

workers power

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Drugs – the case for legalisation

Socialism, Internationalism, Revolution

British Section of the League for a Revolutionary Communist International

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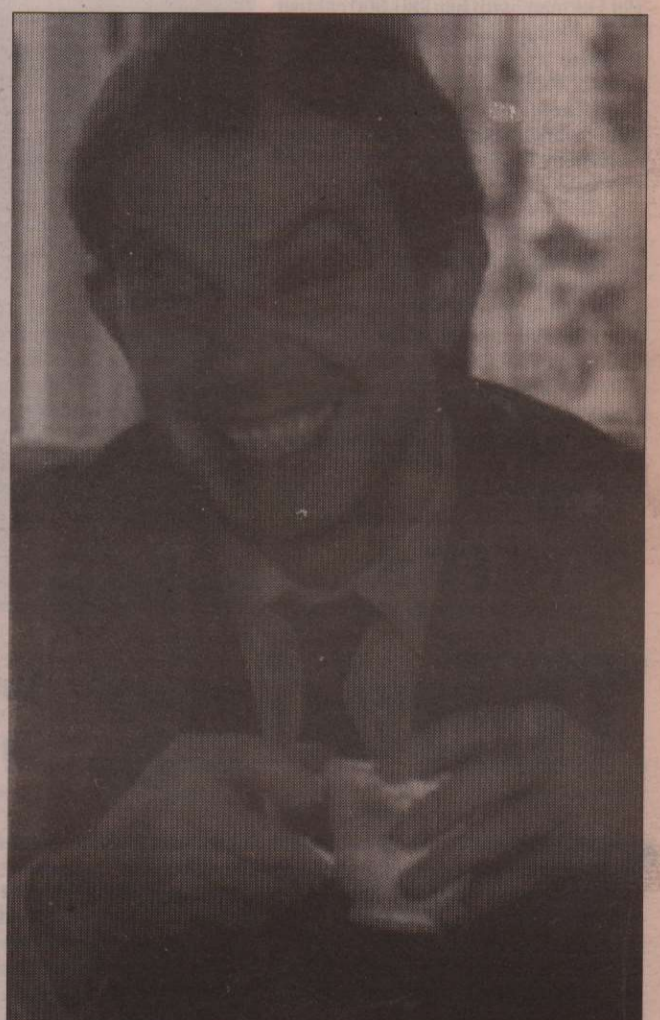


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BENEFITS: Pushing through the cuts

Hard choices for lone parents

LONE PARENT Alison Hogg is pleased with Labour's New Deal. Her new job may be only temporary Christmas work for a jewellery chain but it has given her new found confidence, social contact and more money.

Hogg, discovered by the *Guardian* in its search for human interest at Christmas time, must have gladdened the heart of beleaguered minister Harriet Harman.

But Alison Hogg's only child is 16. She doesn't need to find or pay out for childcare. Living in Croydon she probably has good access to public transport, even if the fares eat into her wages. And maybe her new DSS "lone parent adviser" neglected to inform her that, once her temporary contract has ceased, she will be entitled to less benefit than she used to get before her Christmas job: she'll be worse off by about a fiver.

Who cares about the odd fiver? Harriet Harman, with her £80,000 cabinet minister's pay packet, obviously doesn't. Despite the first real outcry since Labour took office, the policy of cutting benefits to lone parents in work, out of work and the low paid, originally devised by the Tories, has been pushed through.

Claimants

The facts are that from April new lone parent claimants – which Alison Hogg will be, no matter how temporary her job is or how long she had been claiming previously – stand to lose the £4.95 premium included in Income Support. One Parent Benefit paid with Child Benefit to those not on Income Support is also to be scrapped, cutting £6.05 a week.

New claimants of family credit, the benefit used to top up poverty wages, will lose some Housing Benefit and Council Tax Benefit. It's estimated that those in work could lose up to £11.50 a week.

These cuts amount to a saving for the Treasury of about £60 million a year out of a total welfare budget of £97 billion, which even cabinet ministers have privately admitted to be "miniscule". New Labour has made much of its commitment to "compassion with a hard edge" as it tells us that child poverty will be solved through work not welfare.

The New Deal for lone parents, already being piloted and soon to be compulsory, is triggered when the lone parent's youngest child reaches the age of five and three months. The lone parent is then asked to visit the local DSS, assigned a personal adviser, and asked to consider their options for work or training.

Trade-off

The political trade-off is £200 million extra spent on expanding childcare facilities, mostly in the form of after school clubs. Unfortunately, those with pre-school age children will lose benefits and will not be eligible for the help offered.

But how will cutting benefits help to reduce lone parent's dependency on welfare?

If you are a lone parent already claiming income support you will probably now not even consider coming off benefits for the sort of low paid, part time, temporary work that is mainly on offer in job centres. This means the government may well consider sanctions – i.e. benefit cuts for refusing to take low



"Why all the fuss about five to ten quid?" muses Harman

paid jobs offered under the New Deal.

Will the cuts to lone parent benefits significantly reduce the welfare bill? If you do opt to work and are forced into a low paid job then you will have to claim Family Credit to make ends meet. The Policy Studies Institute thinks that the result of the New Deal will simply be to shift large numbers of lone parents from dependency on income support to dependency on family credit. The long term welfare bill will be much

the same and lone parents will be stuck in dead end jobs.

With lone parents currently allowed to earn £15 on top of their income support anyway, the advantages of working for £30 more a week diminish when you consider the losses in terms of other benefits, including things like social fund payments, free school meals and free prescriptions – which could mean that lone parents are even more reluctant to come off income support.

So the policy of cutting lone parent benefits combined with the New Deal looks very unlikely to tackle child poverty. In fact, hundreds of thousands of children living with one parent will actually be worse off, particularly if the parent is low paid.

The lone parent benefit cut is inspired by ideology, not good will towards the poor or new thinking on child poverty. It is justified using Labour's pledge not to exceed Tory spending limits. But the real driving force behind the measure is Labour's desire to divide the working class, turning the "respectable" against the "undeserving" – effectively leaving the poorest and most vulnerable to rot. The same trick will be used against pensioners and the disabled.

Caricaturing

Instead of caricaturing lone parents as passive, dependent and just sitting at home waiting for their benefit cheques to arrive Labour needs to wake up to the reality that lone parents will gladly work if there is free 24 hour childcare. A minimum wage of £6 an hour (based on the European Decency Threshold) would encourage thousands off benefits if the government invested in housing, public transport, the NHS and education and so provided the jobs for them to take up.

And child poverty could be eradicated tomorrow if income support was set at the same level as the minimum wage. All these things could easily be paid for if Labour taxed the rich. Then women like Alison Hogg could stop feeling as though they are to blame for their situation and leave isolation and poverty behind. ■

BENEFITS: Sick and disabled targeted

Thinking the unthinkable?

DEEP CUTS in the totality of support for disabled people would make a mockery of our professions on social exclusion and the construction of a more just society" – so said David Blunkett, the education minister, in a leaked memo to Gordon Brown before Christmas.

New Labour is running into big problems very early on in its attempt to reform the Welfare State. After the revolt by MPs over cuts to lone parent's benefits, protests have already started in response to rumours flying around since early December of plans to slash the £23.5 billion benefits bill for the sick and disabled.

Since the summer, Baroness Hollis, junior social security minister, has been holding secret meetings to "think the unthinkable" with regard to disability benefits. Then came another leak on 12 December: a letter thought to be from Harriet Harman's chief policy adviser circulated to other government departments referring to the need "to make substantial savings from the sick and disability benefits".

This made it clear that the government's plan is to shift money from social security spending to health and education – using the sickening logic of attacking "undeserving poor" in order to put more resources behind the more "popular" schools and hospitals.

"A coherent and convincing story to tell" is what the government now needs before it can go ahead, says the leaked memo.

What kind of convincing story can Labour come up with to explain why disabled people must live on lower incomes or be forced into super-exploited jobs? Sick and disability benefits have

become the latest cuts target because they account for 24% of the total welfare bill. Unemployment benefits only account for 9%. The bulk of spending, 42% goes on the elderly – but most of this is protected by Labour's manifesto pledges on pensions.

However, four million out of the 6.5 million disabled claimants are over 65 and do not fit easily into Labour's "welfare to work" project. Many disabled and sick people are obviously unable to work, and the numbers claiming Incapacity Benefit have been growing despite the stringent medical checks brought in by the Tories.

Disabled people who do want to work, and rely on benefits to help them with care and mobility costs, face a massive hurdle of discrimination. A survey carried out at the end of last year by the Royal National Institute for Deaf People found that employers see a hearing impediment as a bigger obstacle to getting a job than having a criminal record or a history of drug abuse!

Refused

The government has refused to concretise its planned cuts – but Labour is also refusing to rule anything out. There is one soft target for them – Industrial Injuries Benefits. The DSS pays out £660 million a year to people who have often lost their livelihoods because of accidents at work. This is likely to be scrapped, with the responsibility for compensation transferred to employers. Since bosses will not be keen on paying out, if you get injured at work in the not too distant future, be prepared for a long court battle.

But when it comes to cuts in Incapacity Benefit, Disability Living

Allowance and Attendance Allowance, Labour knows it will face embarrassing scenes of angry protesters on crutches and in wheelchairs outside Downing Street, as happened before Christmas. The tabloids will have a field day and public opinion will be against the cuts, while the Tories will hypocritically pose as champions of the disabled.

This is why cutting rates or limiting eligibility criteria are options that the Labour probably cannot choose. The outcry, coming after the furore over lone parent benefits, would be too great. Instead, Blair is more likely to tax or

means-test benefits, a policy they could defend by the insistence that "nobody in need will lose out".

Another option being considered is to transfer the budget for Disability Living Allowance (payments for help with care) to local authorities so that they provide services instead of cash. As part of overall social services spending, this money would be finite and vulnerable to cuts but the blame for any such cuts would fall on local authorities not New Labour.

Means testing or taxing the benefits of the well off may be the convincing

story the government will try to sell us. No one should be conned by this argument. We must fight to protect universal benefits for sick and disabled people. If well off people are getting benefits the solution is easy: the rich must have their profits and wealth taxed to pay for a benefit system that allows sick and disabled people to live comfortably, have access to good quality care, travel easily and work if they want to.

In the words of Labour peer Alf Morris, anything less would mean not only "thinking the unthinkable" but "defending the indefensible". ■

DERBYSHIRE: School meals dispute

Ballot to step up action lost

DERBYSHIRE'S SCHOOL meals workers in Unison have lost the ballot to escalate their dispute with Derbyshire County Council, effectively ending the fight against cuts.

The defeat comes after months of mass meetings reflecting anger at the cuts, the mobilisation of hundreds of low paid women workers never active before, and four days of strike action in November. Only half the membership voted in this second ballot on escalating action, whereas the turnout for a previous ballot was 70%. The bid to escalate the action to a series of four day strikes with the option of going all out was lost by 208 votes to 272.

The workforce faces serious attacks: at least 10% cuts in hours and the imposition of new contracts with generally worsened conditions promoting

flexibility (see *Workers Power* 217).

The school meals dispute shows yet again the danger of putting faith in a strategy of one day strikes, particularly in the public sector.

Another problem was that unelected regional officials were able to insist on a second ballot before the strike could be escalated – this led to a loss of momentum while the regional officials took their time organising the new ballot.

Unison branches need to be aware that they will end up in a fight with the bureaucracy of the union from the outset and be prepared to break the anti-union laws if necessary and go for unofficial action (see page 4).

Derbyshire County Council's issuing of ninety day notices to terminate the contracts of those that hadn't signed the new ones, plus a media cam-

paign of lies and half truths including talking up the compensation offered by the authority for signing will have frightened many workers.

There were also problems with the organisation of the dispute. The strike committee started with three school meals representatives and a possible 11 branch officials. More school meals workers went onto the committee as the strike progressed but there was still a majority of non-school meals workers and despite all the large and lively mass meetings the strike committee was not directly elected from or accountable to them.

The loss of the ballot leaves Derbyshire County Unison considering a legal challenge to the redundancy notices that have gone out; the branch is still advising members not to sign. ■

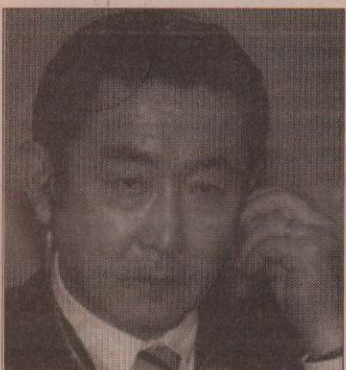
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Zimbabwe: Mugabe clings to power

After nearly twenty years in power Robert Mugabe is still clinging on. **Jeremy Dewar** looks at the problems facing Mugabe's regime and puts forward the worker's answer to the crisis.

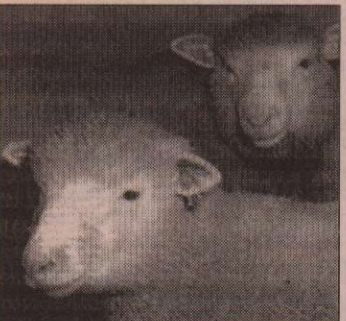
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Japan joins the downward slide

Government crisis following government crisis and a miracle economy needing a miracle. That is Japan today. We examine what has gone wrong and what the Japanese ruling class are doing to rescue their system.

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A risky business?

Food scares and worries over genetically engineered food were a constant theme of 1997. **Adrian Shaw** goes behind the headlines to put the real issues under the microscope

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EDITORIAL

WORKERS POWER 218 JANUARY 1998

Stop Blair's attack on the poor

TONY BLAIR's New Year message to the poor was brutally simple: things can only get tougher. If you are a lone parent, unemployed or claiming disability benefits, New Labour promises that 1998 will be a harsh year indeed.

This message reached us from the Seychelles where the Blairs were having an extremely tough time on holiday. After all it had cost him £1,000 per head just to fly his family out to the islands. Then he would have to find the money for the accommodation and food, apparently being prepared by the former chef of the late and little lamented Shah of Iran.

Speaking to the Parliamentary Labour Party in December Blair said: "Tough choices will come. They must be faced up to. It is then that our resolve, our strength and our commitment will be tested. I am confident we can meet that test and change Britain for good."

Harassment

Tough choices mean more attacks on the poor. Meeting the test means getting away with more means testing, and harassment of those on benefits. Changing for good means changing for the good of capitalism.

Behind Blair's breathtaking arrogance lies a steely determination to pursue a pro-capitalist agenda of fiscal restraint, packaged in reactionary morality. His determination to attack the poor and the vulnerable in our society must be fully matched by the labour movement if his attacks are to be beaten.

His announcement that New Labour will pursue its called reform of the welfare state came as no surprise to those who understand the essential nature of Blair's project to redraw the map of British politics and to change beyond recognition the post-war structures of social welfare provision.

While the government is undoubtedly concerned with cutting the proportion of Gross Domestic Product that goes to public spending against the background of the introduction of a single European currency, the dominant Blairite faction is clearly committed to creating a "welfare state" that has much in common with Bill Clinton's brand of "tough love".

Look at those groups in New Labour's firing line:

- Students – already being forced into poverty through loans, students in higher education will now have to pay tuition fees.
- Lone parents – single parents who are often unable to work because of the appalling lack of affordable childcare in Britain and are reliant on benefits, will be forced into low-paid jobs. If you lose your job, your benefits will be cut.
- The disabled – New Labour's next target for benefit cuts are the disabled. Since taking office in May 1997 Harriet Harman's DSS snoopers have visited 250,000 people living on disability allowance. Clearly, this level of harassment is not considered sufficient and in 1998 the Government looks set to introduce some cuts in disability benefits.

- The unemployed – from this month if you are unemployed and between the ages of 18 and 24 under a New Labour pilot scheme you will have four options: to take a job with training, community work, join the environmental task force or full-time education. Remaining on benefits is not an option, unless you are prepared to



see your already meagre income slashed by 40%. By the autumn it is planned to extend this scheme to anyone under 35.

The poorest in our society, not the rich, are those facing New Labour's cuts. But just as New Labour chops benefits for lone parents, it seems determined to create more lone parents through introducing charges on the NHS for contraceptive pills. This will also save £50 million.

Blair's New Year message assured us:

"The talk of taking any benefit from the most vulnerable in our society is scaremongering."

Perhaps in the gospel according to Blair the most vulnerable in our society are those company directors who awarded themselves Christmas bonuses totalling £3.1 billion. Simply raising taxes so that the wealthiest in our society could not tuck such obscene amounts into offshore trust funds would provide the money needed to increase benefit levels.

On the day of the vote on cuts in lone parent benefit, Labour's Paymaster General Geoffrey Robinson was desperately trying to defend his use of such funds and other tax loopholes to safeguard his massive personal fortune stashed away on the Channel Islands.

Loopholes

Prior to the 1 May election, Gordon Brown insisted that a Labour government would set up a hit squad for closing tax loopholes. By the time the party manifesto had been written, this commitment had disappeared. Despite airy rhetoric, the government has announced no concrete plans to tackle tax evasion. The only hit squad set up was to harass inner city teachers and kids in Hackney, London's poorest borough.

A recent United Nations report declared that poverty levels in Britain were "unacceptable". Figures show that one in four people in Britain are now living in poverty, compared to one in ten in 1979. Since coming to office

Chancellor Gordon Brown has twice cut the rate of corporation tax to the lowest level in the industrialised world. If corporation tax stood at the same level as a decade ago under Tory chancellor Nigel Lawson, another £11 billion could be at the Treasury's disposal.

On the actual night of the vote to cut lone parent benefits, arch-Tory Peter Lilley stood outside the division lobby shaking hands with the New Labourites thanking them for implementing his attack. The class warriors of the Tory party are delighted at the sight of New Labour clawing back working class gains which they couldn't touch.

Blair is carrying out exactly the role which the British ruling class hoped he would. In classic reformist fashion, Blair has used the electoral support given to Labour by the majority of the working class to carry through the attacks needed by British capital. Ken Livingstone sums it up:

"... what we are now about is demonstrating to the international markets that we can be as brutal to the poor as the government we replaced."

Blair's attacks on the poor and constant reassurances to the rich are specifically designed to reassure both British-based and international capital that the economy is safe in New Labour's hands.

There was parliamentary opposition to the cuts on 8 December. Forty-seven Labour MPs voted against the government and another 14 abstained. While nowhere near enough to dent the Government's majority, it was sufficient to cause some embarrassment to the Blairites. Since then Labour MEPs Ken Coates and Hugh Kerr, and possibly four others have indicated that they will stand in opposition to Labour candidates at the 1999 election for the European Parliament.

There is clearly opposition at every level of the Labour Party to the benefit cuts. Even an arch-moderniser, former Kinnoch aide Charles Clarke, felt moved to write a highly critical letter

to Harriet Harman. This undoubtedly reflects a growing unease and, indeed, anger at the attacks on social welfare among Labour voters and members. The Guardian reports that Labour Party membership has declined sharply since the election victory. Up to a quarter of Labour's members have decided not to rejoin the party.

Heroic

But what do these sparks of opposition represent? The Labour rebels themselves sought to portray their revolt in heroic terms – a shot across the bows of New Labour; a great sacrifice to save the party and the country. Chief rebel Ken Livingstone wrote:

"Whatever the short-term pain of December's rebellion, it may actually have saved the Labour government from making an error that would be fatal to its chances of re-election."

Has the rebellion stopped New Labour in its tracks? Blair's New Year message is a clear riposte. Livingstone's approach is that of classic left reformism – act as an opposition, not in order to defeat the right but in order to "save it" from itself. In so doing left reformism can refurbish the party's credentials with the working class by giving dissent a voice but at the same time preventing it from spilling over into active opposition to the Labour government.

In short, backbench rebellions by Labour MPs will not defeat Blair's drive to dismantle the welfare state. The lead-up to the vote on lone parent benefit cuts illustrated Ken Livingstone's willingness to act as the leader of a left opposition within the Parliamentary Labour Party, but no stomach to lead a movement beyond the confines of the Palace of Westminster.

As for the wider Labour left organised around papers such as *Tribune* and *Labour Left Briefing* it senses a chance for a revival at last. The widespread anger at Blair's welfare "reform" and the vote of the 47 dissidents against the lone parent benefit cut have given it a sense that at last an opposition to Blair can be organised in the party. As *Tribune* put it after the vote, "it can be predicted with some certainty that 1998 will mark a distinct revival in the fortunes of the Labour left."

But the goals that this wider left has set for itself do not include the organisation of opposition to Blair on the streets, in the factories and offices, on the housing estates or in the schools and colleges. The mobilisation of the masses against a Labour government is as far from the thoughts of the left reformists as ever. Their papers are full of discussion articles on organising left slates for the next NEC elections, on organising alternative policy forums, on attempts to get Blair to listen to them. In other words they are all talk, no action.

What is required is a political alternative to Blair and to all brands of reformism, a political party that is prepared to use the tactics of militant protest against the attacks and, crucially, to carry the fight into the union branches and workplaces with the aim of winning the organised working class to flexing its industrial muscle to block the Blairites' onslaught against the poor.

Such a party, a revolutionary party, will win the best of the Labour lefts to its ranks. But it will do it by fighting Blair not fudging its opposition to him and his project. ■

UNISON: The witch-hunt of the left

Making the union safe for Tony Blair

SPENDING CUTS, a pay freeze, backdoor privatisation and radical "restructuring": these are New Labour's plans for public sector workers. New Labour - old Tory policies.

You might be forgiven for thinking that the leadership of Unison, the biggest public sector union, would be drawing up battle plans to resist these attacks on its members and to fight for a minimum wage of at least £4.61 an hour - the target agreed by two consecutive Unison conferences.

But you would be mistaken. The National Executive Committee (NEC) of Unison has instead chosen to direct the resources of a 1.5 million-strong union on a witch-hunt against left activists who have often been in the forefront of defending members' jobs, wages and conditions. The leadership has unleashed the most serious attack against the left of any union since the virtual destruction of the CPSA Broad Left in the late 1980s.

Accept

At its 10 December meeting the NEC voted by a two-to-one majority to accept in full the findings and recommendations of a report it had commissioned from "labour lawyer" Brian Langstaff QC. The target of Langstaff's "investigation" was the Campaign for a Fighting and Democratic Unison (CFDU) - the biggest electoral force challenging the leadership of General Secretary Rodney Bickerstaffe from the left. The CFDU candidate, Roger Bannister, captured 20% of the poll in the 1995 contest against Bickerstaffe, and Bannister is among four current NEC members with CFDU backing.

Though the Langstaff report is accompanied by nearly sixty "supporting" documents and cost Unison £50,000, it is a mixture of misinformation, half-truths and outright lies. The NEC decision to accept it intensified and sharply focused the ongoing witch-hunt against shop stewards, lay officials and whole branches, fuelled by classic red-baiting in the Murdoch press (*Sunday Times* 26 October - see *Workers Power* 216 for details).

The report was commissioned and seized on by the dominant faction in the Unison bureaucracy: not just to undermine its potential electoral opponents but to make the union as safe as possible for New Labour in government.

The reason for the investigation into the CFDU was supposedly "wide concern at its high profile campaign... on single status in local government" (see *Workers Power* 211 for details of the deal struck and aggressively sold by union officials).

In fact the CFDU had always stressed its support for the principle of harmonising conditions between blue and white collar workers but opposed the strings attached to a deal which threatens to erode national bargaining and downgrade many administrative and clerical staff through new job evaluation schemes. The Unison top brass scurried for legal advice after the CFDU had won support from more than 40% of delegates at a special conference in May. The bureaucracy had hoped this would simply rubber stamp the deal with the local authority bosses before the postal ballot on it.

The NEC's decision to pursue the witch-hunt has serious implications not just for Unison's internal democracy,

BY WORKERS POWER SUPPORTERS IN UNISON

but for the capacity of members to organise a fightback against Labour councils enthusiastically implementing cuts in jobs and services for their Blairite masters. The Bickerstaffe leadership is determined to ensure that where resistance does arise spontaneously among workers against the attacks, as in the recent Derbyshire school meals dispute, it is confined to bureaucratically stage-managed protests which are unlikely to succeed.

Specifically, the acceptance of Langstaff's recommendations means that Unison branches cannot affiliate or make any contribution to "any one group [within Unison] which seeks to... change the policy of the Union to accord with the wishes of that group". In short, branches have lost any right to fight for the slightest change in Unison policy.

The NEC has also given itself and unelected regional officials the green light to attack any branch that has previously affiliated or donated money to the CFDU. The Langstaff report advises the leadership to conduct "an investigation with a view to disciplinary proceedings" where "a Branch appears reluctant to avoid favouring such as CFDU". Though the sums involved are trivial, Unison head office could now opt to hound branch officers for the return of funds already contributed.

The clear intention is to intimidate the bulk of branches which have provided financial support to the CFDU and isolate a hard core, with a view to suspending those branches which put up resistance. This could eventually mean derecognition of elected shop stewards and branch officers by local authority, NHS or college bosses.

In response to the NEC attack the CFDU has called for a national conference on Saturday 21 February as the launch pad for a campaign in defence of union democracy, branch autonomy and members' control over the union. Prospects look good for support from Unison's Northern and Greater London regional councils. A planning meeting on 10 January will finalise details of the venue and format.

Refused

The CFDU's fourth annual conference agreed to invite the group of 16 NEC members who refused to endorse the witch-hunt, along with representatives from Unison Labour Left and the SWP's membership in Unison to work together to build the 21 February event on the broadest possible basis.

The Sheffield Metropolitan Branch, where SWP members hold a number of key posts, has also under come under the bureaucracy's cosh, having been cited in the October *Sunday Times* article. A hastily organised rally in defence of Sheffield branch on 13 December attracted more than 200 activists from 60 Unison branches around the country. But the relatively large size of the event disguised the absence of active involvement among the branch's own membership in resisting the attacks from the NEC and regional officials.

For the first time in three years there was a substantial SWP presence at the CFDU annual conference on 6 December. A number of SWP comrades in Unison clearly recognise the need for a united campaign against the witch-



"A word in your ear Rodney...get rid of the left so I can make some cuts."

hunt, though there are, at best, mixed signals as to whether the SWP will actively build for the 21 February conference.

While the SWP demonstrated that it has a substantial grassroots audience in Unison through the mobilisation for the September lobby of the Labour Party conference, a decision to "go it alone" and abstain from building for a united national conference against the witch-hunt would be self-defeating, sectarian folly.

In principle, Unison Labour Left backs the conference, but the current period is crunch time for its main spokesperson, the left-talking Greater London regional bureaucrat, Geoff Martin. He opposed the very idea of standing a candidate against Bickerstaffe in the 1995 contest for General Secretary, and he has been very reluctant to offer any public display of support for the Hillingdon Hospital strikers since the national bureaucracy withdrew official backing from their fight in mid-January 1997.

As for those opponents of the Langstaff report on the NEC who are not associated with the CFDU, such as long-time Morning Star supporter Jean Geldart, their participation in a campaign against the witch-hunt is welcome, but not at any price. Few of the NEC members who opposed the Langstaff report can be relied on as consistent allies. The Morning Star, for instance, has done a great deal over many years to confer "left" credentials on Bickerstaffe. It is virtually certain that its die-hard supporters on

the NEC will not involve themselves in militant resistance to a witch-hunt that has become Bickerstaffe's key project within the union.

Workers Power believes that the 21 February conference provides all militants with an opportunity to begin to mobilise resistance to the witch-hunt. It should also be used to plan for united public sector opposition to New Labour's offensive and the bureaucrats like Bickerstaffe that police our unions on its behalf. We strongly urge our readers in Unison to raise the alarm in their workplace and branches, with the aim of winning support for the February conference and getting delegated to it.

Prospects

At the conference in February agreement must be reached about the tactics and the strategy required to win. The anti-CFDU witch-hunt and the other local attacks are the internal affairs of the labour movement. Regardless of the prospects for a successful challenge of the legal standing of the Langstaff report, Unison members should not be resorting to the bosses' courts or the Commissioner for Rights of Trade Union Members (originally established by the Tories as a means of enforcing a scabs' charter in the unions).

As a matter of principle, we must start from opposing the involvement of the capitalist state in trade union affairs. The recent experience of the federal government's intervention in the Teamsters union in the USA (see *Workers Power* 217) has vividly illustrated the

enduring relevance of this principle.

The rank and file membership must now be alerted to what is at stake and organised to put massive pressure on Bickerstaffe and the NEC majority to back down. To do this left activists will have to expose the underlying objective of the witch-hunt: to make Unison safe for New Labour and impotent in the face of its attacks.

The CFDU has produced a petition in defence of the right to campaign which should circulate around workplaces. Motions condemning the witch-hunt and reaffirming the right of branches to campaign for changes in union policy should be pushed to the top of the agenda for Unison's national conference in June. Members and branch officers should bombard Unison headquarters in Mabledon Place with letters and faxes in protest, while any campaign against the witch-hunt should be organising lobbies of regional councils and NEC meetings.

In those branches currently or previously affiliated to the CFDU, activists must win the argument for defiance of the intimidation which is likely to come from regional officials and the national bureaucracy. We must actively support branch officers who are willing to refuse demands for the return of affiliation fees and/or donations - and to challenge those who are prepared to abide by the NEC's diktats.

Abuse

The bureaucratic abuse of power by the Bickerstaffe leadership also makes plain the need to go beyond a defensive struggle, aiming to reverse the 10 December NEC decision, and to fight for a movement within Unison and across the unions as a whole which seeks to abolish bureaucratic perks and privileges. Such a movement, based on rank and file organisation, would fight for a leadership that is truly accountable to its membership. It would see elections not as a means towards the end of capturing the bureaucratic machinery - as the CFDU, coming out of a tradition of broad leftism has a tendency to do - but as an opportunity to mobilise members to fight around a clear action programme.

Workers Power supporters in Unison will fight at the 21 February conference for the building of such a movement. We believe the ultimate success of the anti-witch-hunt fight will hinge on the ability of activists to link it to the building of unity in action through joint committees of public sector workers, all-out, indefinite strikes in opposition to the government's continued attacks on the public sector - the cuts, the pay freeze, privatisation and "Best Value" measures.

The witch-hunt is not just about democracy - it is about whether Unison will act as a tame ally of Blair while he carries through these attacks or a centre of militant opposition to him. Defeating it is vital if we are to repel these attacks. ■

CONFERENCE

For full details of the 21 February conference, contact:
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Bromley Kent BR1 3UH
Tel: 0181 313 4405
after 10 January

SOCIALIST LABOUR PARTY: Second Congress

Scargill's hollow shell

THE SOCIALIST Labour Party (SLP) held its second conference in London on 13-14 December. Many on the SLP's left wing saw it as a last chance to change the party's overall trajectory.

Around 200 delegates attended, representing 114 of the 178 affiliated Constituency SLPs, two affiliated trade union branches, and the party's women's and black sections. At the outset the platform announced that the SLP's membership was now over 5,000. But this congress was less than half the size of the founding event in May 1996. There were no young people: the vast majority of delegates were middle-aged men.

In the run-up to congress most of the left's constitutional amendments had been ruled out of order as "unconstitutional" (see *Workers Power* 216). Several unsuccessful attempts were made at the start of congress to put these on the agenda.

Likewise, an attempt to vote on the constitution itself was rubbished by Arthur Scargill who stated that, since all members pledged to "abide by its rules and constitution" when they signed their SLP membership cards, the constitution had already been adopted. By accepting the order of business the vast majority of delegates happily consented to Scargill's rotten bureaucratic organisational methods.

Card votes were taken on those constitutional amendments deemed in order by the NEC. As the results were being announced, it became clear that the total number of votes included many from affiliated organisations.

The vote to abolish the black section, following an amendment moved by Harpal Brar of the Indian Workers' Association (and the Stalin Society) revealed what was really going on. The first vote was 311 for and 648 against. Then, a member of the North West, Cheshire and Cumbria Miners' Association (referred to as the Lancashire NUM) came up to the platform to tell congress that its vote had not been counted. It was then announced that his delegation had a block vote of 3,000! At this point all hell broke loose. Delegates came to the platform to complain. Why bother with a congress at all when one delegation can decide the outcome of every vote?

At this point about 20 delegates walked out, including black section members, the Cardiff and Birmingham delegations and some delegates from London. Others simply didn't turn up the next day.

Congress quickly degenerated, with delegates speaking against the voting system being heckled and booed. This reached a low-point when Terry Burns, parliamentary candidate in Cardiff Central, tried to raise a point of order. He was viciously shouted down by the majority, while those who supported his right to speak faced threats of physical violence from NEC member Terry Dunn.

The actual debate on the black section was non-existent. No reply was allowed to Harpal Brar's speech, not even from a comrade in the black section. After a recount, the result was 3,297 for and 506 against: the black section was

The recent Socialist Labour Party conference degenerated into farce as Arthur Scargill sought to impose his authority over a dwindling organisation. **Pete Ashley**, until recently Secretary of the Cardiff SLP branch, gives his account of a lost weekend

therefore abolished. This triggered an announcement from the floor by supporters of the Fourth International Supporters Caucus (FISC) that, due to the abolition of the black section, they could no longer stand for the NEC. This group included Pat and Carolyn Sikorski and Brian Heron, as well as Imran Khan and other NEC members from the black section.

Scargill looked mortified: his "left cover" was deserting him! Thanks to his obsession with constitutional manoeuvres, his whole project appeared to be falling apart in front of him. Suddenly, the prospect of the supporters of arch-Stalinist Royston Bull around the homophobic *Economic and Philosophic Political Review* gaining positions on the NEC became a nightmare possibility for Scargill. Equally, there was a chance that the forces around the *Marxist Bulletin* (formerly the International Bolshevik Tendency) and Democratic Platform – the so called left wingers who deserted the fight against Scargill's witch-hunt of the left last spring and summer in order to stay in the SLP at any price – would win seats. No wonder Scargill looked so dejected!

By the next day a deal had been done and the remaining delegates were treated to the site of a tearful Brian Heron telling congress that "while the president and secretary of the black sec-



Scargill – the SLP's witchfinder general

tion cannot take their positions they believed that the other comrades should". Scargill applauded vigorously and led a standing ovation involving most delegates.

This showed just how desperate Scargill is to keep the FISC in the SLP, and indicated just how weak the party leadership currently is. Whether there is anything the FISC supporters will not put up with remains to be seen, but Scargill and the leadership will certainly purge them once they have fulfilled their role.

On the question of the block vote, Scargill acts as if the SLP were a mass party representing significant sections of workers. Clearly it is not. No working pits remain in the North West, with the NUM area representing only retired members, most of whom proba-

bly know nothing of their union's SLP affiliation. Clearly, Scargill was using their block vote as a sledgehammer to pulverise any conference opponents.

The second day saw far fewer delegates in the hall. Motions to change the SLP's position of support for "non-racist" immigration controls, to strengthen its position on Ireland and alter its position of "Little England" chauvinism on Europe all fell without a debate. No doubt had these been discussed, the top table would have welded the block vote to ensure their defeat – precisely why most of the movers had already left the congress.

The Bull group pushed forward a number of witch-hunting motions. There were references to attempts by "Trotskyite (sic) orientated entryists to sabotage the party" and suggestions that

"people in sympathy with the anti-SLP stance of the Workers Power Group and the CPGB should not be tolerated further". A raft of such motions and amendments was remitted to the NEC, once the platform explained that the new disciplinary procedure would provide plenty of power to deal with these matters.

Congress finished with a rallying speech from Scargill. While buoyed by the FISC's return, it was notably low-key. It was far from a successful congress for the leadership. Many delegates were shocked by the first day's proceedings and learned a lot about Scargill's bureaucratic stranglehold.

But what impact did the left make and what is the way forward after congress? The Democratic Platform organised a 70-strong meeting, made up mostly of delegates, following the first day. Barbara Duke of the *Marxist Bulletin* and Martin Wicks of the Democratic Platform addressed the gathering, which was attended by all the left tendencies around the SLP. The meeting concentrated on the denial of democratic rights and agreed a statement for distribution to delegates the next morning.

The statement was supposed to rally more support from delegates for a fight against Scargill's leadership. But its effective purpose was to once more postpone a real debate about the future – if any – for the SLP left.

In contrast, *Socialist Labour Action* (SLA) supporters such as myself argued that all those present should boycott the second day and instead discuss where next for the SLP left. Earlier we had given out a bulletin, "Scargillism or Socialism", to all delegates, concentrating on the fight around the Cardiff branch for a revolutionary programme in the SLP.

It soon became clear that all the other forces at the meeting favour continuing the fight for a "democratic" SLP. They will no doubt take some comfort from the votes of left candidates for the NEC. Without the block vote, Martin Wicks and Lee Rock would have been elected onto the trade union section of the NEC. Terry Burns came close to winning a seat through the constituency section. But once again Scargill cynically used his NUM connections to ensure that none of his opponents won a place.

Branches such as Cardiff and Vauxhall (until the NEC shut it down), which supported many of the SLA's positions, had been in the lead of struggles for a democratic SLP. Given the events described above there is now no alternative but to prepare for political independence. Most of the Cardiff branch, including myself, are resigning from the SLP. I will be rejoining Workers Power. I urge all those in the SLP who agree that there is no future in what has become a Stalinist sect to consider future work alongside Workers Power comrades.

We need a real alternative to Blair, built not by bureaucrats around left reformist politics, but by class fighters committed to a revolutionary programme that gives answers in the present battles of the working class and links them to the necessity of overthrowing capitalism. The SLP is an obstacle to such an alternative, not a path towards it. ■

The SLP 'left' in tatters

WHEN THE SLP was launched in January 1996 it looked a likely pole of attraction for a wide spectrum on the left. Given the rightward march of Labour under Blair and Scargill's own reputation as a class fighter, it seemed destined to attract forces ranging from non-aligned reformists disillusioned with Labour through to tendencies such as Militant Labour (now the Socialist Party) which had found life outside Labour increasingly difficult.

In addition, there were much smaller groups such as the self-proclaimed Communist Party of Great Britain (CPGB) and the International Bolshevik Tendency (IBT), who had made their refusal to vote Labour into a point of principle. Other individual leftists saw the SLP as a new place to huddle together for warmth in a cold climate for socialists.

Some comrades, around the bulletin *Socialist Labour Action* supported and fought for the programme of Workers Power in the SLP.

As it turned out, some organisations never even made it to the starting blocks because Scargill declared that the SLP had a constitution in place before it had even been launched. The explicit purpose was to give a Scargill-dominated leadership the powers needed to block any "Trotskyist" entry tactic. Against SLA comrades and others he simply expelled members or even whole branches.

The common thread running through analyses advanced by the CPGB, and to a lesser extent Militant Labour, was that there was a desperate need to regroup the left's shrunken forces within a new reformist party in the wake of the collapse of Stalinism in Eastern Europe and the rightward shift in British politics. According to variations on this theme, the SLP

was the peculiarly British equivalent of continental European formations like the Communist Refoundation in Italy and the United Left in Spain.

The tiniest bit of news about the internal life of the SLP was fit to print in the pages of the CPGB's *Weekly Worker*, while the former IBT members appeared willing to pay any price to remain within the organisation. But such groups failed to advance a thorough-going programmatic alternative to Scargill's mixture of reheated left reformism and Europhobia.

They and other pro-democracy groups and individuals retreated from efforts to organise defiance of Scargill's increasingly arbitrary rule in the hope of avoiding expulsion. Yet what they have just about managed to stay within is a hollow shell of an organisation, incapable of mounting an effective electoral campaign, never mind leading an "extra-parliamentary" opposition to Blair.

The Scargill leadership has not secured a financial base to sustain an SLP bureaucracy but it has consolidated an authoritarian bureaucratic regime making the SLP a lost cause for revolutionaries. To those conference delegates who signed the Democratic Platform's statement, supporters of *Socialist Labour Action* and Workers Power say that the time has come for a sharp reassessment of what they have achieved.

The SLP is no vehicle for regroupment. Nor will any cobbled together "ex-SLP left, plus others" be. The reason for this is simple. Such regroupment projects shy away from the struggle for programmatic agreement and clarity and from a democratic centralist organisational structure capable of carrying such a programme into life. In a word they shy away from the historic task of the moment – building a revolutionary party. ■



Imran Khan on the election trail – before the SLP Congress abolished the black section he was leader of

SOUTHERN AFRICA

After a year of strikes, demonstrations and mounting economic crisis, Robert Mugabe's grip on power in Zimbabwe seems increasingly tenuous. **Jeremy Dewar** assesses the president's prospects. Meanwhile, in neighbouring South Africa Nelson Mandela has retired as ANC president. His farewell speech, as **Lesley Day** reports, whipped up a storm but offered no new hope for the black workers and poor.

Zimbabwe: Mugabe clings to power

LAST YEAR was one Zimbabwe's President Robert Mugabe would rather forget. It was remarkable in that he was forced to make a number of uncharacteristic concessions.

First, he finally agreed to pay disability pensions to veterans of the national liberation war.

Veterans had been battling for compensation after a promise Mugabe had made to them back in 1980. A militant campaign involving mass demonstrations intensified when the government admitted that the fund set up for the compensation had been systematically robbed by senior party and state officials. One government official attempted to reassure the veterans saying "what was looted was not that much. It was about £16 million".

The campaign culminated in a 50,000-strong rally on Heroes' Day in August, where their former commander-in-chief, Mugabe, agreed to pay each ex-soldier a Z\$50,000 gratuity and Z\$2,000 monthly pension starting in January 1998.

Typically, the already impoverished working class was expected to foot the resulting Z\$4 billion bill through tax hikes and further cuts in public spending. Spontaneous strikes led to the Zimbabwe Confederation of Trade Unions (ZCTU) calling a successful general strike on 9 December. Before the day was out, Mugabe was forced to withdraw all but one of his tax proposals.

Militant

This unprecedented climbdown was caused by the militant anger of an illegal demonstration in the capital, Harare, where strikers fought running battles with the police, in defiance of baton charges and tear gas. The most popular slogan of the march, as widely reported in the African press, was: "Down with Mugabe!".

The support for the strike surprised even the secretary general of the ZCTU, Morgan Tsvangirai. Attempting to explain the wider issues behind the strike, he said:

"People wanted to make a point because of the mass unemployment and high prices. Things are falling apart. There's no health system to talk of. Education has suffered because it's not linked to any economic plan, because there is no economic plan. But there's this clique, a small elitist clique that makes decisions to increase taxes without consulting anybody."

Given that the tax plans were also voted down by parliament (where Mugabe's Zimbabwean African National Union - ZANU-PF - controls all but two seats), Mugabe is clearly more isolated than at any time since independence.

In a desperate bid to renew his

power-base, Mugabe announced the nationalisation of 1,053 almost exclusively white-owned commercial farms.

"We fought for the land and now we are going to take it", exclaimed Mugabe. He hopes that by finally promising to settle the land question in favour of Zimbabwe's poor and largely landless black peasantry (70% of the population) he can win back support.

But he may be doing too little, too late and his room for manoeuvre is extremely narrow. The World Bank has suspended US\$62.5 million worth of budgetary aid since September, the markets have tumbled, inflation is hovering around 25% and the exchange rate has experienced violent tremors, as on 14 November - "Black Friday" - when the currency fell from Z\$14:US\$1 to Z\$26:US\$1, before the government intervened to restore its value.

Meanwhile, the working class, including the liberation war veterans who form an important component of that class and a potential link to the peasantry, has shown its capacity for militant and generalised action.

The economy

Ironically, Zimbabwe is experiencing a mini-boom at the moment. Statistics for 1996 show a 7% growth rate, with the high-earning tobacco export crop jumping 40%. The Harare stock market has, until recently, shown high investment levels and trading. The much-hyped Hartley platinum supermine has at last started production. Yet most analysts agree that these hopeful signs are a false dawn.

The Economic Structural Adjustment Programme (ESAP) is now six years old. Central to it has been the privatisation of the government's assets in industry, mining and energy production, overwhelmingly to foreign (South African, European and US) concerns. In August the Commercial Bank of Zimbabwe followed. But, as in Eastern Europe, privatisation of former state assets has brought a sharp decline to many industries, especially manufacturing.

A good example of this is the long established textile industry. Workers manually mount hundreds of cones of thread onto pre-1950s looms, resulting in poor quality cloth which struggles to find a market. Alongside this, in classic semi-colonial fashion, chemical and food-processing plants for export markets have seen mass shake-outs with the introduction of capital intensive technologies. A third of the workforce is now unemployed.

The public sector has also suffered under IMF-imposed austerity. Not only has the civil service lost a quarter of its jobs, real wages have also fallen. Despite an important union victory in August 1996, when an indefinite strike

brought a 26% wage increase, inflation has eroded this. Now the hitherto sacrosanct health and education budgets have been put under the knife. Significantly, the government held the line on nurses' and doctors' pay last year, literally choking their strike action with tear-gas.

The agricultural sector, the backbone of the economy, is extremely shaky. Record harvests in 1996 boosted the economy, especially exports, significantly. But only two years before the worst drought in living memory drove the economy into recession.

Finally, as with all semi-colonial economies, even one as relatively broad-based as Zimbabwe's, the current "mini-boom" is dependent on fragile external markets. If the giant South African economy (with a GDP 17 times the size of Zimbabwe's) catches a cold, Zimbabwe will develop pneumonia.

In particular, mineral and metal markets are notoriously unstable (as the mid-1980s crash showed). Indeed, at the end of November, a quarter of the Harare stock market's share value (equivalent to over a year's growth in GDP) was wiped off in a single day; a crash to rival those of the Far Eastern Tigers, which Zimbabwe wishes to emulate.

In typical IMF language this is all deemed a "partial success" for the regime. For the Zimbabwean masses, however, it has been a total disaster. Mugabe's populist (and timid) pursuit of more black managers and owners in industry cannot disguise the fact that for the poor, living standards are now back to 1980 levels or below.

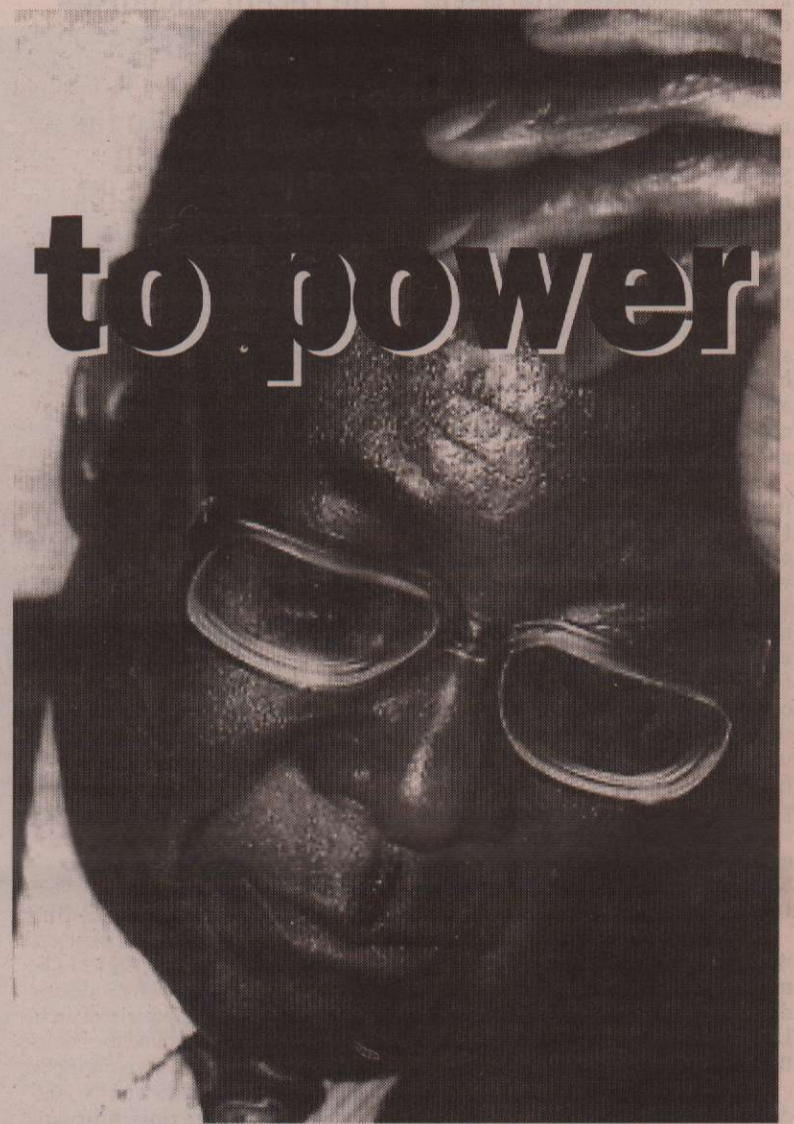
The land question

Added to this is the problem of continuing entrenched white ownership of the land. Seventeen years after liberation, 4,500 white families still own (by far the most profitable) half of the arable land. Only 67,000 black families have been resettled since 1980. Land hunger exists alongside under-utilisation of the best land on the white-controlled large farms.

Against this backdrop Mugabe's proposed solution looks radical. Quite rightly, the president has so far refused to pay the white ex-colonial farmers for the soil, though the state will pay for permanent improvements such as buildings, roads and dams.

This land was stolen by successive waves of British and Rhodesian colonisers. Nor is all of this "ancient history". Many of the biggest farmers acquired land within the past generation. In particular, large tracts were handed over to ex-British army soldiers after World War Two. The black peasants were not paid a penny in compensation.

Yet the British Labour government now has the gall to refuse to help



President Mugabe has been forced into concessions by strikes and demonstrations

Zimbabwe because the whites are not getting full compensation! As Mugabe pointed out at a recent rally, "The British have gone back on their promise to help us which they made at Lancaster House" (the site of the ceremony for the independence agreement signed by Margaret Thatcher in April 1980).

On closer inspection, however, Mugabe's plans are not that radical. As he declared at the same ZANU-PF rally, "we want to settle poor black peasants on this land and black commercial farmers." This is flawed in two respects.

The poor peasants cannot simply take over the land. They need free credit if they are to be able to farm it. Previous limited resettlements have seen huge drops in productivity as cash-strapped peasants cannot afford to invest and have resorted to subsistence farming. Any newly resettled black families will not be able to sell or raise a mortgage on their land and punitive interest rates will put private credit out of their reach.

In addition, the white Commercial Farmers Union (CFU) has threatened 147,000 redundancies, to cut production by 40% and to default on Z\$4.8 billion of outstanding mortgages, which could throw the banking system into crisis. Already, in an act of sabotage, Z\$6 billions of 1998 crops have not been sown by white farmers.

The second danger is that the government could create a layer of black commercial farmers, as it has done in the past, to win loyalty from generals, senior civil servants and party activists. This would not only swindle the poor peasantry, by swapping one set of landlords and bosses for another, but could

also temporarily ease Mugabe's political crisis.

A workers' answer

The Zimbabwean working class has taken important strides forward in the past year. The ZCTU has, until recently, been seen as a puppet of the regime. But a series of strikes in the civil service, the health service and on the airlines have put the organised working class on the political map. The ex-soldiers' victory over disability pensions and the partially successful general strike have opened the way forward for the hitherto unorganised working class to participate.

But the reformism and class collaboration of the current ZCTU leadership could block that path. Of course Morgan Tsvangirai, secretary general of ZCTU, is a sworn enemy of Mugabe. Two days after the general strike, government thugs burst into his office, attacking Tsvangirai and beating him senseless. Tsvangirai has said he holds the police commissioner and the Home Affairs minister responsible for the attack.

But while he may be targeted by Mugabe, Tsvangirai is not an enemy of the IMF-imposed ESAP which lies behind the cuts.

In a recent interview he declared: "The problem is that Mugabe doesn't have an economic strategy. He had this huge bureaucracy which was used for patronage. But the economy was not growing and he was spending more and more money. We were not living within our means. Some form of structural adjustment was needed."

But the problem cannot be reduced

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to the corruption of the ZANU-PF elite. Tsvangirai's is a classic reformist answer to a capitalist crisis: a more equitable distribution of the cuts.

There is an alternative: socialism. Instead of hitching itself to another faction of the bourgeois party, ZANU-PF, the ZCTU should be forming its own party. Instead of championing veteran's leader, Dr Chenjerai Hunzvi, an open supporter of Joshua Nkomo's faction (Mugabe's former military ally and then political rival), the ZCTU needs to fight to develop and implement a workers' answer to the crisis.

The land question remains central to Zimbabwean politics. It is the unsolved problem that led to the national revolution. All the commercial farms, including land, machinery and infrastructure, should be immediately nationalised without compensation. Those landless peasants who so wish should be allocated plots and granted free credit to develop the land in co-operation with workers. Other farms, like the giant tobacco plantations, should be run under the control of agricultural workers, with production

democratically planned to meet domestic and export needs.

The attacks on the working class are set to increase. Occupations are needed to prevent further privatisations, including that of the state airline; strikes must be organised in the privatised industries, like the Cotton Company of Zimbabwe, to stop job cuts and demand re-nationalisation under workers' control. Corruption and profits are the problem, not nationalisation.

Inflation has returned workers' living standards to the same level that they were in 1980. The ZCTU should build on the December general strike by fighting for wage hikes, a minimum wage and a 1% increase for every 1% inflation takes away.

The health and education systems

are the only remaining legacies of the liberation struggle. They have already been savaged and are threatened again. Should Mugabe's thugs try to tear-gas health strikers back to work, like they did last year, the other organised work-

housing, under workers' control could wipe out the evils of mass unemployment, provide a democratic guard against corruption and improve services and living standards.

"We are saying 'Down with Mugabe!' We are fed up with him." This is how one worker summed up the political mood of the general strike. The question is: what will replace Mugabe?

In the course of the workers' struggle the answer to that will become clear if the workers and poor peasants can develop their own organisations - councils that begin life by running the strikes and develop into bodies that can run the country; defence organisations that can protect demonstrations from baton charges and develop into the means for defending a workers' and poor peasants' government based on workers' and poor peas-

ants' councils.

At the moment ZCTU is launching a campaign for constitutional reform. To stop any behind the scenes stitch-up, such a campaign should seek to unite the ZCTU, the veterans' and poor peasants' organisations. They should call for the election of a sovereign constituent assembly as an immediate means of ending Mugabe's undemocratic rule.

To ensure that workers' and peasants' needs are put before the profits of the local bosses and the western banks and multinationals, workers will need their own party. The ZCTU must not repeat the mistakes of their South African brothers and sisters in COSATU, and sacrifice working class political independence in the name of an alliance with the "patriotic" bourgeoisie, namely the ruling ANC. The ZCTU must be forced to form a workers' party.

Within that struggle, revolutionaries will fight to ensure the party forged is a revolutionary one. Only with such a party, can the business left unfinished by the April 1980 Lancaster House agreement finally be concluded. ■

The land question remains central to Zimbabwean politics. It is the unsolved problem that led to the national revolution. All the commercial farms, including land, machinery and infrastructure, should be immediately nationalised without compensation

ers should relaunch the general strike.

Over a third of the working class is unemployed, despite being among the best educated in Africa. And yet Zimbabwe urgently needs to rebuild its economy. "Structural adjustment" is needed, but not of the IMF variety. A programme of public works, such as

South Africa: Mandela's long goodbye

ON 16 DECEMBER Nelson Mandela gave his final speech as President of the African National Congress (ANC). He spoke for nearly five hours, concentrating his fire on white intransigence and reaction.

The bosses' press and the white establishment were "alarmed" at this "tirade". His political swan song seemed a far cry from the forgiving talk of national reconciliation and the rainbow nation which they had come to expect from this "father of the nation".

The South African white establishment talked nervously of the dangers of one-party rule and the prospects of a more radical ANC government.

However, a closer look at both the speech and its targets reveals that far from launching a new crusade against inequality, Mandela was setting out to blame others for the ANC government's failures. Far from announcing a break with the ANC's bourgeois allies, Mandela was calling for swifter progress towards the integration and advancement of the black bourgeoisie.

Mandela's targets were varied. He even attacked some within the ANC for corruption. The message was that the construction of a post-apartheid South Africa was far from secure and under significant threat.

McCarthyism

Mandela accused the media and various unspecified non-governmental organisations of conspiring against the ANC's programme. Some likened parts of the speech to McCarthyism, as Mandela revealed his suspicions that sections of the Afrikaner opposition are involved in supporting organised crime to create a sense of chaos in South Africa. The level of crime is significant: the murder rate is around seven times that of the USA. And there is extensive infiltration of the police force by Afrikaner right wingers.

Mandela also lambasted the white opposition parties for defending racial privilege. He attacked the private sector for perpetuating apartheid patterns of ownership and control. He painted a picture of a plucky ANC fighting against intransigent reaction:

"Whenever we have sought real progress through affirmative action, the spokespersons of the advantaged have not hesitated to cry foul, citing all manner of evil - such as racism, violation of the constitution, nepotism, dictatorship, inducing a brain drain, and frightening the foreign investor."

The problems of continuing inequality are real enough, but are felt most acutely not by aspiring black business but by South Africa's working class and rural poor. Since the demise of apartheid the black middle class has prospered. Six percent of blacks are now considered rich; they are among the top fifth of earners. Black businessmen now control 9% of companies on the stock market. But greater opportunities for the black bourgeoisie are not mirrored in the experience of black workers.

Approximately a third of the potential workforce is unemployed, with jobless rates running at nearer 50% for the black population in certain areas. Work in the informal sector is by its very nature sporadic and insecure.

Jobs have been lost in mining and agriculture and while production rates have begun to rise in manufacturing, this has been on the back of rationalisation - shedding jobs, not creating them.

At the same time there is a shortage of skilled labour. Education has not been a priority under the new regime. A quarter of all adults in South Africa are illiterate.

Around a third of black families in South Africa still live on less than £100 a month. House building and improvements to service infrastructure are still pitifully slow. The insanitary conditions in many black townships did not disappear with the end of apartheid and continue to blight the lives of millions.

The huge inequalities in South Africa - still overwhelmingly patterned on racial lines - are a legacy of the apartheid system. They run through every aspect of social and economic life. For instance, a recent survey of the health sector in the Eastern Cape showed that nearly 80% of English and Afrikaans first language speakers (i.e. whites) occupy higher grade or supervisory jobs, whereas less than 20% of Xhosa speakers did so.

The root cause of these inequalities is the capitalist system itself. Capitalism sustained and benefited from apartheid for decades. Now it is demanding measures which maintain and even stretch the gap between rich and poor. Mandela's government, far from challenging this system, is promoting it.

It was Mandela and the whole of the ANC leadership who embraced the compromise constitution with its



The old leader and his successor: different styles but the same politics and the same class interest

sunset clauses. It was Mandela who deliberately constructed the Government of National Unity with the old racist parties. It is the ANC government which has continued to operate hand in glove with big business, even after the departure of the National Party from the coalition.

The ANC government is now locked into an IMF-driven programme of economic restraint, public sector cuts and continued privatisations. The original Reconstruction and Development Plan (itself a modest programme for regeneration and social improvement) has been replaced by GEAR - which is supposed to stand for Growth, Reconstruction and Development. John Gomo, the President of the union federation COSATU, was more accurate when he called it the "reverse gear of our society".

Investment

The public sector cuts demanded by GEAR are supposed to allow further investment in industry and manufacturing. In true IMF style this is supposed to be achieved by simply allowing the bosses to keep more profits while providing various infrastructural sweeteners.

The first obvious results are a tightening of public sector budgets with disastrous consequences for numerous

municipal projects. This means that in the industrial and financial powerhouse of Johannesburg there has been a freeze on improvements in electricity and sewerage. Libraries have had to cut their hours. Plans for improved sports facilities in the townships have been put on hold.

Finance Minister Trevor Manuel simply tells those who complain that "financially irresponsible" local municipalities are to blame.

As for the impoverished schools, the government planned to "solve" the problem of lack of resources by allowing schools to employ teachers over and above their allocated quota, if they could raise the funds themselves - a clear invitation for schools in more privileged areas to raise the funds themselves and preserve two-tier education. Protests from the teachers' unions have kept this to 10% of the workforce in any school but even this will allow richer parents to buy better education.

At present, black working class opposition is still relatively low-key, although there are constant small scale battles over wages and conditions and localised protests against cutbacks.

Widespread opposition to GEAR was voiced at the last COSATU congress, but the leadership is still sticking with the Alliance - the block between the ANC, COSATU and the

South African Communist Party (SACP). But the longer the government fails to deliver real improvement the more the Alliance, and working class acquiescence, come under strain.

It seems much of Mandela's speech was written by his heir, the new ANC President Thabo Mbeki. While the change in leadership may lead to a change in style - Mbeki is known as a backroom boy, a cool-headed technocrat - it is unlikely to lead to a change in political direction.

Mbeki is a bourgeois politician through and through. For the most part big business is perfectly happy to see him take the reins. But he is also quite willing to use populist rhetoric and bend towards the Africanist wing of the new black bourgeois politics when necessary. When Mbeki talks of "black empowerment" what he means is empowering black business and the professions.

This slight shift of line means putting a greater distance between the ANC mainstream leaders, and the SACP and the COSATU leaders. Mandela called for a "re-evaluation" of the relationship with the SACP, though at present both the leaderships have an interest in preserving the Alliance.

There are still SACP members in the government and a candidate backed by them and the unions - Patrick Lekota - won the Deputy President's post at the ANC Congress. This relationship ties the working class to the government and helps smooth the path for South African capital.

South African workers' real interests demand that the prison house of this Alliance is broken. They need neither populist rhetoric nor reformist promises but real action to tackle poverty and racism.

These tasks cannot be achieved without tackling the real sources of power and wealth - the capitalist owned and controlled mines, businesses, big farms and finance houses - and taking them into the hands of the working class. Mandela and Thabo Mbeki are engaged in an attempt to divert blame for the inequalities, poverty and exploitation which continue in post-apartheid South Africa. Mandela's farewell speech was, in fact, a high profile platform to set the agenda for further betrayals. South African workers must give him and his successor a clear answer by breaking from the Alliance and striking out on the path of real political independence. ■

DRUGS: Why Jack Straw is wrong

The case for legalisation

William Straw allegedly sold £10 worth of cannabis to a *The Mirror* journalist. No big deal – except William was the son of the most authoritarian Labour Home Secretary there has ever been. Jack Straw has made his political name as an enemy of drugs, a champion of responsible parenting and a friend of tough policing, particularly against the youth.

The real issues inadvertently "exposed" by the *Mirror* journalist are the absurdities of Britain's anti-drugs laws, the idiocy of Jack Straw's war on drugs and the need to defend youth like William, from zealots like his father, the police and the judges. After all simply for being suspected of dealing cannabis many youth, especially black youth, get treated a lot worse by the state than William Straw did.

The whole incident with William Straw should be used to take on and defeat his father's and the British state's reactionary policies on drugs. A socialist understanding of the drugs question is vital if we are to do this. That is why we print here a resolution on the issue passed by the International Executive Committee of the League for a Revolutionary Communist International (LRCI) at its meeting in late December 1997.

The resolution has been slightly abridged for reasons of space.

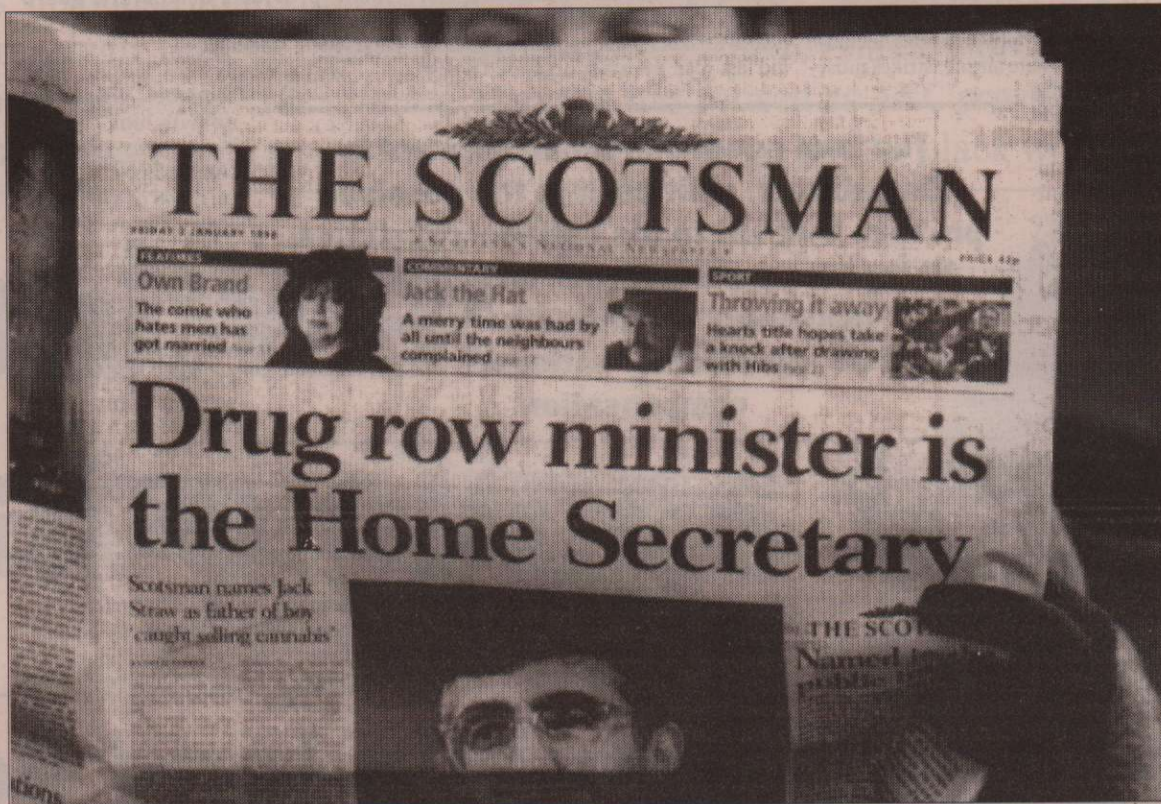
THROUGHOUT THE history of human society, including pre-class society, humans have consumed substances for reasons other than nutrition. Painkillers, hallucinogens, stimulants, mood alterers were all found in the earliest human societies.

Today Drugs is a generic term for substances ingested for reasons other than nutrition to ameliorate pain, cause stimulation, depress excitement, or alter mood or sensory perception. Recreational drug use has existed in every known human civilisation. The reasons for this are:

- the human body and brain is not a finished, perfect, or absolute form. Drugs can be ingested which temporarily ameliorate aspects of the individual's experience: reducing pain; increasing happiness; providing enjoyable physical stimulation or depressing anxiety. Drug taking is as "natural" as any other human activity;
- oppression and alienation cause widespread individual and social misery, pain and boredom, spurring individuals and groups to ingest drugs. Even in the very earliest societies drugs were consumed to alleviate the pain and fear that arises from humanity's struggle with nature;
- alienation and established religious or sexual mores create barriers to social activity which are weakened when several individuals are intoxicated. Hence the widespread popular use of drugs, whether as a sacrament in ancient religious ceremonies, in the phenomenon of the carnival and festival in the ancient, medieval and modern worlds, and the organised social distribution and collective consumption of drugs.

Reject
We take as our starting point the historically conditioned development of human society and the needs of human cultural and social development. We therefore reject asceticism as a general moral principle.

But there has yet to be discovered any drug that is devoid of harmful effects – some minor, others catastrophic. Revolutionary communists must therefore recognise both the historical utility and inevitability of widespread drug-taking, and the prevalence of socially destructive patterns of drug distribution and consumption



among oppressed classes.

We fight against bourgeois and religious hypocrisy and anti-democratic repression, whilst at the same time endeavouring to do everything possible to minimise the consequences of drug use for the health of the species and in particular, its effects on the fighting capacity of oppressed classes.

The rise of the modern city under capitalism created unparalleled concentrations of population at the same time that capitalist production massively increased the alienation of the individual. Mass production gave rise to a huge trade in drugs, controlled and owned by the rising mercantile and colonial powers. Thus certain patterns of mass drug consumption were consciously fostered by the capitalists.

Tobacco and caffeine consumption became common in Western Europe where they were previously unknown but found a ready market. Britain fought two wars for the "right" to sell opium to China. In the advanced Western capitalist countries the brewers emerged as powerful components of domestic capital.

Capitalist competition gives rise not only to drug production and distribution, but also to its opposite – prohibition. Thus the imperialist bourgeoisie determines which recreational drugs are to be legally obtainable, which restricted, and which it will attempt to suppress altogether. This is done

without regard to the relative effects of the substances concerned on the health of individuals or society.

Hence tobacco and alcohol are legal in every one of the imperialist democracies whilst the much less harmful drug cannabis was suppressed as a dangerous rival to them (at that time principally in the colonies) under the International Opium Convention of 1925.

Campaign

Hence also the panic-stricken campaign by the breweries against MDMA ("Ecstasy") use by young people, which has led since its sudden rise after 1988 to a loss of billions in the profits of the breweries, despite the fact that MDMA related deaths (under 100 in Britain over the last five years) are only a tiny fraction of the hundreds of thousands of deaths from alcoholism (excluding deaths in road traffic accidents officially attributable to alcohol) and the millions killed by tobacco.

Just as Britain fought drug related colonial wars in the 19th century, so control of the drug trade remains an important component of imperialist policy in the late 20th century. The USA's "War on Drugs" is only the most recent and extreme example of imperialism's long and ignoble record. Under cover of attempting to eliminate cocaine production, the USA claims the right to unilateral military intervention in central and south America, and used it as a pretext for its invasion of Panama.

Today anti-Coca operators immiserate small Colombian and Andean peasants whilst ensuring that the supply of cocaine to the world's number one market – the USA itself – is secure and can continue to expand. There is a mounting body of evidence of the CIA's role in planting crack cocaine – a hard drug associated with very high dependency and thus high levels of desperation and crime – in black ghettos across America in the early 1980s.

By exercising "arms-length" control over production and distribution, the bourgeoisie can maximise profits, use dangerous drugs to neutralise or weaken particular sections of the population that it fears and continue to justify imperialist adventures and the maintenance of a legal prohibition that provides a pretext for widespread police harassment and social control.

Specific mention must be made of the role drugs play in promoting and maintaining racial oppression. Racially oppressed communities are often ravaged by the effects of illegal drug use, with the usual ideological response of the bourgeoisie (and racist workers) being to blame the victims. Revolutionaries have to constantly fight against attempts to specifically criminalise black, north African, Asian and Latin American communities, whether in the name of a "drugs crackdown" or a "mugging crackdown".

The youth radicalisation of the 1960s and the rise of "youth culture"

and popular music spurred the consumption of illegal drugs – especially cannabis – all over the world, and in the imperialist democracies in particular. Prohibition provides an all-pervasive pretext for police repression of young people, and the harassment of ethnic minorities. The main reason given for this – the connection between drugs and crime – would be undone should prohibition itself be removed.

Resolution

It is this aspect of the situation that points the way to the resolution of the problem and its significance for revolutionary communists today. By unjustifiably prohibiting certain drugs and spreading palpable disinformation to justify this policy, imperialism simultaneously criminalises millions of people and exposes its preparedness to lie in its own interests.

This undermines the legitimacy of the state and the political system to millions of people all over the world. While the 1960s notion that drug-taking raises consciousness was nothing more than a stoned petit-bourgeois myth, imperialism's unjustifiable ban on some drugs has engendered widespread suspicion of and hatred for the police among young people all over the world.

This in itself need not spontaneously lead young people into class struggle against the police. It can merely reinforce the tendency to criminalisation and the growth of gangs, as in the cities of the USA and Britain.

A pattern has emerged as drug use has grown among the young. Youth alienation leads to intensified use of illegal drugs. This in turn leads to a growth of organised crime in drug distribution and rising violence by criminal gangs and desperate users of hard drugs. In working class areas anger and dismay rises at drug-related crime and at the degradation of young people in areas where "epidemics" take place.

The police are provided with a pretext for a crackdown on youth and minorities. In the absence of a fighting working class movement, for many youth organised criminal gangs increase their appeal and respect as the main enemies and opponents of the repressive apparatus.

Where gang activities take a significant hold communists actively challenge the slide into lumpen-proletarian criminality and gangsterism in the most oppressed working class areas. We resist any attempt by the bourgeois police or other repressive agencies to strengthen their power and control through a war on drugs or gangsterism. At the same time we advocate working class action – if necessary through force – to stamp out anti-social acts and gangsterism in working class areas.

Defence

To this end we propose the organised self defence of the working class in every area. Such defence organisations should be democratic and accountable. But we continue to stress that legalisation of drugs would ruin the gangsters overnight, removing their monopoly in distribution and the impulsion to criminality on the part of millions of youth.

But the fundamental cause of lumpenisation and anti-social crime in working class areas is neither drugs nor the illegality of drugs. It is the appalling conditions of life in the most oppressed and downtrodden urban areas. Only a mass revolutionary youth movement that takes up a life and death struggle against poverty, oppression, injustice and police repression, can provide the young dispossessed with a fighting alternative to self-destructive drug use and crime – self-sacrificing revolutionary struggle against capitalism. ■

What we fight for:

- Down with imperialism's "war on drugs".
- Legalisation of all drugs - restrictions only on use of drugs whilst driving or performing dangerous work.
- Provision of accurate information on the effects of drugs, with scientific reports and research open to public inspection. Transfer of public funds wasted on policing drug use into research on the effects of drugs and efforts to synthesise safer drugs. Organisation of drug dependants into collectives for educating young people on the negative effects of drugs on health.
- Provision of drugs at state-fixed prices.
- Free provision of hard drugs to registered addicts at state medical centres; remove all restrictions of the rights of registered addicts. Absolute confidentiality of medical records

including registers of drug dependent individuals.

- Needle exchanges to reduce risk of infection and cross-infection of diseases.
- Free testing of drugs for dosage, contents and impurities.
- State monopoly of drug production and distribution to destroy gangsterism at its roots.
- No to vigilante campaigns against drug users or small-scale sellers who commit no anti-social acts.
- For the right of working class communities to defend themselves against harassment or extortion by criminal gangs.
- Expropriate the breweries, pharmaceutical and tobacco companies - the biggest drug dealers of all.
- Stop the USA's war on "narco-terrorism". For peasants' rights to cul-

tivate coca and other drug related crops on guaranteed state prices. Imperialism out of central and south America.

- Scrap all laws against parties, raves, youth culture. Free provision of drinking water and MDMA testing kits at all raves.
- End advertising of all drugs, including alcohol and tobacco.
- For an organised campaign against self-destructive drug use, disseminating accurate information and involving users' and victims' groups wherever possible.
- Fight the poverty and oppression which engenders alcoholism and hard drug use and for a clear perspective of struggle against the terrible conditions capitalism inflicts on the inner cities - unemployment, poor quality housing and homelessness. ■

FOOD: Genetic engineering and the food on our tables

A risky business?

MANY PEOPLE, including some prominent scientists, believe that the new wave of food-related "epidemics" is caused by tampering with the natural lives of farm animals. They argue that forcing vegetarian species like cows to become meat-eaters, the intensive production of eggs and "factory farms" have now been exposed as dangerous folly.

Consumer groups have called for better product labelling and the attraction of organic farming methods has increased. For a substantial number of consumers, vegetarianism has been seen as a way to avoid the supposed ill effects of modern food production.

Now, however, the arrival on a truly mass scale of genetically-engineered crops seems about to destroy the last refuge of the health-conscious, green consumer. Six multinational agrochemical conglomerates – Monsanto, Novartis, AgroEvo, Dupont, Zeneca and Dow – are fighting to secure a dominant position over world food production through their control over the biotechnology necessary to genetically engineer crops.

Between them, these corporations have so far invested £5 billion, but with the global stakes in the food industry reckoned to be worth £250 billion the rewards for "victory" in this battle could be enormous.

At present, only two retail food items are obviously produced by genetic engineering – tomato puree and vegetarian cheese – but the Consumers' Association says that many more are affected but cannot be identified because of so-called product mixing. This is especially true of products containing soya (reportedly present in 60% of all processed food items). Monsanto already accounts for 25% of US soya production and it refuses to allow any separation of its output into "natural" and engineered categories.

As well as soya, there are genetically engineered varieties of corn, oil-seed rape and cotton, with many other crops soon to follow. This has sparked concern among a layer of consumers, farmers and even within some governments. *Guardian*, a week-long series in the *Guardian*, a Labour minister for food safety, Jeff Rooker, has expressed some sympathy with the call for a three-year moratorium on licenses for more genetically modified crops.

In response to such hostility, Monsanto, and other agrochemical giants, have deployed a variety of lobbying techniques. In the USA, for instance, Monsanto has "planted" ex-employees in the federal Food and Drug Administration (FDA). The most stunning example of this political engineering was the recruitment of former Monsanto researcher Margaret Miller by the FDA, which then asked her to review her own Monsanto research!

Biotechnology firms were among the biggest corporate contributors to Bill Clinton's 1996 re-election campaign. The agrochemical giants have managed to persuade 14 US state legislatures to adopt laws prohibiting "the spreading of false and damaging information about food".

The six multinationals are pressing the United Nations' food standards group to ban labelling of genetically modified foods. If they succeed such a ruling would be adopted by the World Trade Organisation as its global standard. Any national government which opts to contravene this decision could be subject to sanctions.

Fighting back against the attempt to manipulate the global food markets is an unusual alliance of environmentalists, farmers and even some big supermarket chains. Recent months have seen direct action across three continents against modified crops, with produce and seed stores destroyed, milk

BSE, E Coli bacteria, salmonella in eggs, cancer-causing additives and E-numbers, even "chicken" flu – the list of food-related scares goes on and on. Labour's latest response to this was to ban the sale of beef on the bone, outraging many consumers and prompting a vile nationalist protest campaign by the reactionary National Farmers' Union. In this climate of food panic a debate on the genetic engineering of certain food products is underway. **Adrian Shaw** looks at the issues behind this debate.



Cloned sheep in Scotland: symbols of new promise or peril?

poured down drains, and offices and other corporate installations occupied. Third World farmers, especially in India, are threatening civil disobedience campaigns. In Britain, the Iceland chain has banned genetically engineered produce from its "own label" products.

What is it about genetic engineering that has caused such uproar around the food industry? To begin with, it is worth remembering that human beings have been trying to alter foodstuffs, plants and animals for thousands of years. In a very real sense, the existence and expansion of our species has rested on our ability to subordinate nature to a significant degree.

Controlling chemical reactions is essential for brewing, baking, cheesemaking and the production of a host of

desired gene can be copied and inserted directly into the host body. While still not fully perfected, such techniques are much more precise and far quicker in achieving the desired results than simple cross-breeding.

At present, such techniques seem to offer the most potential in protecting crops from the toxic side effects of herbicides (weed killers). Monsanto's single most successful product to date has been the herbicide glyphosate, marketed under the brand-name "Roundup". But Monsanto's patent runs out in the year 2000, thus allowing competitors to manufacture similar products and erode its hefty profit margin.

Monsanto's response to this commercial threat has been the development of a new range of glyphosphate-

be required to buy the seed for three years, use only one weed killer and grow only one crop. They are potentially subject to unlimited penalty fines if they attempt to reuse any of the seed, in any way. Disgruntled farmers will have legal recourse to only one US court if they wish to pursue action against Monsanto.

As genetic engineering becomes more developed and its commercial application more widespread, several countries are anxious about the future for specialist foodstuffs and the prospect of cultivation elsewhere in the wake of genetic modification. The potential threat to a number of Third World economies, reliant on the export of one or two crops, is obvious. It is easy to see why many Indian farmers and scientists see the push for geneti-

span of insects that feed on them or, alternatively, produce toxic-resistant strains of "super pests".

Given the currently unknown consequences of modifying crops, what should the response of socialists be? Clearly, the potential benefits for humanity are enormous. The use of cloning techniques promises a range of useful medicines, such as a key blood clotting agent now carried by genetically engineered sheep in Scotland. Production of this protein from cloned lambs could vastly improve the quality of life for many haemophiliacs at virtually no cost.

The ability to grow crops in previously inconceivable quantities, free from attack by pests, could eradicate hunger and malnutrition at a stroke. Famines could become a thing of the past. But herein lies the real problem at the heart of the current debate. Which classes will benefit from the scientific conquests being made?

Today food is produced not for consumption alone, but for profit. The real cause of contemporary famine and hunger is not a shortage of food but the fact that it is produced by capitalist corporations determined to realise a profit. If food cannot be sold at a profit it is left to rot by the capitalists rather than used to satisfy the hunger of millions.

The altogether desirable goals of increasing agricultural efficiency and reducing physically exhausting toil on the land would, in the context of socialism, call for controlled experiments to assess relevant risks involved in the genetic engineering of foodstuffs. But such a scenario is a million miles away from the calculations of Monsanto and the other agrochemical giants.

For them the sole decisive criterion remains profit, which is inextricably linked to the manipulation of the world's food markets. If Monsanto genuinely believed that there were no risks inherent in the processes at present, would they object so strenuously to the labelling of genetically engineered products? If it wasn't seeking to create a monopoly, would they be seeking to stop farmers re-using seed? If they had nothing to hide would Monsanto have bothered smugly moving staff into the FDA's laboratories?

Marxists are in favour of the development of the productive forces, but we are also committed to democratically planned production to meet human need, not realise corporate super-profits. Technologies developed under capitalism have not only increased agricultural productivity many times over, they have often enhanced the safety of foodstuffs many of us consume everyday.

But so long as biotechnology remains under capitalist control, we must be on our guard about their safe application.

Socialists fight for:

- A moratorium on any further licensing of modified crops
- Full public disclosure of the details of all current experiments in the field
- A workers'/consumers' enquiry into genetically engineered foods, with full access to relevant scientific expertise
- Labelling of products which clearly distinguishes between genetically and "natural" crops
- The rechecking of all modified crops currently on the market
- The nationalisation, without compensation and under workers' control, of the agrochemical monopolies.

A fight for such control will do more to enhance the safety of the masses than Labour's beef on the bone ban. And it can develop into a fight against not just the production of food for profit but also against the capitalist system itself. ■

In a very real sense, the existence and expansion of our species has rested on our ability to subordinate nature to a significant degree

other everyday foods and drinks. Among animals, selection and cross-breeding allows useful traits to come to the fore, while limiting the presence in a livestock population of those characteristics deemed to be unhelpful for human consumption.

Those who say there should be no attempt to exercise such control at all are the dietary equivalent of the flat-earthers. But a rejection of their arguments should not blind us to the new issues, that are being uncovered in the current debates, about the scale of genetic engineering being proposed by the multinationals.

The difference which has now emerged, more than four decades after Francis Crick and James Watson first unlocked the secret of the DNA molecule, is that the individual genes responsible for negative or positive attributes in food products can be identified and manipulated with a qualitatively higher degree of precision. If a plant or animal "needs" to be modified, the

resistant crops. In theory, this will enable farmers to blanket spray their fields knowing that the herbicide will only damage "weeds".

In the context of intensive farming such a product has obvious attractions and Monsanto has even claimed that the product will be environmentally friendly, leading to the reduced use of weed killer and pesticides. In the meantime, however, New York state's Attorney General has ordered Monsanto to withdraw claims that the product is biodegradable and "environmentally friendly". Public health experts at the University of California have pointed out that glyphosphates are the third most common culprit in herbicide/pesticide-related illnesses.

Some farmers are also unhappy with the conditions Monsanto has sought to attach to the purchase of its new seeds. Not only are they expensive (\$22 as against a current \$16 per bushel average) but Monsanto has tacked on a "technology fee". In addition, farmers will

cally engineered crops as a key part of the drive by imperialist multinationals to exercise still greater control over world food production.

If these are the concerns of some farmers and governments about the economic changes that genetic engineering might cause, there are also scientific grounds for caution. The principal worry is the inability to guarantee that gene transfers will only touch the specific trait intended. Genes are living organisms. They interact with various aspects of their surroundings. It is not possible, as yet, to predict with confidence how a number of the "new" plants and/or animals will behave.

Already, serious problems have emerged in a number of experiments. The most disturbing episode concerned a bacteria (*Klebsiella planticola*) which was meant to digest agricultural waste and turn into ethanol. Instead, it indiscriminately destroyed crops, soil and fauna! Other concerns focus on modified crops that apparently slash the life

GERMANY: University strike wave

Students say no to cuts and fees

THE STUDENT protest movement in Germany started at the end of October at the University of Giessen. A general student assembly decided to go on strike against cuts, underfunding and the introduction of fees.

Over 600 students had signed up for a seminar in social sciences designed for 60 students! The anger boiled over into action and the protest movement began.

In the following weeks the movement spread throughout Germany. No national student organisation organised or even called for this; the example of Giessen was enough to bring hundreds of thousands into action. At the high point of the movement – late November and early December – more than 100 universities were hit by student strikes.

At the end of last year, Germany saw the biggest wave of student protests since the days of the 1968 movement. **Martin Suchanek** of the *Gruppe Arbeitermacht* (GAM) reports.

Mass demonstrations were staged against the government's cuts and its refusal to outlaw fees in the newly adopted university regulation law, the "Hochschulrahmengesetz". This measure is designed to promote the direct funding of universities by private capital. Whole departments will become dependent on private funds, competing with each other for such money. Control of research, the selection of lecturers and the content of the courses will be in the hands of private capitalists.

All of the political parties, including the ruling conservative/liberal coalition, claimed that they sympathised with the protests. But this "sympathy" was cynically designed to defuse the movement. The mass of students were not fooled. They directed their actions and demands against these fake "friends".

No nation-wide platform of the movement has been developed but nearly all the student strike assemblies called for similar demands: against further cuts; for state funding of the

universities; no to the introduction of fees. In a number of cases demands for equal access and rights for foreign students, plus an extension of student rights in the self-governing bodies of the universities, were added.

Many platforms called for solidarity with other victims of the attacks on welfare: the unemployed, the low-paid, public sector workers and lecturers, pensioners, immigrant workers and women. At many rallies representatives of the public and education sector unions, OTV and GEW, were invited as speakers and a number of demonstrations and rallies were organised together with them. This marked a step forward in the consciousness of many students.

The demands adopted by the students were not accidental, but reflect-

ed the dominant political ideology of the leading activists. The leadership clearly lay in the hands of politically petit-bourgeois and reformist forces – the Greens, the SPD, the PDS, and "independent" petit-bourgeois and reformist groupings.

Despite the militant potential of the strikes, the nature of the leadership meant that they were often conducted in a half-hearted and inconsistent way. Only a few universities were occupied and hardly any picket lines were formed to stop strike-breakers.

In a number of cases the reformists and Greens managed to get whole assemblies to vote to respect the "right to learn" for strike-breakers. Where they could not win this they blocked decisions to build picket lines or to occupy colleges by not implementing them.

This was possible because there were no strike committees made up of leaderships elected and recallable by the strike assemblies. So the leadership remained in the hands of the bureaucratic student parliament executives.

It remains to be seen whether January and the new term will witness a further wave of strikes. But we can already draw a general lesson of the movement: to win the students will have to fight around clear demands for free education and an end to cuts, align themselves with the working class and build democratically elected and accountable centralised fighting organs. To achieve these tasks and to solve the present crisis of leadership amongst the students it will be crucial to build a revolutionary communist student organisation. ■



German students raise the banner "Universities in need"

The *Gruppe Arbeitermacht* (GAM), German section of the League for a Revolutionary Communist International, intervened into the student strikes with a series of leaflets and four extra issues of our paper. We also organised a number of meetings at the campuses, particularly at the "Freie Universität Berlin". Our student members took part in the occupation of the directorate of the university.

The GAM's arguments ranged from outlining a general strategy for the movement to dealing with significant day-to-day decisions in the general assemblies.

We argued for an indefinite occupation-strike, daily strike assemblies, the election of strike committees to

OUR INTERVENTION

lead the struggle, their centralisation throughout Berlin and nationally, and the immediate convocation of a national action conference to decide on the demands and the strategy of the whole movement.

The GAM argued that these demands should be not only defensive (against further cuts and against fees), but that we should fight for a decent living grant for all students – a guaranteed minimum income of DM 1500 a month. Linked to this was the demand for a massive programme of funding to modernise the universities,

controlled by committees of the trade unions, the employees at the universities and the students. This would challenge the states', the bosses' and the professors' control over research and teaching. All of these measures would be paid for by a massive increase of taxation on the rich.

Since the students on their own could never achieve such aims, they needed to link up these struggles with the workers' fight against privatisation, wage cuts, redundancies and unemployment, and cuts in welfare spending.

By these means the GAM outlined and fought for a revolutionary alternative to the reformist leadership of the movement. ■

AUSTRALIA: Secret scab training camp exposed

Class war on the waterfront

DOCUMENTS LEAKED to the press last month showed that an Australian company called Fynwest had recruited 50-70 men to train in Dubai as stevedores under the direction of an ex-SAS man. The training of scabs in Dubai was aimed at breaking the powerful Maritime Union of Australia (MUA).

As well as ex-soldiers, the training force included 29 current Australian military personnel on formal leave from the army and airforce. The threat of an international boycott of Dubai's harbour by the International Transport Federation (ITF) led the Dubai authorities to revoke the would-be strike-breakers' visas on 13 December.

While this was an undoubted victory for the MUA, the episode is just the beginning of the story. Australia's right-wing Coalition government, led by John Howard, is out to smash the union. This makes class warfare on the Australian docks inevitable in 1998.

Fynwest initially denied that the men were being trained for operations in Australia. It was later forced to concede that it had sought to "train people overseas for jobs that we have here in Australia".

The trainees' contracts obliged them to spend three months on a programme in Dubai. On their return to Australia they would have helped train a further 180-200 men over a 28-day peri-

od. This phase of the operation would have been conducted in a camp sealed off from the outside world. At the end of this period, the men would have awaited "orders for further deployment".

"Further deployment" could only mean a union-busting operation on the Australian docks.

This explains the military planning and conspiratorial character of the whole operation. The MUA is part of the historic vanguard of the Australian labour movement and maintains a closed shop in all of the country's ports. A victory for Howard against the MUA would advance his goal of casualising ever larger sections of the Australian workforce – replacing unionised labour with cheaper workers on individual contracts.

When the Fynwest operation came to light Howard's government said that while it welcomed any initiative to bring "greater competition and freedom" to the Australian docks, it had no involvement with the plan. This was soon

exposed as a lie.

Only days after the first reports, more leaked documents revealed that not only had the government known about the operation since September, it had actively contributed to the plan's development, in collusion with the National Farmers' Federation, and the mining and manufacturing lobby.

The plan emerged in the wake of an earlier MUA victory at the port of Cairns in northern Queensland. Here dockers struck after the local stevedoring company had attempted to bring in non-union labour.

After a two week stand-off the company backed down when several ships refused to enter the port after their owners had been threatened with solidarity action by the ITF, an umbrella organisation representing over five million workers world-wide. The government berated managers for their lack of resolve. It clearly went for the Fynwest option in the hope of turning the tables on the MUA in the next confrontation.

The government and its ruling class pay-masters speak with one voice when they demand "reform" on the waterfront. The docks are absolutely central to the Australian economy, and lowering port labour costs is a strategic goal for the Australian bourgeoisie.

Restructuring the docks is a key part of a wider offensive against Australian workers and the oppressed. Since coming to power in March 1996 the Coalition has slashed health, education and welfare spending, attacked Aboriginal land rights and passed new anti-union laws based on the Thatcherite model.

The threat of co-ordinated action with the ITF has so far been crucial in warding off the attacks. Like the world wide support that has been vital to sustaining the Liverpool dockers' strike, it illustrates the potential for building the international solidarity between workers that is required to defeat the attacks of the capitalists.

But for this potential to be realised the ITF itself will have to be transformed. It is firmly controlled by the bureaucrats of the participating unions – a fact also revealed by the Liverpool strike where the TGWU's role in the ITF has actually restricted the scope of international solidarity. Rank and file international co-ordination is required to overcome this bureaucratic stranglehold.

So far, all negotiations with the ITF have been carried out behind closed

doors by MUA secretary John Coombs. He certainly cannot be counted on to lead a determined battle in defence of his members' jobs, wages and conditions. When the present government came to power Coombs' main concern was to demonstrate that his members could deliver on productivity and international competitiveness.

Three months into the Coalition government he stated that he would do "whatever I can do to remove any suggestion that I cannot deliver on productivity".

It is vital that rank and file Australian dockers insist that all discussions of tactics and strategy with the ITF be totally open to the membership.

At the same time they should begin to build rank and file committees at every port and between ports, with the goal of ensuring that democratically elected and fully accountable committees control the action when the inevitable showdown comes.

Other trade unionists should demand that their union leaders give a guarantee of their active support for the dockers at every stage including solidarity strike action and should start forging links with MUA activists now.

Such determined national and international action can defend the existing conditions of Australian dockers and the working class as a whole and lay the basis for future gains. ■

ASIA: Economic turmoil spreads

Japan joins the downward slide

THE ECONOMIC miracle that was Japan is looking distinctly tarnished. As the government stumbled from crisis to crisis, the Japanese economy has plunged back into recession and Japanese business suffered its worst spate of bankruptcies in post-war history.

Japanese prime minister Ryutaro Hashimoto's own personal popularity has sunk to an all-time low. While grappling with economic problems he has also been struggling to keep the ruling coalition government, led by the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP), in order.

And 1998 promises more of the same for Hashimoto and his coalition government.

The root of the problem for Hashimoto's government is the state of the Japanese economy. The Tokyo stock market has shed billions of Yen from its value over the past few months and there has been a sharp contraction in consumer spending. Economic growth remains amongst the lowest in the OECD countries – barely over one percent – and unsold stock inventories continue to rise.

These economic problems led to the spate of bankruptcies. The collapse of Yamaichi Securities Co. was only the most spectacular of a series of financial institution failures (see WP 217 "Asia sneezes, we all fall down?" December 1997)

With the Japanese finance sector burdened by an estimated 29 trillion Yen (US\$223 billion) in bad debts, more failures are expected in the coming months. Indeed, four of Japan's ten largest financial institutions are facing bankruptcy unless the government bails them out.

The crisis in the Japanese finance sector is not simply caused by poor lending practices and the effects of the economic meltdown elsewhere in Asia – important as these are. Falling industrial output is a key factor.

This fall was a result of massive over-production of commodities and over-accumulation of capital. Growing stock inventories and a contraction in areas

for profitable investment have forced firms to cut production and thus cut profits. In November alone industrial output in Japan fell by 4.1%, the sixth decline in the last ten months.

Hashimoto has pledged that he will take all steps to ensure that Japan is not the country to pull the world economy into depression.

These steps have so far included a two trillion Yen (US\$15.3 billion) income tax cut; a budget that cut general expenditure by 1.3% – the first reduction in eleven years – and a plan to reduce Japan's state sector from twenty two to thirteen ministries.

Here Japan's rulers face a major contradiction; on the one hand they are facing pressure to increase state spending to bail out flagging firms and keep the country's economy afloat; on the other hand they are pledged to rein in public spending in order to address state debt and the current account deficit.

They can't do both. The dilemma has already expressed itself in a lukewarm response from both business and workers to the government's hesitant crisis management measures.

Only days after the announcement of the tax cuts and budget plans, the Nikkei index once again went into a free fall, shedding nearly 4% of its value.

Japanese workers are deeply dissatisfied with the government's action and its promises to bail out failing firms.

In a recent poll 65-75 percent of waged workers said that they felt that a serious recession still prevailed.

All of this has expressed itself in a slide in support for the government and particularly for Hashimoto. His support has dropped from 44% in November to below 30% by the end of 1997. At the same time his coalition government is deeply divided. Both of the LDP's coalition allies – the Social Democratic Party and the New Party Sukigake – have expressed doubts over Hashimoto's policy direction. With more economic turmoil promised in early 1998, these differences may not be

able to be contained within the present coalition.

The main opposition party is not well placed to take advantage of the government's weaknesses. The Shin Shinto (New Frontier Party) is itself severely divided, with a break-away group having just been formed. With its former forces now divided, and with significant political differences separating it from possible coalition partners – the Socialist and the Communist parties who between them probably command the support of no more than 12% of the electorate – it is unlikely that it could form a stable government.

It is likely, therefore, that the LDP will remain Japan's dominant political party. But while they may dump Hashimoto in the near future, the LDP have no answers to the crisis.

Only the Japanese working class, led by a revolutionary workers' party, can solve that crisis by destroying capitalism and building socialism. The building of such a workers' party is the key task for the Japanese working class today. ■



Japanese premier Hashimoto

Japanese workers are deeply dissatisfied with the government's action and its promises to bail out failing firms

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.



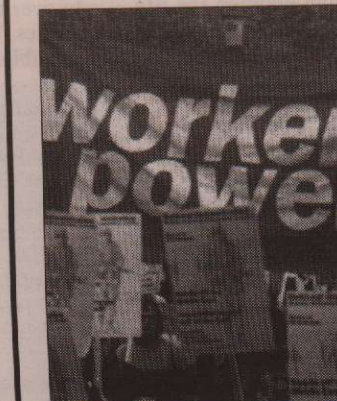
Social Oppression

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! ★

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Ireland: defend the nationalist community

End Loyalist terror



The funeral of Seamus Dillon, victim of a sectarian Loyalist terror squad

IN THE FINAL hours of 1997 two gunmen approached the Clifton Tavern in a predominantly Catholic area of North Belfast. They raked the bar with bullets, leaving 31-year-old Edmund Treanor dead and six others wounded.

Late on New Year's Day the Loyalist Volunteer Force (LVF) claimed responsibility for Treanor's murder, saying it was in retaliation for the assassination on 27 December in the Maze Prison of their "leader" Billy Wright.

Neither Edmund Treanor nor any of the other victims of the Clifton Tavern attack had any connection with the Irish National Liberation Army (INLA), the organisation which claimed responsibility for shooting Wright. Nor were they linked to any other Republican organisation.

The New Year's revellers in the Clifton Tavern were shot simply for being in a Catholic bar. This brutal sectarian attack is typical of the LVF – the most bloodthirsty of all the Loyalist paramilitary organisations.

Representatives of the SDLP as well as Sinn Fein strongly believe that the LVF did not act alone in carrying out the New

Year's Eve attack. They point the finger at the Ulster Defence Association (UDA) for at least colluding in the action. Despite denials by the UDA, its brigadiers took out memorial notices for Wright, known as "King Rat", in Protestant papers across the Six Counties, praising him as a "true loyalist".

The attack in North Belfast was at least the third since the INLA executed Wright. And the LVF have strongly indicated that it would not be their last act of sectarian vengeance.

Strafed

Hours before the Clifton killing, Loyalists strafed the house of a Catholic family in the Belfast suburb of Greencastle. The night after Wright's death LVF gunman claimed the life of Seamus Dillon, a bouncer at a hotel club in Dungannon, Co. Tyrone in another "revenge" attack, which wounded four others including a 14-year-old boy.

This all contrasts sharply with Billy Wright. He was a sectarian psychopath, who authorised the murders of at least three dozen Catholics. He was responsible for the slaying of taxi driver William McGoldrick at the height of the July 1996

protests against the Orange parade of bigotry at Drumcree. This action was too much even for his bosses in the Ulster Volunteer Force (UVF), who expelled Wright from the organisation and supposedly placed a bounty on his head.

While the British media has sought to paint Wright as an extremely marginal figure, mainstream Unionist politicians had been quite prepared to associate with Wright when he was alive and have been only too happy to seize on his death in their attempt to ensure the so-called peace process leads to no significant concessions to the nationalist community. They know that the threat of Loyalist terror is a valuable weapon for maintaining the Protestant veto over the future of the Six Counties, however much they may publicly claim to be non-violent.

A leading member of Ian Paisley's Democratic Unionist Party, Billy McCrea, the then MP for Mid-Ulster, shared a platform in support of Wright in 1996 after the murder of William McGoldrick. Against the background of the stand-off at Drumcree, Ulster Unionist Party (UUP) leader David Trimble met

for closed-door talks with Wright, a meeting initially denied by Trimble but documented beyond any doubt by a BBC journalist.

Unlike Paisley's party, the UUP has taken part in the Stormont talks since Sinn Fein's entry after the IRA declared its second ceasefire last summer. Westminster politicians like Trimble are, however, prepared to play the Loyalist terror card to either scuttle the Stormont talks entirely, if that is deemed necessary, or secure the most reactionary settlement possible.

The UUP, though it is willing to countenance a renegotiation of partition, remains fundamentally committed to the defence of Protestant privilege which has been upheld for more than 75 years by the sectarian statelet. Trimble will not put too much distance between the party and the potential for an Orange backlash against the peace process highlighted by the attendance of 20,000 at Wright's funeral on 30 December.

Meanwhile, fear has returned to the streets of North Belfast and other nationalist communities across the Six Counties. Recent events have awakened memories of the notorious

Shankill Butchers and the horrific massacres carried out by Loyalist thugs at Greysteel and Loughinisland in the mid-1990s. The question is once more: how can nationalist communities defend themselves against murderous Loyalist attacks?

Occupation

In the wake of the murders of Seamus Dillon and Edmund Treanor, the government has reversed its programme of the partial withdrawal of the 18,000 British troops stationed in the Six Counties and reintroduced military patrols to sections of Belfast. But the bitter experience of nearly 30 years of British military occupation has shown that the troops have served to defend the sectarian statelet and crush all forms of nationalist resistance to it as on Bloody Sunday in 1972 – not to protect the basic rights of the Catholic population.

The small forces around the INLA hope that the assassination of Wright, combined with growing frustration in working class nationalist areas at Sinn Fein's total commitment to a peace process which has delivered neither peace nor justice, will revive its fortunes. But the

defence of the nationalist population must not be left to an elite band of guerrilla fighters. Nor does the way forward lie with the renewal of the guerrilla armed struggle, however determined.

What the current situation requires is a mass campaign of opposition to the sectarian state and to British imperialism's occupation of the Six Counties. It requires the organisation of self-defence by the nationalist masses to combat Loyalist terror. The armed sections of the Republican movement should put their weapons at the disposal of, and under the control of nationalist communities under the threat of indiscriminate murder and "ethnic cleansing".

In Britain, socialists must be absolutely clear that we stand foursquare with the nationalist community, those being targeted by the Loyalist thugs. Ultimately they will not be protected by the INLA, nor will they find a lasting peace through the Sinn Fein negotiators. The precondition for a just peace remains the complete withdrawal of British troops and the granting of the unconditional right of self-determination to the whole of the Irish people across the 32 counties. ■

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