers' containerisation offensive. They were not about to be bought off by a few "friendly" judgements.

They had a nine point charter. Its demands included the bringing of all ports, including the inland container depots, into the Dock Labour Scheme and the nationalisation of all ports under workers' control.

To win these goals the picketing and blacking was maintained. For picketing Midland Cold Storage the dockers were pounced upon by the NIRC. On Friday 21 July, five stewards – Cornelius Clancy, Anthony Merrick, Bernie Steer, Vic Turner and Derek Watkins – were incarcerated in Pentonville Prison. Sir John Donaldson thundered:

"By their conduct these men are saying that they are above the rule of law. No court could ignore such a challenge."

Loyalty

Reg Prentice, the Labour spokesman, said: "I have no sympathy with them and I don't think they deserve the support of other workers." As ever Labour was more concerned to prove its loyalty to the bosses' laws than to the interests of the workers. And this was "old" Labour – well before Tony Blair turned New Labour into a loud supporter of Tory anti-union laws.

Up and down the country millions of workers thought differently to the learned judge and the wretched Labour



The dockers' call to arms

traitors. Across the country dockers, lorry drivers, non-registered container depot workers, builders, car workers and miners came out on strike and in support of the dockers. Between 21 and 26 July a rolling general strike from below began to gather force. Trades councils, like Liverpool, called for an all-out indefinite strike until the Five were released.

At last, under the enormous pressure of the rank and file, the "leaders" of the labour movement stirred themselves. The General Council of the TUC on a motion from the engineering union, the AUEW, called a one day general strike for Friday 28 July.

They may have only wanted a one day strike to let off steam but no rank and file worker doubted that it would have continued and grown after that. After all many of the workers who struck, in defiance of the laws, had already been out for longer than one day and were clearly prepared to stay out longer still.

The rank and file militants across every industry realised that the attack on the dockers, if successful, would mean they would be the next victims of the anti-union laws. They understood that solidarity action with the dockers served the interests of the whole class.

The Tories, faced with this whirlwind of mass action, totally collapsed. Again the Official Solicitor pleaded. Again the judges' hearts were miraculous-

ly softened. The Pentonville Five were carried shoulder high by tumultuous crowds from the prison. Working class political strike action on a mass scale and the threat of a general strike had overturned "the rule of the bosses' law". Such is the power of the general strike weapon – even as a threat.

Defeat

Alas, the rank and file dockers, miners, car workers, printers and others once again proved to be the proverbial "lions led by donkeys". The TUC and the lefts, Scanlon and Jones, did not press on to smash the IRA, to drive the Tories to total defeat. The IRA was left on the statute book, to be used later, against the AUEW. The Tories, in the following year, managed to get away with another legal attack on striking workers. In the face of a builders' strike they used the conspiracy laws to frame 24 building workers. Two of them – the Shrewsbury Two – stayed in prison even after a Labour gov-

ernment was elected in 1974, and after it had repealed the IRA.

When Labour came to power in 1974 it did an enormous favour to the bosses. It set out to demobilise the working class so there would not be any more 1972s. The gains of the early 1970s in terms of shop floor organisation and trade union and political militancy were undermined in the years of the social contract.

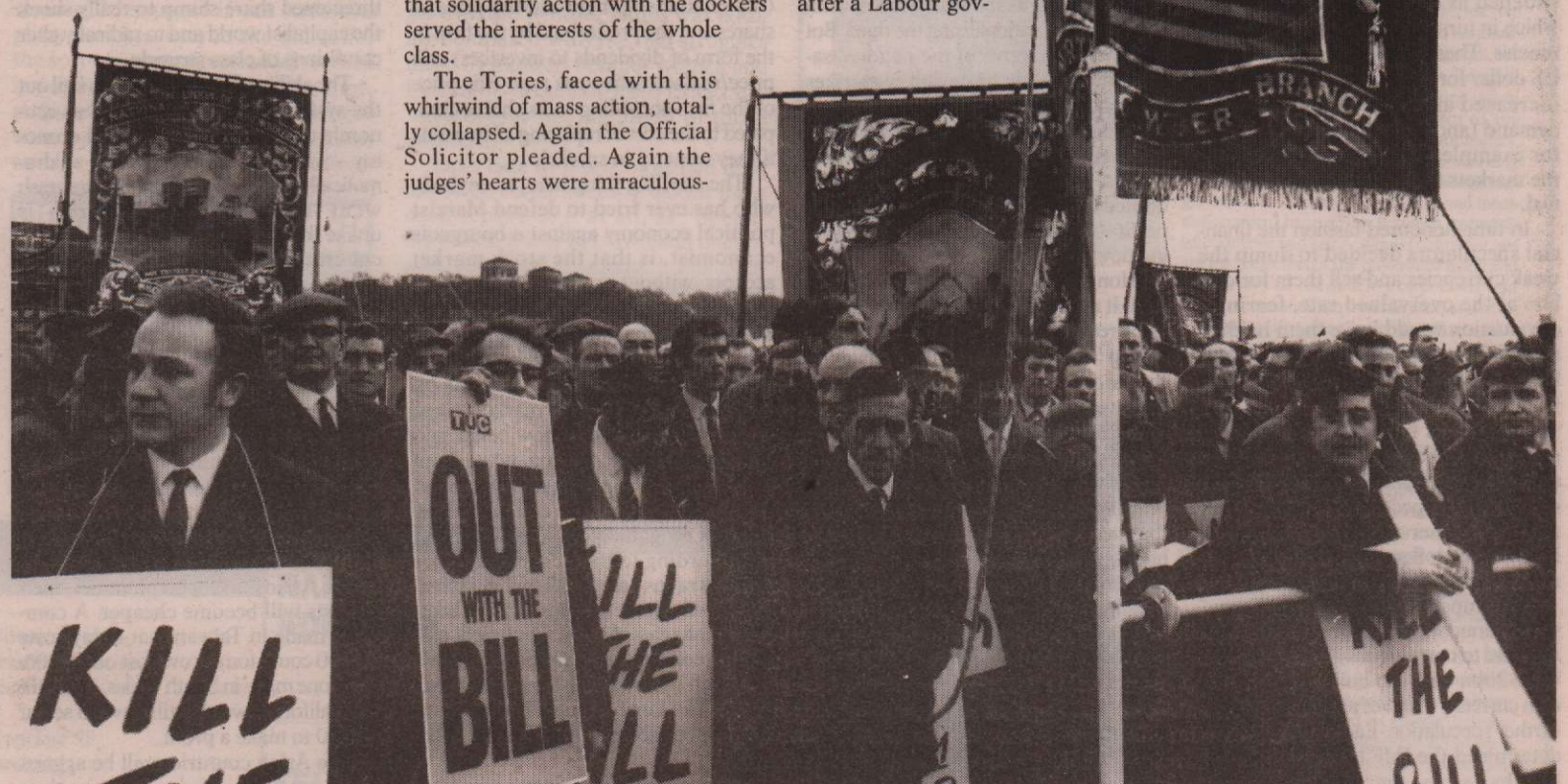
The end result was that the way was cleared for Thatcher, using salami tactics against the working class in order to limit the threat of a generalised response, to impose all and more of the savage measures we had defeated a decade before. In particular, her savagery against the miners' in 1984-85 and her abolition of the National Dock Labour Scheme in 1989 were the ruling class' revenge on the two sections of the working class which had done most to humiliate the Tories during the great upsurge of militancy in the early 1970s.

Laws

Today Tony Blair insists that trade unions must modernise and that part of modernisation means accepting that the anti-union laws are a good thing and are here to stay, mass strikes and pickets are a bad thing and must be banished forever. His reason has absolutely nothing to do with "modernity". It is because he knows the bosses value laws that limit the ability of the working class to defend itself, its jobs, wages and rights. He values them because they may come in useful when he faces trouble from public sector workers.

The most modern approach we can take to all of this is to demand the complete repeal of the Tories' anti-union laws. But given Blair's hostility to such a demand we need to convince more and more workers of the truth that was demonstrated during the 1972 struggle.

Trade union freedom will be recovered by the methods of mass direct action and the general strike, of solidarity, and by a clear understanding that every serious class struggle is a political struggle.■

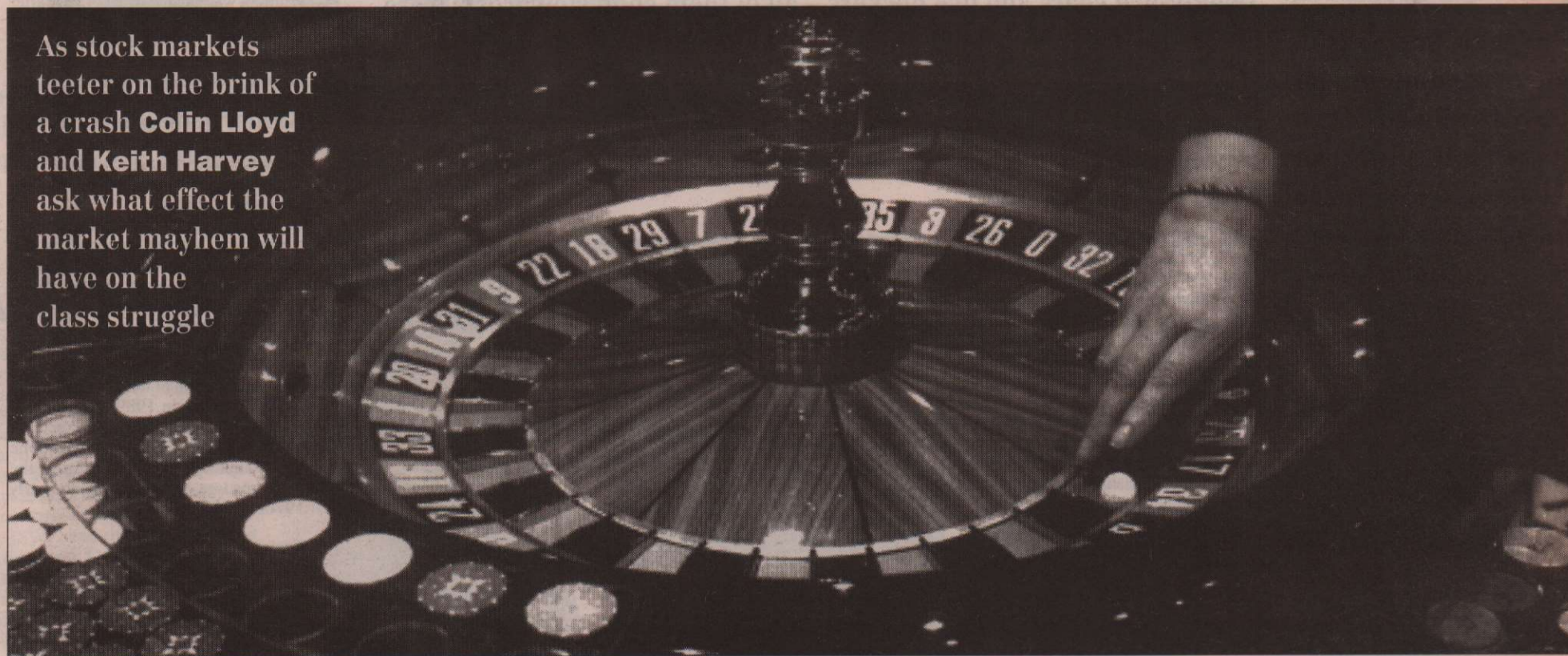


One of the many Kill the Bill demos against the Industrial Relations Act

Stock market mayhem

From crash to slump?

As stock markets teeter on the brink of a crash Colin Lloyd and Keith Harvey ask what effect the market mayhem will have on the class struggle



LAST MONTH the world's stock markets crashed, wavered, bounced back up a bit and, as we go to press, are still reckoned to be teetering on the edge of another fall.

In the real world, meanwhile, there seems to have been little change. No factories have closed in the USA or Europe as a result of the crash, inflation remains what it was before, and city business people are still buying New York-style lofts in Docklands as fast as the builders can fit them out.

The trigger for the share price falls was a small downturn in the industrial economies of the so-called Asian Tigers. In the 1990s a second tier of Asian Tigers - Malaysia, Thailand, Indonesia and the Philippines - have attracted a lot of investment to take advantage of their cheap labour. Their economies boomed, growing around 8% a year as they exported cheap consumer goods all over the world.

Protracted recession in Japan and market saturation elsewhere led to reduced growth rates. As this happened the financial markets judged that the governments could not indefinitely sustain their current account deficits.

These deficits are the result of taking in more money and imports and less outward investment and exports. They widened as export growth stumbled which in turn put pressure on their currencies. These had been pegged to the US dollar for some time but as imports increased and exports fell then the demand (and price) for the Thai baht, for example, fell away, suggesting to the markets that it needed to be devalued.

In time-honoured fashion the financial speculators decided to dump the weak currencies and sell them for dollars at the overvalued rate, fearing a devaluation would leave them holding worthless national currencies, and/or hoping to buy them back later when they were much cheaper.

Concerted selling in the summer caused first the Thai and then Indonesian, Malaysian and Philippines currencies to fall to speculative trading, their tiny foreign reserves no match for the billions of US dollars moving around the uncontrolled financial markets.

The impact on the "real economy" will be dramatic in these countries. First, they had to borrow heavily from the IMF (\$10-20bn each) to build up their foreign currency reserves as a hedge against further speculation. Each government is determined the IMF loans will be paid back by slashing already meagre welfare and education programmes and wage

freezes and sackings in state industries.

Secondly, in order to stem the selling of currencies the governments jacked up interest rates to make them attractive. This translates directly into higher costs of borrowing and repaying loans made to firms.

Finally, all these countries borrowed

the cake". They gamble here, with our money, for high stakes.

Anybody who has invested in unit trusts with a large percentage of far eastern companies has now found out that, as the adverts say "share prices may go down as well as up". This inevitably knocked the confidence of the red braces

If the market moves from instability to crash, and the real economy from tentative growth to slump, we will see some capitalists running to Labourite politicians, pleading for them to reinvent state regulation, nationalisation and even welfare benefits

US dollars heavily in the 1990s to finance the industrial boom. Now overnight the cost of servicing these dollar loans has gone through the roof, forcing every company who borrowed to find 30% or more of their national currencies to pay them back. Firms will close as their profit margins will not sustain that kind of shock.

In South Korea, also affected, three of the big private monopolies (chaebols) have gone bankrupt. The government has let two go to the wall while it is in the process of nationalising the third. But even here the terms of the nationalisation have already provoked big strikes from the workers involved.

Soon the stock markets felt the effect of the currency collapse. Stock markets list the nominal assets of the firms quoted there. Many of them now faced profit collapse which led to a rapid marking down of the price of their shares.

Hong Kong was the first to feel the chill. It now has little industry but a massive property and financial sector. In the run up to June this year, when it returned to Chinese sovereignty, Hong Kong was awash with Chinese mainland and overseas money preparing for a spate of growth after the take-over. Property values went into the stratosphere.

Companies in the region damaged by the currency collapse sought to get their hands on ready cash by selling shares in Hong Kong; banks that were now holding doubtful loans saw their assets marked down. The result: the Hong Kong stock market fell by 40% in a three month period.

Hong Kong had a knock on effect in western stock exchanges for two reasons. First, the far eastern stock markets are where the people who manage our pensions and mortgages get their "icing on

and champagne brigade, since their mega salaries are mainly in the form of bonuses for profits made. No profits, no Porsche.

The second reason for the crash is that the US stock market is already overvalued, compared to the real-world companies they are buying and selling against. Share dealers always keep an eye on the relationship between the share price of a company and its real value. They do this by looking at the price/earnings ratio (the relationship between the price of shares and the profits paid by the firm in the form of dividends to investors) and price/replacement costs ratio (the price of the firm according to its shares compared to the cost of replacing all its assets if they went up in smoke).

The startling thing here, to anybody who has ever tried to defend Marxist political economy against a bourgeois economist, is that the stock market accepts, without question, the concept of a real value that underlies the market price of a commodity. This, according to capitalism's hired professors, is an invention of Karl Marx: there is no such thing as value - only market prices.

The yuppie traders know better, and they suspect the stock markets are about to give them a textbook demonstration of the existence of a true exchange value underpinning the ephemeral price.

According to the *Economist*, price earnings ratios - across all capitalist companies - are at their highest for decades. This means that, despite the current economic recovery, their profits are growing much more slowly than their share prices. The same is true when we compare the replacement value to the share value.

Here too, shares are way overpriced. The *Economist* reports research into the

last 29 times in history when this situation occurred. On each occasion share prices were forced back into line with real values through a stock market crash: "If history were to repeat itself in this way, the Dow [the US stock market] would fall by two thirds in real terms."

Despite these fears, the late-October market crash did not turn into a financial free-fall. This was because both the dealers and many of the middle class investors refused to believe that this was the crunch. They started buying, unconcerned about the long term effects.

But if there comes a day when the stock markets make anything approaching the two-thirds adjustment envisaged by the *Economist* the small investors will, just as they did in the great crash of 1929, lose their cool spectacularly. We are talking about the owners of pensions, PEPs, TESSAs and endowment mortgages starting to lose money hand over fist.

The middle classes will run to the central banks crying for help. The people who have voted for parties who closed down hospitals and public services, privatised our utilities, all in the name of market forces will suddenly be crying for state intervention, subsidy and even - as today in South Korea - nationalisation.

And therein lies the potential of the threatened share slump to really shock the capitalist world and to radically alter conditions of class struggle.

The ability of central banks to bail out the system is a political as well as economic question. The globalised economy - whose interlinkages were so dramatically demonstrated as the share crash went "full circle" in 24 hours - is unlike the national capitalist economy in one crucial respect: it has no centralised state to run it, only competing superpowers headed by the USA.

If capitalism really were a system of equilibrium and effortless self correction, this would be no problem. But it is not: every crisis and crash hurts one capitalist more than another, one country more than another.

What will be the effect on the world economy in the next year or so? First, there is likely to be renewed pressure for protectionism in the USA and Europe. As the Asian currencies plummet, their imports will become cheaper. A computer made in Taiwan that today costs £1,000 could tomorrow cost only £700, while one made in South Wales, or southern California would still have to sell at £1,000 to make a profit.

The Asian countries will be aggressive in marketing their exports as their domestic economies will be in recession.

We cannot rule out major explosions of class struggle in these countries as the workers refuse to pay for the consequences. In turn, the governments are more than capable of military aggression as they seek to divert attention away from their ruinous policies.

Secondly, Japan's economy will remain nailed to the floor, as it has been for most of this decade. Its domestic economy has not responded to two major reflationary packages from the government; its export sector was its only way out. Some 43% of its exports go to east Asia; now these will be severely curtailed as the Tigers choke off their imports as domestic demand shrinks.

The current share crisis is not over. It is impossible to predict the short term outcome. But its mere existence is testimony to irrationality of capitalism as a system: workers can be put on the dole, factories destroyed, whole communities blighted because the system is riddled with crisis.

Thatcherism trumpeted the arrival of popular capitalism and with it the myth of the self correcting market. George Soros, one of the world's richest capitalists, recently passed a far more sober judgement on the system:

"I'm afraid that the prevailing view, which is one of extending the market mechanism to all domains, has the potential of destroying society... It has survived so far only with [state] intervention: the authorities have come to the rescue. If the fluctuation becomes too big... then you can have a breakdown. It will come through political and eventually military events, rather than events merely in the financial markets" (*New Statesman* 31 October 1997)

Soros and capitalists like him do not yet fear a revolution - not because they have the economic answers but because, precisely in the "political and eventually military" spheres, they believe that, in Soros' words, "socialism is dead". They fear emerging nationalism and fascism more than they fear the working class.

If the market moves from instability to crash, and the real economy from tentative growth to slump we will see capitalists like Soros running to Labourite politicians, pleading for them to reinvent state regulation, nationalisation and even welfare benefits.

That is why, as crisis looms, we have to build the alternative - both to nationalism and reformist "socialism" - that can really spell out a future for humanity free of the spectre of breakdown, poverty and war. ■

Hackney schools

Unite against the council

Dear Comrades,

As a local revolutionary socialist, I found Kate Foster's article (September) about the government Inspection Team sent in to Hackney education very welcome. But it does contain two fairly major errors of fact, and there are also two significant points in her political analysis which are wrong.

Firstly, it simply isn't true that Blunkett and co sent in the inspectors because of "poor standards" in schools, not least because (as comrade Foster notes) Hackney schools simply aren't that bad. According to Blunkett's own words, the inspection was launched because of concern that the local education authority "was not doing enough", while his sidekick Byers said that "the schools . . . do not appear to have had the support they would expect" from the LEA.

Their whole emphasis was on the defects of the Council, despite brief reference to faults of the schools. In many people's opinion (mine included) this is a cynical electoral exercise designed to make the government look "tough" on standards in education, at the expense of an easy target (Hackney), with the side-benefit (to the Labour machine) of highlighting deficiencies of Labour's local political opponents.

Secondly, it was the "Transforming Hackney" programme of the current (non-Labour) ruling coalition that brought in the "latest" re-organisation (of many!) in July this year, and in that one Education was split, with schools becoming one of nine "front-line" service areas. Contrary to comrade Foster, the *previous* (1993) re-organisation merged Education and Leisure (as, one must note, in many other local authorities). "Transforming Hackney" matters a lot because of a major fault in comrade Foster's analysis, namely her failure to mention the

struggles of other Hackney workers. These have recently been focused on massive pay, conditions and job cuts under the "Transforming Hackney" agenda.

Another fault is her suggestion that "Tory vandalism" is to blame for the problems in Hackney schools. The fact is that Hackney Council, under Labour, was exceptionally incompetent and corrupt, even by the general standards of British local government.

Examples of this that directly affected schools include the payroll fiasco of 1990 (where thousands of school-based staff weren't properly paid for months on end) and bungling over recoupment, involving the costs of pupils being taught in different boroughs, which seems to have cost Hackney education millions of pounds.

Other well known examples include poor handling of child abuse allegations ("Trottergate") and the abysmal housing service (with 19 estates now listed for hand over to housing associations). Housing problems in particular provide a potential basis for council workers to form alliances with local residents against the council, whoever wins the 1998 elections.

If we are to resist what is going on in the borough, whether at the hands of "old" Labour or of "New" Labour and its Tory and Lib-Dem allies, or of central government, we need to build maximum unity of all workers at the Council, and between them and the consumer-victims of its services. Comrade Foster seems to be making the same error, by focusing almost exclusively on education alone, as did NUT activists with whom I worked during the Jane Brown [a lesbian teacher witch-hunted by the Tory press] affair in 1994.

The long standing racism at the Council, now being belatedly investigated by the Commission for Racial

Equality, is also a basis for mobilising workers and the community together. The local activists' group, Resistance, is organising a public meeting to help build such unity on 18 November 1997.

Comradely
Tony Whelan

The details of the meeting referred to in the above letter are: Hackney Council - What it is and how to fight it; Speakers from Unison, NUT, Tenants, Building Worker Group; 18 November 7.30pm; The Samuel Pepys, Mare Street, London E8

We reply

On the facts, Blunkett had just named and shamed two schools in Hackney as failing. The inspection team may have been told to target the LEA, but they planned to spend two weeks inspecting schools. It was only because of pressure from the NUT that these inspections were scaled down. Both in terms of rhetoric and action, Blunkett has criticised standards in Hackney schools.

The re-organisation you refer to was agreed in July but as far as education was concerned, it has yet to be implemented. The hit squad sent in by Blunkett has insisted these proposals be dropped.

On the analysis, we were quite clear about the role played by Hackney Council. We describe Labour's record on education in Hackney as "one of gross incompetence and vindictiveness".

Finally we would agree with you on the significance of the struggles being undertaken by other workers in Hackney. It is important that links are built between the council unions at a rank and file level and that unity is created between all council workers and the local working class service users.

Diana's death

She was no rebel

Dear Comrades,

In the September issue of *Workers Power* you stated, "Many ordinary people identified with Diana because she rebelled, bucked the system and espoused progressive causes - from HIV to land mines."

Did she really rebel or buck the system of exploitation and social oppression? I didn't think so; promoting good causes through charity is nothing more than a bourgeois trick, so that they can deal in arms (Dodi Fayed for example) and at the same time give to land mine victims.

I remember a few years back when she went to an HIV ward to meet patients there. She was heralded as pioneering the cause of people with HIV as she boldly shook hands with the patients. But when her kids asked her what was wrong with these patients she said they had cancer. So much for promoting awareness.

Did her "depression, bulimia, suicide attempts and ultimately divorce provide a glitzy microcosm of the plight of millions of less wealthy women"? I suppose if you stress the glitzy part yes, maybe she did suffer the sort of oppression that all women in society face. But at the same time, millions of working class women have to face up to day-to-day exploitation and far worse oppression than some-

body from her class would ever have to face. She would never have to work for £2.75 an hour in a supermarket or as a part-time cleaner. Her struggle with the Windsor family was nothing compared with the real struggles faced by millions of other women and I certainly wouldn't have called it a "microcosm" of the plight of those millions.

Let's face it, if one of us had died in her circumstances it would have been reported, if at all, as "Speeding drunk driver kills two and endangers the lives of others"! The progressive causes we fight for would not have been mentioned and not a single tear would have been shed. Why then should we play their game and paint Diana as some sort of martyr who represented the plight of women?

Yours in comradeship
Max (Manchester)

WORKERS POWER

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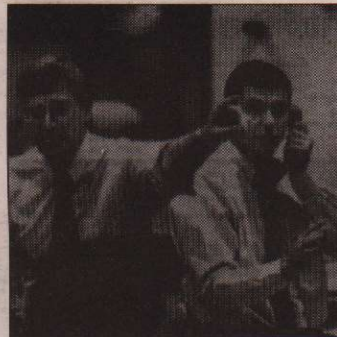
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WHERE WE STAND



Capitalism

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



The Labour Party

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



The Trade Unions

must be transformed by a rank and file movement to oust the reformist bureaucrats, to democratise the unions and win them to a revolutionary action programme based on a system of transitional demands which serve as a bridge between today's struggles and the socialist revolution. Central to this is the fight for workers' control of production. We are for the building of fighting organisations of the working class - factory committees, industrial unions, councils of action, and workers' defence organisations.



October 1917

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



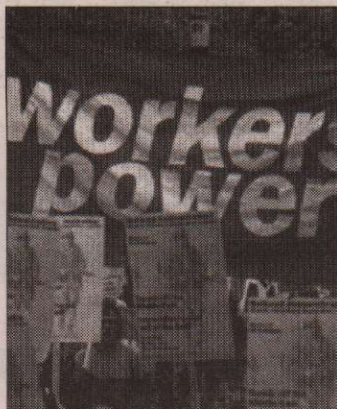
Social Oppression

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



Imperialism

is a world system which oppresses nations and prevents economic development in the vast majority of third world countries. We support the struggles of oppressed nationalities or countries against imperialism. We unconditionally support the Irish Republicans fighting to drive British troops out of Ireland. But against the politics of the bourgeois and petit-bourgeois nationalists, we fight for permanent revolution - working class leadership of the anti-imperialist struggle under the banner of socialism and internationalism. In conflicts between imperialist countries and semi-colonial countries, we are for the defeat of the imperialist army and the victory of the country oppressed and exploited by imperialism. We are for the immediate and unconditional withdrawal of British troops from Ireland. We fight imperialist war not with pacifist pleas but with militant class struggle methods including the forcible disarmament of "our own" bosses.



Workers Power

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

Workers power

Socialism, Internationalism, Revolution

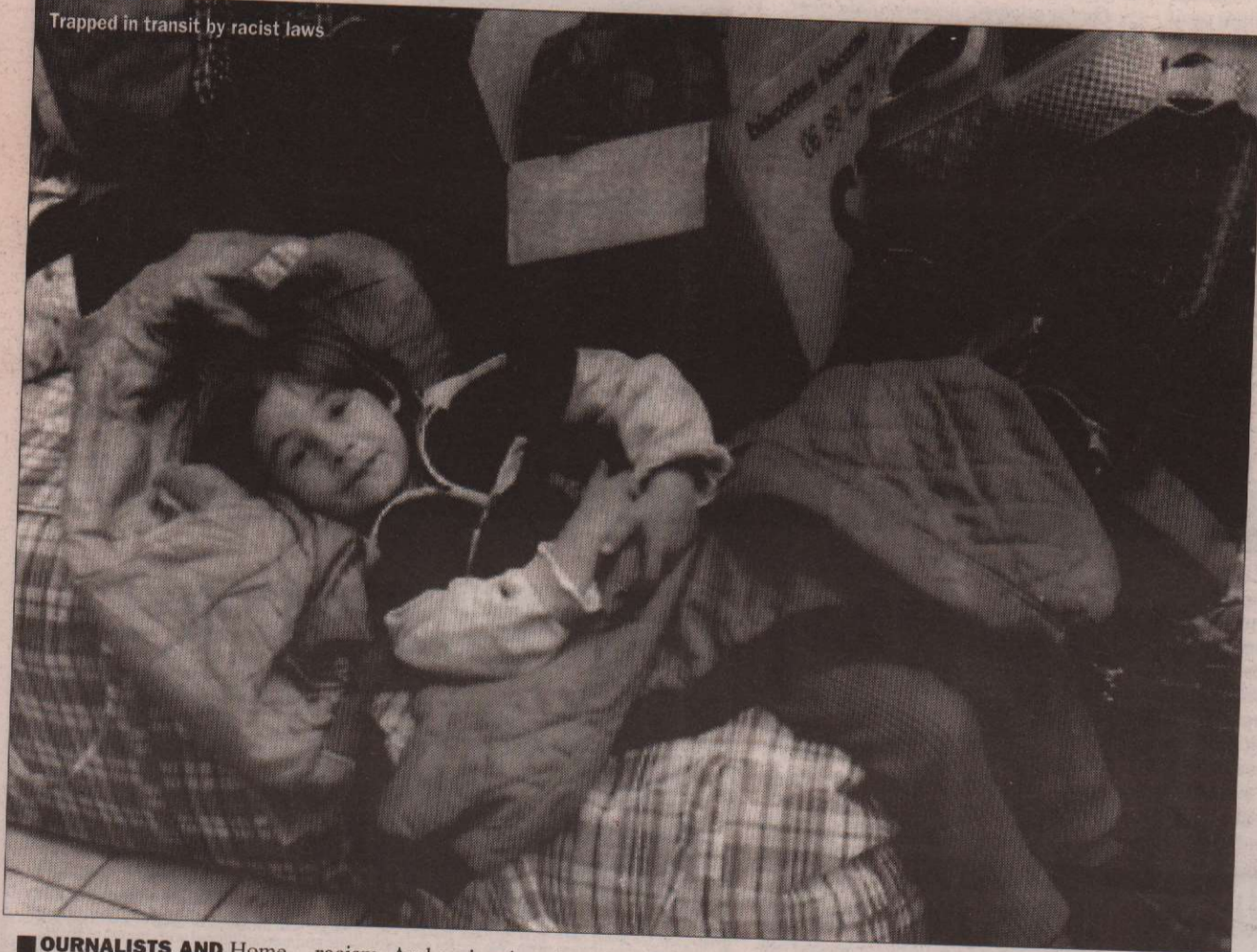
British Section of the League for a Revolutionary Communist International

No 216 November 1997 ★ 50p

Romanies: victims of Britain's racist laws

ABOLISH ALL IMMIGRATION CONTROLS!

Trapped in transit by racist laws



JOURNALISTS AND Home Office officials have blamed a documentary on Czech and Slovak television for the arrival of hundreds of Romanies, popularly known as Gypsies, seeking asylum in Britain.

A barrage of recent media reports has spread many rotten myths about these and other asylum seekers. The tabloid press, British immigration officials and Labour ministers like Mike O'Brien have branded these and other East European refugees as "economic migrants" or worse.

All of this fuels one thing –

racism. And racism is poison. Workers in Britain need to fight it with all their might, starting with the fight to repeal the despicable 1996 Asylum Act.

Economic migrant is a term used to distinguish between the "genuine" asylum seeker fleeing from political repression or war, and those who leave their country of origin in order to make more money elsewhere.

The fact that many victims of torture and repression are locked up in concentration camp style detention centres, like Rochester in Kent, shows that the distinc-

tion is a fine one, designed to soothe the liberal conscience. But it also serves to spread hate and suspicion for all refugees.

The "economic migrant" is reviled as selfish and mercenary. The same rules do not, of course, apply to capital and the capitalists. Finance capital moves around the world at the touch of a computer button.

The late James Goldsmith, billionaire tycoon, had so many different homes, in so many different countries, he evaded tax everywhere. But if you are poor

then you are clearly not entitled to want a better life for yourself and your children.

Leaving this aside the fact is that the Romanies arriving in Dover are fleeing violence and discrimination. Around eight million Romanies live in Central and Eastern Europe. There are significant communities in Hungary, Poland, Romania and Serbia, as well as the Czech Republic and Slovakia.

Across the region Romanies are treated as second class citizens at best, in many cases they are hounded from their homes.

One of the asylum seekers described graffiti on walls in Slovakia: it read "Gypsies to the gas chambers". This is an awful reminder of the Nazis' genocidal policies which targeted the Roma for extermination and slaughtered tens of thousands in the concentration camps. In Belgrade today skinhead gangs of Serbian nationalists regularly hunt down and kill Romanies.

The governments of the region are complicit in this racism. The Roma population is painted as a "problem". When Czechoslovakia was split into the Czech Republic and Slovakia, everyone had to register, stating their new nationality. Some who had lived for years in one part of the country were not allowed to register in that area if they could not prove their nationality. This particularly affected the Roma. Neither country was willing to register the Romanies as part of their population.

But are the citizens of Dover facing a flood of immigrants? No.

Just over 800 Romanies have applied for asylum – less than the number attending an average secondary school. Take the number who have arrived and multiply it by 100 and you might just fill Wembley Stadium. Hardly a flood. Yet the press have chosen to whip up a hysterical and hostile response among local people in Kent.

The Romanies are slandered as "Giro Czechs", "Slovak scroungers", thieves and spongers. As well as the filthy racism in these attacks, the tactic of overstating the numbers and creating a sense of a massive problem is one consistently used by the British state to justify its barbaric treatment of asylum seekers.

In particular New Labour –

INSIDE:

- 1972 – When the dockers fought the law and won
- Class war in Ontario

with its "giving age", its warm heart and all the other pious phrases uttered by reverend Blair – is using the "flood" argument to cast its racism in the colour of welfarism. "How can we accept so many refugees?" they say, "when we are having trouble paying for the NHS for our own people?"

Fact: the NHS is in crisis because it is being deliberately starved of funds by a New Labour government that refuses to tax the rich. The entry of refugees to this country will not mean a penny more will be spent on the NHS. Nor will their entry mean better services for anyone living in Kent. This is all a cover to justify racism.

Britain already has some of the world's most restrictive immigration laws – the basis for Britain's refusal to sign up to the Schengen agreement, the cornerstone of the European Union's "Fortress Europe" policy.

British immigration laws are racist laws, which conveniently obscure the fact that this is a very rich country with a grossly unequal distribution of wealth, concentrated in the hands of an almost entirely white ruling class.

The laws are used almost exclusively against black people, especially workers. If you are rich and buy property after property, like Mohammed al-Fayed, you can stay.

It is time for the labour movement to cut through the fabric of lies, stand up against Britain's immigration controls and confront the real enemy: Britain's bosses.

Labour must:

- Scrap the 1996 Asylum and Immigration Act
- Restore full benefit rights to asylum seekers
- Abolish all immigration controls

Asylum seekers welcome here – repeal the Asylum Act