

# Workers power

Socialism, Internationalism, Revolution

British Section of the League for a Revolutionary Communist International

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## INSIDE

### Who's winning the Irish peace?



### Clinton's real crimes

page 3



### Fighting the benefit backlash

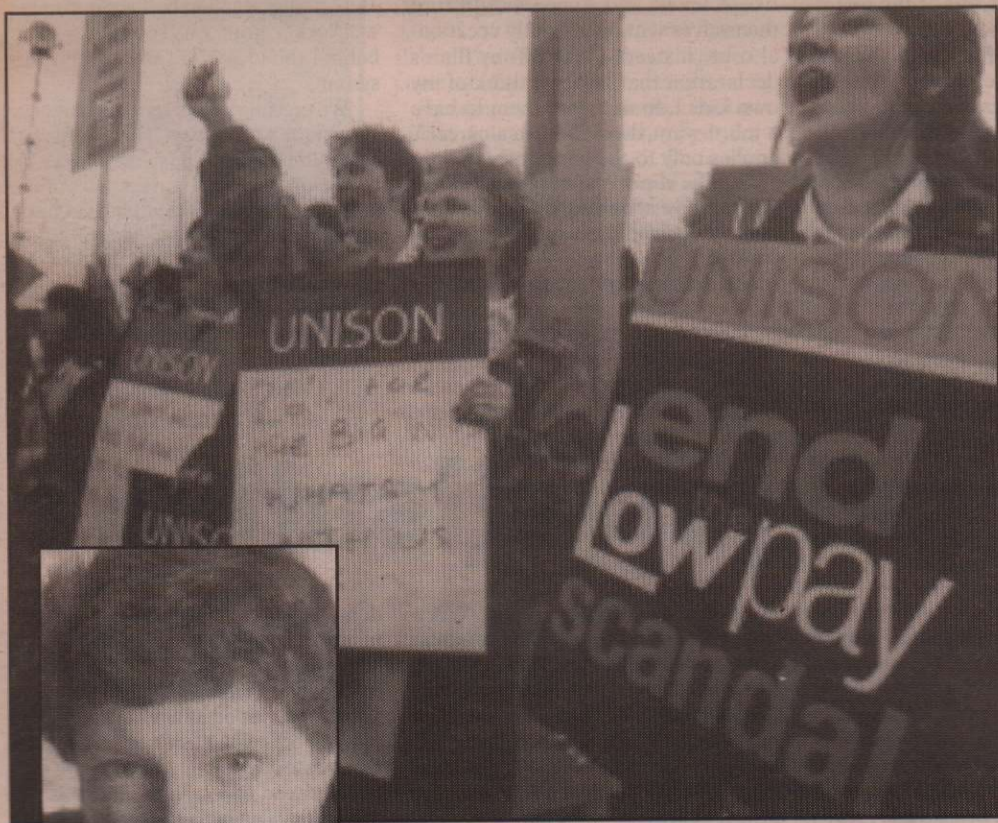
page 2



### Europe bars terror victims

page 12

# BLAIR'S PAY ROBBERY



City fat cat Guy Hands earns £110,000 a day while health workers will lose £5 per week under Labour's pay deal

## 1.3 million workers face pay cut while fat cats get record rises

**The fightback starts here – page 4**

## BENEFITS: Labour's welfare roadshows

# Open for business - closed to claimants

**BLAIR'S WELFARE** roadshows prove both the government's determination to attack welfare rights and its recognition of opposition and unease among its supporters.

The roadshows have been carefully orchestrated to give a limited voice to hand-picked party activists, but also to make a media splash. They are an indication of who the real "stakeholders" are in Blair's government.

In Sheffield the first "open" meeting was open largely to local business. Firms are being asked to donate £5,000 sponsorship for roadshows, no doubt in return for favours when it comes to handing out New Deal contracts. The Luton roadshow was sponsored by TV firm NTL CableTel.

At the same time Labour's propagandists have been putting a spin on the various proposals under discussion. Maternity pay won't be cut, it will be subject to an "affluence test"; single parents aren't losing benefit, they are getting "new opportunities"; the disabled aren't being forced back to work, they're receiving help from a "personal adviser".

This propaganda war is having some success because of the inadequacies of the existing welfare state and the terrible levels of poverty in Britain today. The new government is still able to draw on reserves of goodwill. Many workers are dismayed at the benefit cuts but many more are still willing Labour to succeed and are prepared to give Blair a hearing.

Labour is advancing a number of key arguments that need a serious reply:

● "Many welfare benefits go to the wrong people. The better-off qualify for help while ordinary families foot the bill."

Blair and his social security minister Harriet Harman say that the bills are too high because of substantial payments of disability and maternity benefits to rich people.

Harman asked why women on £1 million a year should get maternity pay of £20,000 a week. But just how many women fit this description? This nonsensical figure is being floated

to justify cutting maternity pay to women in ordinary white collar jobs. Over 21 million women currently do not qualify for any maternity pay. The real answer is decent maternity pay for all and an increase, not a cut, in child benefit.

The vast majority of people claiming Disability Living Allowance need every penny of it. The principle is simple to understand: it costs more to live and work if you are disabled.

Means testing benefits is insulting and degrading. Would it save money? Unlikely. Means tested benefits are the most expensive form of benefit to run. They require more bureaucracy: form filling, assessments, visits.

● "Thousands of claimants are defrauding the system."

The National Audit Office handily released figures to back up Blair claiming that 17% of claims were fraudulent. Actually these figures came from the DSS itself - hardly a neutral observer. Other independent surveys suggest that less than 2% of claims are suspect.

The real scandal is the fraud practised by the big tax dodgers - who stash away something like £96 billion through scams like their offshore trusts. New Labour have done nothing to tackle tax avoidance, not surprising given Geoffrey Robinson, Labour's Paymaster General, has millions stashed in the Channel Islands. Harassing a tiny number of benefit claimants, while allowing others to grab millions, doesn't seem to make much economic sense, but that is precisely what they are doing.

● "The welfare state keeps people in poverty - instead they should be offered opportunities."

Blair said at one roadshow:

"When I look at the welfare state I don't see a pathway out of poverty, I see a dead end for too many people."

Yet the various proposals under discussion will result in more poverty and fewer opportunities.

The largest section of the social security budget - 46% - goes to the elderly. The only way to cut this spending is to force most people onto personal



Disabled rights protesters demonstrate against cuts in benefits

pensions run by the private sector. This change will take place "over a fifteen year period" - in other words threatening the pension rights of many of today's older workers and everyone under 40.

Cuts to single parents benefits will save little money. In the absence of decent jobs, women will move from dependence on the state to dependence on men or on their parents; others are pushed even further into poverty.

● "The welfare to work scheme will help young people out of the unemployment trap."

The New Deal for young workers is heralded as a move away from the slave labour schemes of the past. Young people will be offered job opportunities, training or education.

But the New Deal is a cheap labour scheme. Blair acknowledges that there will be no guarantee of jobs at the end of the New Deal training. The government is forcing them into low paid

work; if they refuse they lose benefits.

The biggest con is the offer of education. Recently employment minister Andrew Smith confirmed that the bulk of the education provision would be for NVQ Level 2 qualifications - in other words training for semi-skilled jobs. Those on existing Level Three programmes will only be allowed to continue "where there is a clear link with job prospects".

Sixty nine thousand under-25s currently enrolled on college courses like A levels and Access could find themselves sent on a strictly vocational route instead. Clearly Tony Blair's declaration that "when I think of my own kids I do not want them to have a job, I want them to have a career", applies only to the better off families.

● "The country simply can't afford the massive spending on the welfare state; the spending is spiralling out of control."

This is the biggest lie of all. Britain's

social spending as a proportion of GDP is now in the lowest quarter of OECD countries. The 1998 edition of Social Trends, the government's own compendium of economic and social statistics, reveals that Britain is ninth out of eleven European Union countries when it comes to the proportion of expenditure spent on health and social security.

Britain spends half of what Denmark spends on the welfare state. Far from being an ever increasing, expensive burden, it turns out that welfare in Britain is being run on the cheap. But, like the capitalists in other major industrial countries, Britain's bosses want to pay even less and Blair wants to keep them happy.

The current benefit cuts package will save £3.2 billion. It is estimated that the money restored to companies through corporation tax cuts in the last budget totalled around £9 billion. Even schools minister Stephen Byers should be able to work out the mathematics involved in that!

The Labour Cabinet has still not decided on the final shape of the "reforms". Blair is chairing a "Ministerial Group on Welfare Reform" at which the differences between Frank Field, who wants a more radical restructuring, and Brown and Harman who want to cut the budget, will be thrashed out. But the message of the roadshows is that Labour supporters must prepare themselves for further and deeper cuts.

The Labour Party bureaucracy has been busy ensuring that the new National Policy Forum on the welfare state has an inbuilt pro-Blair majority. And the TUC, which ought to be standing up for workers' rights, has recently swung behind the idea of a two-tier pension system.

We urgently need a serious campaign against the welfare cuts. This means that alongside the petitions and lobbies by those immediately affected there must be a sustained attempt to get trade unions and workplaces committed to fighting the cuts through demonstrations and strikes. ■

## EUROSTAR: Prescott threatens nationalisation

# End of the line for rail privatisation?

**JOHN PRESCOTT** has given London and Continental (LCR), who run Eurostar, 30 days to come up with a package to build the high-speed rail link from St Pancras to Folkestone. If it cannot, "preparations will be made for an orderly handover of the business to the public sector".

LCR wanted the government to increase its subsidy for the project from the existing £1.8 billion to £3 billion, since it has not been able to attract additional financial backing from the private sector. LCR was given Eurostar and 18 trains free on the understanding that it would use the profits to build the high-speed rail link. To complete the project would cost around £5.4 billion. Under the terms of the agreement between LCR and the government, if the company fails to build the link Eurostar reverts to state ownership. If this happens it will be the first nationalisation in Britain since the mid-1970s.

A failure by the private sector to build this link will demonstrate the "free market" is unable to provide us with the goods, services and infrastructure that we need. It will be a massive blow to all those who hailed the privatisation programme carried out by the Tories. It will also embarrass a Labour leadership which constantly hails the supposed risk-taking dynamism of the private sector.

### Embarrassment

To add to the profiteers' embarrassment, the French and Belgian state-run railways have completed their high-speed links: the French in 1993 and the Belgians just last month. Meanwhile in Britain, railworkers will have appreciated the irony of watching members of the consortium, which includes National Express and Richard Branson's Virgin group, go running to the government. These great champions of

the capitalist system who are praised for their entrepreneurial spirit are the first to go cap in hand to the state, when they are the ones threatened with bankruptcy.

Prescott has been forced to consider taking Eurostar back into public ownership. The government has signed agreements with the Belgian and French governments which oblige it to keep the Channel Tunnel operating. The entire project is crucial to the interests of British capital. The Tories, despite all of their rhetoric against state subsidies, were quite prepared to use "tax-payers' money" to ensure their friends in the City would be guaranteed profits. But even they realised there was no certainty that LCR would be able to fulfil its commitment to build the rail link if it could not get financial backing.

This is not the first time that capitalist governments have had to nationalise sectors essential to the economy

as a whole, nor will it be the last. When private capitalists no longer continue running key industries and are willing to see them collapse, then the state is prepared to take over and run it on behalf of the whole capitalist class. This happened after the Second World War when both British Rail and the British Coal Board came into being. The old owners received payment from the government and continued to receive compensation even after nationalisation. These new industries provided the capitalists, as a whole, with subsidised coal and rail transport.

### Salvage

Nationalisation of Eurostar should not be dismissed as irrelevant on the grounds that it is only the difference between state and private capitalism. If the government is forced to salvage a prestigious project like the rail link through nationalisation it will be a

demonstration of the failings of free market capitalism in particular. It will show that to modernise the country's infrastructure, develop the transport system, provide adequate housing, build new schools and hospitals, we cannot rely on the irrationality of the profit system. Instead of a system that runs for the profit of a few, we need a planned economy for the needs of the many.

This is clearly not Prescott's aim, but especially while he is using phrases about public ownership, we should respond by raising the demand for the renationalisation of the entire rail industry. Such renationalisation should be carried out without any compensation to those fat cats that have made profits out of privatisation. Railworkers should be in control of how the service is run and along with the service users should plan what steps need to be taken to make the rail system cheap, efficient, safe and comprehensive. ■

in this issue



### Ireland: Britain's Treacherous peace

The recent events in Ireland have fluctuated between the announcing of an official inquiry into Bloody Sunday to the pro-Unionist blueprint for a settlement and the continuing Loyalist murders. Mark Harrison explains the underlying cause of these contradictions.

● pages 8 and 9



### The end of the dock strike

Workers Power talks to one of the Liverpool dockers about the lessons of the defeat and what can be done now.

● page 5



### Museveni's Uganda

President Museveni of Uganda was once a guerilla leader. Today he is one of imperialism's key friends in Africa and a pioneer of free-market economics in Africa. Keith Spencer charts Uganda's evolution into a laboratory for the IMF's policies.

● page 10

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# EDITORIAL

WORKERS POWER 219 FEBRUARY 1998

## CLINTON The real scandal



**U S IMPERIALISM** was planning an attack on Iraq, but the Washington media were much more interested in reports that President Bill Clinton had an affair with a young White House intern. Veteran television correspondents apologised for uttering the phrase "oral sex" on air.

The capital of the most powerful imperialist country was rife with speculation that Clinton would have to resign or face the prospect of impeachment. The media had gone into a feeding frenzy, following every salacious rumour that found its way on to the Internet. Having spent three fruitless years and some \$25 million on investigating the Clintons' alleged financial misdeeds, special prosecutor Kenneth Starr had seemingly scored a hit.

A week later and the threat to Clinton's presidency looks to have receded, even as the talk of bombing Baghdad into submission continued to grow. The *Observer* even proclaimed Clinton's "second coming" in its 1 February edition. But how did the Chief Executive of the world's lone superpower come so close to political death?

Leading the White House counter-offensive against allegations of perjury and an attempt to obstruct the course of justice, Hillary Clinton told a breakfast television interviewer that a massive "right-wing conspiracy" had sought to undermine both herself and her husband since 1991. While she had slightly overplayed her hand, there was more than a grain of truth in that charge.

The official Republican leadership in Congress has been loathe to wade in against Clinton over the Monica Lewinsky case. This is partly because of a cynical calculation that a damaged Clinton in office for the remainder of his term does more for their chances of regaining the White House than installing Al Gore and his "safe pair of trousers" for two years prior to the election.

The Republicans also fear opening Pandora's box; their leader in the House of Representatives, Newt Gingrich, sued his first wife for divorce while she was receiving chemotherapy in hospital.

But there are some shadowy and extremely well-funded organisations and individuals on the fringes of the Republican party – from publications

funded by Reverend Moon through to the rabidly right-wing king of talk radio, Rush Limbaugh, and Ronald Reagan's key document shredder Colonel Oliver North – who have pursued Clinton with dogged determination. These include the fanatical "born-again" Christians of the Rutherford Institute, who regularly offer legal representation to anti-abortion activists charged with violence against clinics and have supported the defence campaign of a recent member of the American Nazi Party.

Whatever the truth of former Arkansas state employee Paula Jones' accusation of sexual harassment against Clinton, she would not now be in any position to press her civil suit through the federal courts without the support of the Rutherford Institute. They have even hired a media consultant for Ms Jones and a team of Hollywood beauticians to erase her working class image.

Why those who run the Rutherford Institute appear to believe that Bill Clinton is a liberal devil incarnate and Hillary a dangerous leftist is mystifying.

Clinton may be a serial philanderer and a stinking hypocrite who has happily jumped on to the family values bandwagon. But to date, nobody has alleged that any of Clinton's sexual "victims" were anything other than reasonably intelligent, consenting adults.

The same could not be said of one Clinton's political victims, Ricky Ray Rector, a brain-damaged, black teenager locked up on Arkansas' death row during Clinton's campaign for the Democratic Party's presidential nomination. Clinton pointedly interrupted his national campaign tour to return to his post as the state's governor. The purpose was to stage a photo opportunity with the would-be president signing the warrant for the teenager's execution. Clinton and his spin doctors had sent out a message that he was mercilessly tough on crime and would not be moved by the pleadings of civil libertarians in his quest for power. Tony Blair and Jack Straw have clearly borrowed pages from his script.

Installed in the White House for more than five years, the Clinton administration has perpetrated countless crimes on the working class and poor

in the United States and the world generally. These are crimes which the bourgeois media depicts as "foreign policy triumphs" or vindications of Clinton's "pragmatism" as a "New Democrat", who refused to be shackled by the ideological baggage of the social welfare New Deal coalition.

If Clinton authorises another military strike against Iraq, it will be the third of his administration. He has upheld the economic sanctions against Baghdad, first introduced in 1990 in the run-up to imperialism's shooting war to reclaim Kuwait's vast oil resources. As a result of the sanctions, malnutrition is rife among Iraqi children, with scurvy and rickets once more commonplace. A United Nations report suggests that up to 500,000 children under the age of five have died as a direct result of the sanctions restricting access to medical supplies as well as foodstuffs.

Clinton has also sought to tighten the noose around Cuba. He has courted the votes and campaign contributions of the Cuban bourgeoisie in Miami exile, signing and enforcing the Helms-Burton Act that enables the Federal government to take legal action against the US operations of overseas companies which dare to do business with Castro.

Elsewhere in the Caribbean, Clinton sent the Marines into Haiti, ostensibly to restore the duly elected president after a military coup. The real motive behind the intervention soon became clear, however, as the hopelessly dependent Aristide administration implemented an IMF austerity package against the same impoverished masses who had elected it.

Another example of Clinton's brand of imperialism came in the Balkans. After months of hand-wringing at the fate of Bosnia's Muslims, the White House finally authorised a military intervention, which continues into 1998 with bi-partisan Congressional support. The role of the US troops has been to secure the unjust partition of multi-ethnic Bosnia into three polarised enclaves – ethnic cleansing by other means.

For all his posturing as a champion of women's rights, the administration has also been keen to clinch a deal to construct a new gas pipeline through

territory in Afghanistan under the control of the fundamentalist Islamic forces who have systematically driven women out of workplaces and girls out of schools.

At home, Clinton has made common cause with the Congressional Republicans in a drive to slash the Federal budget deficit, balancing the books at the expense of America's poor. Having placed Hillary in charge of developing a healthcare reform package, he swiftly abandoned it in the face of intense lobbying and television advertising campaigns from the giant insurance companies. By late 1997, the administration had agreed a package of \$115 billion in cuts to Medicare provision – the principal healthcare programme for the poor.

In 1996 Clinton signed into law a piece of welfare legislation which at one stroke finished a 60-year-old programme of minimal provision to "families with dependent children". This particularly cynical and vicious attack should save the US Treasury \$50 billion up to 2002, while funding for food stamps plummets and single parents risk the loss of all benefit if they do not find work within two years.

The administration has presided over a continuing fall in real wages for the majority of US workers and a widening of already grotesque income inequalities. Even after the autumn 1997 turmoil on Wall Street, induced by the unfolding crisis of the "Asian Tiger" economies, prices on the New York Stock Exchange have rebounded to stand at record highs. Official unemployment stands at a 24-year low and yet inflationary pressures appear minimal across most labour markets. No surprise, then, that the vast majority of big US bosses do not want to see the back of Clinton before his term is up.

Socialists should use the "Zippergate" scandal to put under the spotlight the real crimes of the Clinton years. There is an opportunity to show these are not simply the acts of a cynical political careerist, but hold up a mirror to the rotten system of imperialist capitalism both he and his revamped Democratic Party have always been committed to upholding – at whatever human cost. ■

### WORKERS POWER

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## Public sector pay

## Labour's two stage robbery

**O**N 29 JANUARY the details of two pay deals were disclosed. On the one hand, Guy Hands, an executive for Yomura bank, was reported to have "earned" £40 million in 1997 – an obscene daily rate of £110,000. At the other end of the pay scale in Tony Blair's New Britain, 1.3 million public sector workers covered by the Pay Review Bodies (PRBs) received staged pay settlements worth an average 2.6%.

As the *Financial Times* pointed out, "The government yesterday forced 1.3 million public sector workers to take a cut in pay, after adjusting for inflation". With inflation officially running at 3.7% and workers' cost of living rising even faster, teachers, nurses and other NHS staff will be worse off on 1 April than they were under the Tories.

The supposedly independent PRBs, which are in fact stuffed with bosses' representatives, recommended deals worth an average of 3.8%. The schoolteachers' PRB stated that "it should be implemented in full from the due date without staging."

But the Labour government intervened to ensure that only 2% should be paid in April, the remainder from December onwards. In other words, workers are being robbed of nearly half their meagre pay rise for the first eight months. According to General Secretary Doug McAvoy of the National Union of Teachers (NUT) this will cost teachers £50 per month and the settlement will cost the Treasury £305 million as opposed to £445 million if it was not staged. Nurses will lose £5 a week.

## Delay

Although this "staging" was introduced by Kenneth Clarke, "Iron" Chancellor Gordon Brown has deliberately out-Toried his predecessor by forcing through the biggest ever delay in meeting the PRB awards. Even the moderate McAvoy noted that "New Labour is behaving more savagely than its predecessor".



Malcolm Wing, Unison's chief negotiator for nurses, many of whom currently earn just £14,165 a year after five years on hospital wards, pointed out most of the nurses who voted Labour in the belief that they would finally get decent pay awards "will be angry and disappointed."

Defending the deal, Health Minister Frank Dobson, claimed it is "as fair as we can be to all NHS staff. That means applying the same overall disciplines on pay to all staff in the NHS – including managers." This is a barefaced lie. Not only are GPs, dentists and consultants (all on £45,000 a year plus) getting awards of between 4.5% and 5.6% but, according to Labour Research findings, chief executives of NHS Trusts awarded themselves huge pay rises and bonuses last year. The head of the University Hospital Birmingham got a 30.6% rise taking him up to £132,000 a year. So much for New Labour's talk of "equal misery".

Even worse, for the sixth year in a row, all pay awards will be "self-financing". This means that schools and hospitals will have to find the extra money to pay the awards by making cuts elsewhere. Essential services and workers' jobs (not chief executive bonuses) will be threatened yet again. Some 250,000 public sector jobs have been destroyed since 1993 in the name of financing pay deals for public sector workers. By adopting and extending the Tories' strategy, Labour have guaranteed that more losses will follow.

This attack on low-paid public sector workers has implications beyond the 1.3 million workers directly affected. Nigel de Gruchy, general secretary of the NASUWT teachers' union, complains that, "The anger this will generate is out of all proportion to the small savings achieved." Indeed, the *Economist* estimates that Brown will have "an extra £17.1 billion" in his coffers by 2001-2, so why the tight-fisted pay restraint? But de Gruchy misses the

point.

Tony Blair spelled out Labour's thinking in his speech to the Commons when the pay cuts were announced. He defended the decision to stage the settlements, "to ensure that these awards do not lead to unwelcome increases in pay pressure throughout the economy". In other words, low-paid public sector workers will be used as a benchmark for the private sector and those public sector workers not covered by the PRBs.

Average pay settlements are currently running at 4.8%. But this disguises the fact that public sector workers are averaging 2.6% rises and the private sector 5% rises. Public sector pay rates have declined by 16% relative to private industry since 1982. After 18 years of Tory cuts, nurses, teachers and others are increasingly the poor relations of their private sector counterparts.

It is essential that we stop the rot. The unions must be forced to launch

a real fight to ensure that Labour gives a decent pay rise to all public sector workers and starts to reverse the decline of the last 15 years. But it is the rank and file of the unions, principally the NUT and Unison, who must lead this fight.

## Satisfied

Although Unison has tabled a claim for a 10% or £1,000 (which ever is greater) pay rise for all NHS staff not covered by the PRB, there is little sign it is organising a fight. The fact that the Government has hinted that all NHS staff will receive the PRB award appears to have satisfied Unison's negotiators. Malcolm Wing has even argued for the extension of the PRBs across the whole of the NHS workforce. In effect, he is willing away the right to collective bargaining over pay, which teachers lost in the mid-1980s.

Union activists in NHS branches and school associations should immediately call meetings of all members, whether or not they are covered by the review bodies. Motions should be passed calling on the union leaderships to reject the pay offers and campaign for a public sector-wide strike for 10% or £1,000 pay rise across the board.

Of course, Unison's Rodney Bickerstaffe will preach caution, pointing to the national minimum wage as the way to tackle low pay. They will also warn that David Blunkett threatened at the 1996 TUC Congress to ban public sector strikes if they blocked Labour's core programme, and that schools minister Stephen Byers has said that Labour would break the union link rather than give in to strike action.

Meekly accepting yet another pay cut will embolden Labour to come back for more. Every day we continue to allow Labour to push through Tory policies, the Blairites grow stronger. That is why the best time to fight back is now! ■

## Unison: pass this resolution

AS REPORTED in last month's issue of *Workers Power*, Rodney Bickerstaffe has launched a major witch-hunt against socialists and militant activists in Britain's largest public sector union, Unison. The aim of the bureaucratic leadership's attack is to make Unison safe for Tony Blair.

Workers in the NHS and local government will be at the sharp end of New Labour's public spending cuts. Bickerstaffe has no stomach for a showdown with the government and is therefore trying to remove or muzzle the branch activists who could lead such a struggle. That is why the fight against the witch-hunt is not simply a question of democracy, it is a fight to maintain Unison's ability to defend members' jobs and conditions.

Workers Power supporters in Unison will be building for the conference called

against the witch-hunt on 21 March and linking it to the need for a fight against PFI, Best Value and cuts. We urge all our readers in Unison to raise this issue in their branches and get delegated to the conference on the basis of the following resolution:

This branch condemns the decision taken by Unison's National Executive Committee (NEC) on 10 December 1997 to prohibit branches affiliating to or making any other donations of money/resources to the Campaign for a Fighting and Democratic Unison (CFDU). In addition, the NEC agreed to threaten disciplinary action against any branch which refuses to seek the return of funds already contributed.

The branch also deplores the action initiated against activists in a

number of Unison branches across the country (such as Birmingham, Leeds, Lewisham, Nottingham and Sheffield). Such action is a politically motivated attack against shop stewards and branch officers, who are only guilty of campaigning around existing union policy or being critical of full-time officials.

The branch therefore resolves to support and send [—] delegates to the conference called by several Unison branches for Saturday 21 March to lay the basis for a broad campaign opposing the attacks on union democracy and the witch-hunt of left organisations and activists. The branch believes that such a campaign must be based on:

- opposition to the use of the courts or other state bodies such as the Commissioner for the Rights of

## Trade Union Members

- building active support among rank and file members to back branch officers who refuse demands for the return of affiliations fees, donations, etc.

- a programme for the democratisation of the union from the bottom-up and the abolition of bureaucratic perks, privileges and abuses of power. The branch agrees:

- to fax/send a letter of protest to General Secretary Rodney Bickerstaffe (at Unison HQ, Mabledon Place, London WC1), expressing its total opposition to the NEC decision and the current witch-hunts generally

- to support and help organise lobbies of regional council and NEC meetings, when called by the national campaign.

The branch calls on the 21 March conference to issue a call for and aid the development of joint committees of Unison members and other public sector trade unionists to mount a campaign of industrial action including all-out, indefinite strikes in opposition to such measures as the pay freeze, PFI and "Best Value".

(Where branches are already affiliated to the CFDU, etc.): the branch further resolves to maintain its affiliation to the CFDU and encourages all currently affiliated/supportive branches to defy any attempts by the national leadership, regional officials, etc. to discipline branch officers who refuse to reclaim agreed branch donations to the CFDU and similar organisations up to and including the point of suspension of the branch by Unison's NEC. ■

## Firefighters must strike to save stations

**F**IREFIGHTERS ACROSS the country are facing massive cuts, station closures and management victimisations. Here are just some of the details:

- On Merseyside, one firefighter has been sacked as management has ripped up the disciplinary code, part of the nationally negotiated working conditions.

- In Strathclyde, management want

to implement cuts of £4.5 million.

- In Coleshill, Warwickshire, 22 jobs are under threat.

- Two London stations are threatened with closure: Barbican and Shooters Hill.

The leadership of the Fire Brigades Union (FBU) has been slow off the mark but now, under pressure from members, ballots for action are being carried out – but only in some regions,

like London and Merseyside. These regions must campaign for massive "yes" votes and use the results to spread the action and make it national. Otherwise there is a danger that regions will be picked off one by one.

Six thousand firefighters in London will be balloted for action against the closures. In response management have begun a vicious campaign of intimidation. Firefighters in Islington are being

disciplined for wearing campaign badges and warned not to attend campaign meetings.

A strong response is needed in the face of such intransigence. Union members must organise for a massive "yes" vote in the ballot. Extended strike action, rather than one day stoppages, is required if jobs and the stations are to be saved.

The campaign has already begun. Firefighters joined local people in a live-

ly lobby of the leader of Greenwich council at the end of January. The next step in the campaign is a march on Saturday 14 February at 11 am starting at the junction Foxcroft Road and Eaglesfield Road.

London firefighters are also building for a mass lobby of the London Fire and Civil Defence Authority on 19 February at 11 am, Hampton House, Albert Embankment. ■

**T**HE LIVERPOOL dock strike is over. After two and a half years of struggle the dockers agreed at a mass meeting to accept the Mersey Docks and Harbour Company's (MDHC) last offer. The dockers decided that, after an exhausting fight, they could not win their demands for reinstatement and that they risked the dispute collapsing.

There can be no argument with the dockers' decision – no one could ask for more than they have given. The striking men and the "Women of the Waterfront" who backed them to the end are giants, true heroes of the labour movement. Their courage and tenacity should shame those traitors who lead the movement and who betrayed the strike in the most disgraceful way.

But the magnificent fight by the Liverpool dockers holds key lessons for the class struggle today.

Here, we talk to **Frank Carberry**, a Liverpool docker and key activist in the dispute. Frank's comments confirm many of these lessons:

- The decision of the dockers to set up picket lines outside the docks rather than occupy it from within missed a key opportunity to paralyse the port. Once the dockers were outside the full force of the state could be used against them.

- The constant harassment of strikers by the police and the bloody events of the first anniversary picket – when the police force systematically picked off and beat up demonstrators – showed that mass pickets alone were not enough.

- Even more decisive was the treacherous role of the TGWU leadership who hid behind the anti-trade union laws to undermine the dockers' action. The dockers' leaders did not come out strongly or quickly enough against them. The T&G bureaucracy needs to be ousted and the union transformed into a fighting organisation which prioritises defending its members over paying out fat salaries to full time officials.

## The end of the Liverpool dock strike

# Lessons of a historic fight



The dockers mobilised thousands of ordinary workers while their leaders betrayed the struggle.

**WP:** What was it that finally brought around the end of the dispute?

**FC:** We were worried that, if we had not brought an end to the dispute, there was a danger of a slow drift to accept the employers' offer. Sixty of the men had already accepted the employers' terms and, since the last ballot in December, a further twenty had taken the offer. In addition the ILA [International Longshoremen's Association] in the USA had told us that they could no longer deliver the international solidarity action, which had been so essential to continuing the dispute. Our last picket of US ports was cancelled the day before men were due to fly out to the USA because of a phone call from the ILA.

Following our successful ballot in December you might have expected that Bill Morris, the leader of the TGWU, would throw the full weight of the union behind the dockers. In fact he did the exact opposite and wrote a circular letter to all branches, Labour Party wards, MPs and god knows who else opposing the strike.

There was also very good information that at the next executive meeting the TGWU were going to end their payments to the strike fund. We

had not received the type of local industrial support that we needed from the likes of Ford and Vauxhall to have an impact on the employers.

The Labour Party had made it clear that we could expect no political settlement to the dispute and that, far from supporting us, they were collaborating with the employers to ensure their victory. We could have fought on but we were forced to the conclusion that there was no realistic chance of winning our demands of reinstatement and that unless we ended the dispute now there was a danger that the hardcore of men would get nothing.

**WP:** Do you think that the dispute could have been won?

**FC:** We fought this dispute the wrong way round. We started off thinking that all we needed to do was fight the employers to win. But really we needed to fight the union first and then the employers. Betrayal is not a word that we should use lightly – it is not a word that we should throw around – but the union's attitude to this dispute, and particularly the role of Bill Morris, has been a betrayal of our struggle.

It is no accident that, now the dispute is over, Bill Morris and the TGWU are being invited back into the non-

union ports by the employers: it is his payback for a job well done. We needed to use more direct methods of struggle to win. I and some of the other men believe that we needed to occupy the port at the outset.

Mass pickets alone could not have easily closed the port down. The port is miles long, it would have taken thousands to have had an effect from the outside. We called mass pickets on several occasions and never got the numbers we needed. But an occupation would only have required a few men to block the port with the heavy equipment and containers. It would have taken the army to get us out, and anyway an occupation would have provided a focus for solidarity action and pickets.

**WP:** What do we need to do to the unions to transform them into organisations that will fight?

**FC:** We need to bring the bureaucracy to account. All officials need to be elected and recallable, accountable to their members. They need to be paid no more than the wages of the members they represent. The unions need to be democratised from top to bottom.

**WP:** What was the effect of the anti-union laws?

**FC:** According to the ILO [International Labour Organisation, funded by the United Nations] convention that the British Government signed up to, workers have a right to take solidarity action with other workers. This is a basic human right. So it is the British Government, whose anti-trade union laws stop this, that is breaking the law, not us – we are fighting for our rights.

But the anti-union laws were very important: not just for the government but for the union bureaucracy, who used them to police the dispute. Bill Morris would not even allow discussion of the dispute at the executive because he said it was against the law. When he was asked on what legal advice he based this opinion, he said he could not say because it was against the law! At the BDC [TGWU's Biennial Delegate Conference] the executive tried to rule that the vote against the officials in support of our dispute, which was clearly won, was lost... because it was against the law. If there had not been uproar they would have got away with it.

The union sabotaged our international action by writing to international unions telling them that the dispute was not official and that their support could jeopardise the union. At every point the anti-union laws were used by the bureaucracy to betray our dispute.

**WP:** In Australia the dockers are facing similar attacks to yours – the international solidarity was one of the highlights of the dispute, are there any lessons that can be drawn from it?

**FC:** In Australia, in Melbourne, it's true the dockers there are facing exactly the same attacks as the MDHC carried out on us. It seems to me that the main difference is that, there, the union is on their side and will work to make the ITF [International Transport Federation] deliver the international solidarity that they need. Here we had to fight against our union first before we could get anything.

**WP:** What about the support in Britain?

**FC:** When we started out on this dispute we were all alone. The left has been crucial in giving us the support that we needed to carry on this long. In particular the support groups have given us vital solidarity. Workers Power were there from the start. Comrades from Workers Power worked alongside us throughout the dispute. I would like to thank Workers Power for all their solidarity and support, for the assistance that they gave us through our struggle.

**WP:** Where to now?

**FC:** Our fight may have been lost but it was just one fight in the struggle of the oppressed against their oppressors. There are already signs that workers are starting to fight back, that workers' consciousness – if you want to put it like that – is starting to rise: most recently in France, but across Europe and the world. Our fight, the struggle, does not end here, it will continue. ■

## AUSTRALIA: Bosses bring in scabs

# A new dock strike begins

**L**AST MONTH we reported on the secret plans to train scab Australian dockers in Dubai. The bosses were preparing for a showdown with the Maritime Union of Australia (MUA), one of the country's most powerful unions.

The battle we predicted has begun. One of the bosses' associations, the National Farmers' Federation (NFF), has set up a port using scab labour. With farm products totalling 60% of Australia's exports the agricultural bosses are determined to break the "wharfies" union.

The NFF has leased a private wharf in Melbourne, surrounded it with 50 security guards and is recruiting scabs. Meanwhile the dockers have been locked out. The MUA has responded with a strike. MUA leader, John Coombs, said:

"I will do whatever's necessary to make sure their [the locked out dockers] jobs are secure and we don't fall victims to this diabolical plan... What will come out of this will be something that will disrupt the trading pattern and economy of this country."

Coombs' words point to the seriousness of this strike. Not only is it a question of stopping the further spread of casualisation across the world's docks – a key issue in the Liverpool dock strike (see above) it is also a vital battle for the government to break union power.

### Force

The conservative Prime Minister, John Howard, is backing the farm bosses. "They will have the full support and understanding of my government," he declared as soon as the dispute started. Farmers' leader, Donald McGauchie,

promised to "use the full force of the legal system to make sure we're in business."

The unions will face scab labour, security guards plus the police and the courts as they go into this fight. The stakes are high and the response needs to match the threat.

Coombs is a left talker, but it is vital that he is put under the control of the rank and file of the MUA immediately. The MUA needs to immediately shut down every port. Strike committees need to be set up, elected from and controlled by regular mass meetings of the dockers. A national strike committee must run the dispute with control over negotiations and bureaucrats like Coombs.

But this battle poses more than just scab labour on the docks. It is a dagger at the throat of the entire Aus-

tralian labour movement. If the bosses win this one every union will face an onslaught, anti-union laws will be pushed through and the rights and living standards of Australian workers will come under savage attack. The MUA, and rank and file militants within it, need to start the fight now for a general strike and solidarity action from the International Transport Federation.

### Solidarity

Already, the leader of the Australian Manufacturing Workers' Union, John Corsetti, has pledged solidarity to the MUA. He announced:

"If the manufacturing industry in Victoria has to come screeching to a halt, then so be it. If you want a war, let's have it. We are here and we are ready and waiting to face you in the ring."

Fine words, but there's no need to wait. The entire bosses' plan can be smashed by prompt action now. If the MUA shut down every port, not just those in Victoria, and if the Australian Congress of Trade Unions calls a general strike the bosses will be squealing. Howard will be on the run and the basis for a working class offensive will be laid.

● **Solidarity needed:** The Australian dockers have played a brilliant role in solidarity with British workers in struggle – from the miners in the 1980s to the dockers in the 1990s. Now we have to pay them back: once the strike is underway in Australia, the T&G in Britain should call for a boycott of all goods from non-union Australian ports. There should be regular pickets of Australian government owned businesses in Britain and a solidarity fund. ■

## Labour Party: as opposition mounts

# Will the Labour left fight Blair?

**L**IKE DEMORALISED troops who have been hiding for the duration of a long bombardment, Labour left wingers are gradually emerging, rubbing their eyes and making their first stumbling steps among the ruins of "old Labour". They are also finding that they have to start organising themselves for a fight of sorts – Blair's New Labour government leaves them with no other choice.

The frontal attacks on welfare rights, rises in interest rates, wage restraint and shamelessly pro-business policies that characterise Blair's administration are leaving many ordinary Labour supporters dismayed. At the same time an unrelenting witch-hunt is still being pursued at all levels of the party.

But the left wing shows no sign of having developed a new strategy after the failure of its old one. The signs are they are about to make all the same mistakes again – pleading with Blair to moderate his assaults rather than organising to overthrow his leadership and to build a political alternative.

The Labour left are, however, fighting in different circumstances to their heyday in the early 1980s. Blair's New Labour is not simply a repetition of the old drift to the right in office of past Labour administrations such as Wilson's and Callaghan's – although it has many echoes of those.

Blair is still trying to take Labour into new territory: either his preferred option of a US style Democratic Party – a bourgeois party funded by big business but with an agenda designed to win votes from workers as well as "middle America" – or, what he might have to settle for, a European style social democratic party less tied to the trade unions and resting on individual membership and state funding.

Most sections of the Labour left want to pursue the old course of pressurising from within. Not only was this strategy singularly ineffective in the past, but it is being overtaken by events. Blair's own aims may propel the left out of the party.

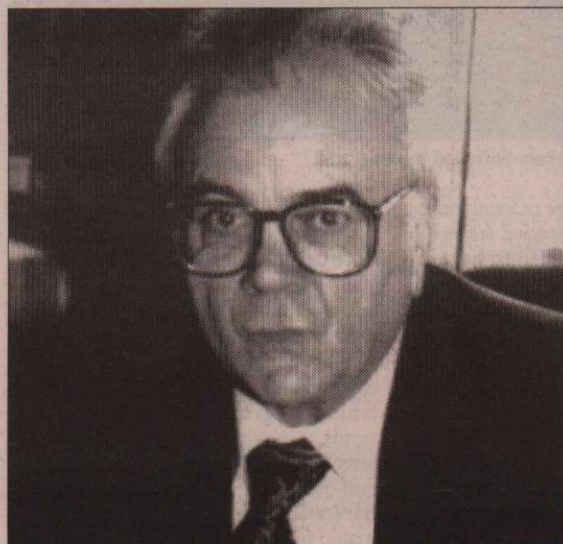
So far the most newsworthy opposition has come from those 47 Labour MPs who voted against the single parent benefit cuts, and from Labour MEPs Ken Coates and Hugh Kerr.

### Protesting

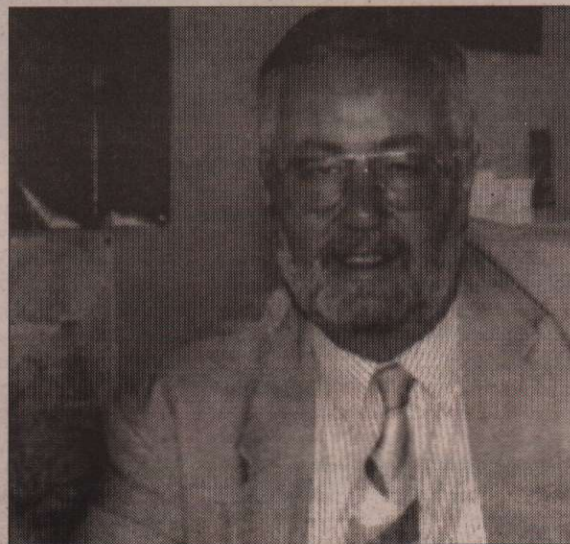
Coates and Kerr were hastily bundled out of the party after protesting about the direction of government policy and floating the idea of standing as independent socialist candidates in the next European elections if forced off the Labour slate. As Ken Coates pointed out, he was expelled from the European Parliamentary Labour Party, from the Socialist group in the European Parliament and from the Labour Party itself, in rapid succession and without a hearing at any point.

Neither Coates nor Kerr are serious contenders for leadership of the left. Kerr is calling for a "realignment" of the left towards environmentalism; Coates, the one with more roots and support in traditional Labour territory, is still fighting shy of calling for a new party, preferring to be part of "a network bringing together people who have stayed in the Labour Party and those who have left because they oppose

"The real argument is no longer between the two major parties but between the New Labour Government and the Labour left" proclaimed a recent editorial in the Labour Left Briefing. This is a gross inflation of the actual size and current importance of Labour's left wing. Nevertheless it reflects some real developments, writes Lesley Day.



Expelled Labour MEP's Ken Coates (left) and Hugh Kerr (right) offer no lead to workers



the cuts".

This network would call for defence of the welfare state, redistribution of wealth, full employment and would oppose "undemocratic" electoral changes. This refers to the fact that the PR system for the European elections could take away constituency accountability for MPs and put all control of the party slate in the hands of the national leadership.

This "network" project, beloved of many on the left currently, is doomed to failure. It is bereft of a fighting programme and it has no organisational shape or weight. It is not an alternative to New Labour but it will lock activists into unproductive debates over what will remain a series of single issue campaigns.

The limits of Coates' revolt, and the uselessness of his alternative, have been underlined in virtually every interview he has given where he has stressed that he stands for the Labour Party of ... John Smith, the former (now deceased) Labour leader who was firmly on the traditional right of the party and who was famed for beginning the very campaign to woo business that Blair has been more successful in carrying through.

Building a serious opposition in the party needs politics, organisation and leadership. There are several contenders, but none are showing any real courage and determination.

The "insider" left whose house journal is Tribune, includes those in the unofficial Labour Reform group and undoubtedly reaches up to Cabinet level, including the currently embarrassed Robin Cook. Frank Dobson is also seen as a standard bearer for the left inside the Cabinet.

The base of this wing is gradually realising that it cannot stay silent much longer. In a recent Tribune article, Walter Hain argued that it was now clear that "the bottom line for this government is not the achievement of the more equal caring society that has always

been Labour's aim and that overt opposition is necessary for every proposal that retreats from that aim". Hain also called for constituencies to take a more "pro-active and critical part in monitoring the activities of the Labour government."

But Tribune and Labour Reform may well find out that they have left it too late to make a principled stand. Out in the constituencies, even mainstream left wingers and other critical voices are being silenced. Seven branches in Birmingham are still suspended, a state of affairs which not only left the selection of parliamentary candidates in the hands of the national machine but has allowed the Regional Office to "deselect" councillor Raghav Ahsan of Sparkbrook ward against the almost unanimous wishes of the local party members.

Cabinet members, junior ministers and other MPs who want to move into "overt opposition" have to be prepared to put their careers at risk and to face the possibility of a split being forced on them. If they did make a stand then, despite the Mandelsonian regime in the party there, would undoubtedly be a response in the party at large. But courage is not the only ingredient needed. There is the question of the trade unions, and there is the problem of politics.

### Hardened

The Campaign Group of MPs and their supporters around Campaign Group News are more hardened opponents of Blair than those around Tribune. They were the mainstay of the benefit revolt and include Alice Mahon who was the most outspoken critic. The two main "thinkers" of the group are the secretary Alan Simpson and media figurehead Ken Livingstone.

While both are showing signs of moving away from the "anti-European" stand which characterises the old Stalinist left, their political programme is still fundamentally national-centred.

Simpson looks back to the Roosevelt New Deal and the ideas of state intervention to manage the economy:

"You cannot separate the economics of Keynes from the social policies of Beveridge."

Simpson argues that it is possible to manage international capitalism for the benefit of the working class.

Livingstone makes a more traditional call for a reduction in the exchange rate, bringing down interest rates to prevent a slow down in growth and taxing the rich to bring in revenue – but this is essentially the same mixture of Keynesian economics and social reform. Like many on the left, he couches his calls for social reform and improvement as being necessary to prevent support for the government ebbing away.

So while the Campaign Group is more out front than Labour Reform and Blair's closet ministerial critics, it is equally bound to a political programme based on the idea that reform can be successfully delivered within the existing system – by managing capitalism – and that the Labour Party, including the Blairites, is the vehicle for achieving this.

This programme is not only obsolete because of the vagaries of the global economy, it has been tried, tested and has failed miserably. The 1930s of the New Deal gave way to world war. The era of Beveridge was the era of post war economic boom and the reforms that were delivered were designed to head off working class opposition to capitalism. The Beveridge-inspired welfare state could never be more than a paternalistic palliative to the needs of the poor and the sick. Now, with the post war economic boom long gone international capitalism is demanding the abandonment of welfare programmes world wide.

While Tribune and Campaign Group News gear themselves up for a sharper attack on Blair, they know that any challenge needs the backing of the trade

union leadership. So far Bickerstaffe, Edmonds and Morris, the main players, have been loyal to Blair but they are bargaining behind the scenes over the minimum wage, trade union recognition and union influence within the party.

While they can keep the lid on members' anger they may be willing to carry on manoeuvring. But they are patently failing to stop Blair's continued march to the right. Left wingers who insist on waiting for the trade union bureaucracy effectively silence themselves at the same time.

Clustering around the parliamentary and local government opposition are a variety of camp followers including Labour Left Briefing (LLB) together with the ostensibly revolutionary Socialist Outlook. All of these groupings see themselves as trying to push the Labour left and the trade union leadership to the left, to encourage a left opposition to New Labour. But in practice they end up tailing the existing left leadership.

### Warnings

LLB carries as many warnings against splitting from Labour as calls for resistance to Blair and his attacks. In the same vein, Socialist Outlook criticises Coates and Kerr, not for their failed reformist politics but for being "tactically inept" and for threatening to stand against Labour. This ignores the fact that Blair's regime forces anyone determined to put up a real fight to be clear that a split is the likely outcome. Choosing your tactics according to Millbank House rules will mean the fight is over almost as soon as it has begun.

These various networks and journals all call for "clarification" and debate on the left. But a real alternative to Blair must be built around a coherent strategy – a revolutionary socialist alternative which squares up to the fact that managing the capitalist system for the benefit of the majority is a utopia. It must be built too on working class action that goes beyond lobbies to strikes and action councils. Above all it means fighting Blair in practice and not simply positioning yourself as a left critic trying to curb his worst excesses.

This does not mean we ignore the Labour left. Thousands of workers look to its leaders as a potential source of opposition to Blair and we need to demand that Livingstone and company do challenge Blair in and out of Parliament.

The purpose of this, though, is not to "save" the Labour Party from Blair. Blair is the logical expression of a party whose entire history has been shaped by its determination to defend capitalism at the expense of the working class at all costs. And the left consistently aids and abets the right in doing this by posing as an alternative but never actually building one. They always cave in to the right's demands.

The real goal should be to ensure that in every struggle with Blair, in every division between the left and the right in the party, the revolutionary alternative to Blair and to reformism – left and right, old and new – is fought for so that the workers who look to left reformism today can be won to that revolutionary alternative tomorrow. ■

## REGROUPMENT: SLP left in despair

# Stuck in the swamp

**THE LAST CONGRESS** of the Socialist Labour Party (SLP) provided definitive proof that the transformation of Arthur Scargill's party into a force for socialist revolution is impossible.

The evidence is incontrovertible. When the Scargill faction was outvoted, it called on delegates from the fictitious "Lancashire NUM" to deliver a block vote of 3,000 in the leadership's favour. This at a congress of around 200, in a party whose active members cannot number many more. This bureaucratic chicanery is typical of the SLP, a defining feature of how the party is organised. To continue to believe that such an organisation can be transformed is a bizarre illusion.

Nevertheless, the *Weekly Worker*, the paper of a tiny sect that calls itself the Communist Party of Great Britain (CPGB), without a hint of either irony or shame, disagrees:

"Whether the SLP can make the transition to a party of republican reformation remains to be seen." (*Weekly Worker* 223)

As late as 22 January the CPGB was still refusing to face up to the shattering of its perspectives:

"The SLP presents new opportunities for communist rapprochement."

## Truth

Some SLP members at the conference were prepared to recognise the truth. *Socialist Labour Action*, produced by SLP members who support the programme of Workers Power, warned in a bulletin to the SLP Congress:

"If this conference proves that the SLP will not tolerate revolutionary socialists in its ranks, then all those within the party who stand for revolutionary socialism will have no alternative but to prepare for independence."

They have now drawn the conclusion that it is necessary to leave the party and build a consistent revolutionary alternative to it: Workers Power.

The *Weekly Worker* regard it as "leftist impatience" to "decant" from the SLP, and even compare leaving Scargill's group to splitting from mass working class organisations like the trade unions:

"The vast majority of revolutionaries would quite rightly regard the suggestion that we split from the unions because they are dominated by the bureaucracy as heresy – so why are they so schismatic when it comes to political organisations of the working class? The SLP remains a key arena to fight for genuine proletarian politics." (*Weekly Worker* 221)

The trade unions in Britain organise over six million workers. They are genuine mass organisations of the working class, regardless of the fact that they are led by class traitors. Their mass character itself produces the potential for their transformation under the leadership of revolutionaries. To split from them would be suicidal folly.

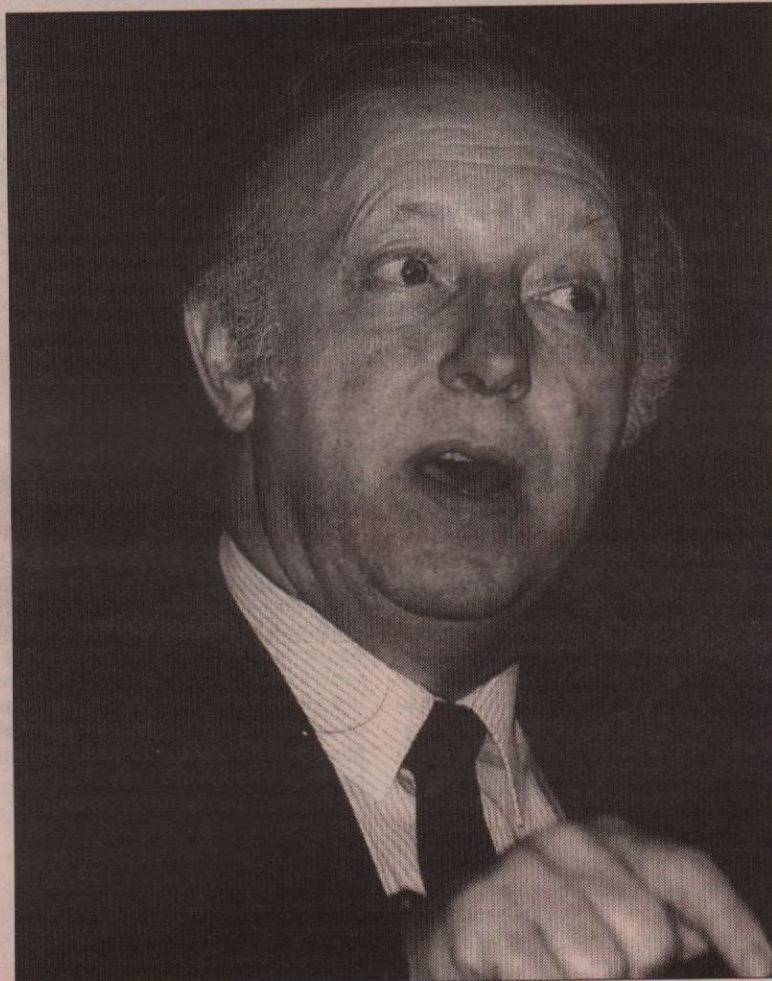
## Isolated

The SLP, on the other hand, is a very small association of self-selected members largely isolated from the mass of the working class. If it were a mass organisation, revolutionaries might be obliged to campaign within it – provided that it were possible to fight for communist ideas without getting expelled. But it is not a mass organisation or anything near to it. Nor is it possible to fight within it for revolutionary ideas or change the party programme – as its recent congress proves only too clearly.

To liken it to a mass trade union is not merely to misunderstand revolutionary tactics completely – which are predicated on never voluntarily detaching oneself from the masses in their

On 10 January the left of the Socialist Labour Party (SLP) split. The majority were those who had refused to stand firm against Scargill's witch-hunt in the months leading up to the SLP congress in the hope that they would avoid expulsion: the Democratic Platform. Others, like the *Weekly Worker*, fought the witch-hunt but remain blind to its consequences for the SLP and insist that there is still everything to play for inside this withered Stalinist sect.

But both sides, along with others on the British left, share a belief that task of the day is to bring about a "regroupment" or "rapprochement" of the small groups. **Richard Brenner** explains what is wrong with this perspective whether it be fought for inside or outside the SLP.



Scargill dashed the hopes of those who thought the SLP was the answer

daily struggles. It is also to show a breathtaking ignorance, born of sectarian schematism, of the realities of the British working class movement today.

The Labour Party, the CPGB tell us, is finished – despite its evident mass working class support and membership, despite its support from and deep roots within the unions. We are constantly berated for not "splitting" from it. But a Stalinist sect with around 200 active members and tiny influence in the class is presented as a key arena in the fight for proletarian politics. Such is the looking glass world of the *Weekly Worker*.

Of course it is possible to organise an alternative to the SLP. That is exactly what Workers Power is doing. Delusions of grandeur? No, just fact. In the last year we have, for example, built a youth organisation that not only rivals but exceeds in every respect the achievements of Socialist Labour Youth, the SLP's youth section.

The two youth organisations held their national conferences in the same building on the same day – ours filled a hall with young activists; they were a distinctly ageing group gathered round a small table. We have built campaigns against BP in Colombia, unionised young workers, fought back against the fees in the colleges; what have they done?

The *Weekly Worker* asks *Socialist Labour Action* about the need to break

from the SLP – "independent from whom – and dependent on what?" The answer is clear: independent of Scargill's sect, and dependent on revolutionary politics and active struggle in the working class.

This is a closed book to all of the groups currently obsessed with "rapprochement" or "regroupment". The *Weekly Worker* has put this illusory "rapprochement" at the centre of its

**History is full of examples of these unprincipled get-togethers without programmatic agreement. Do they result in the participants discovering that their differences were "secondary"? Every single one of these rotten fusions has resulted in exactly the opposite – more splits**

perspectives. Yet at the same time it cannot help recognising that we are not witnessing a break to the left by serious sections of workers and youth from the old organisations.

On the contrary, the paper has a surprisingly accurate estimate of the reasons for the sudden appearance of many tiny groups (Socialist Perspectives, What Next?, Socialist Democracy, Workers Action, WIL, RDG, LCMRCI, TUG etc etc etc and apologies for the lists of abbreviations but that's how it is) all committed to nothing

more than an endless discussion of "regroupment":

"... all are – quite explicitly – products of profound defeat, of the quite ignominious collapse of previous perspectives." (*Weekly Worker* 22 January)

So why orient your entire perspective towards them? It is not as if there is nothing else happening. Disabled people and single parents are coming into struggle against Blair. The reactionary Welfare to Work proposals are being introduced at the same time as a wave of struggles against unemployment in France and Germany. Students are still campaigning against fees. Young people are discussing the environment, the problems of the Third World. Left-wing activists are resisting a witch-hunt in UNISON, the TGWU is running a recruitment drive amongst young retail workers...

## Focus

There are fresh forces to organise and win to revolutionary politics. Why focus everything on small groups of people worn down and tired out by defeats and whose previous perspectives have collapsed "ignominiously" (as incidentally have those of the *Weekly Worker*) and who propose nothing more than a discussion?

This is no caricature. Take the "Socialist Democracy" group, made up of some who left the Socialist Party without a political fight and some who left the Socialist Outlook group, also without a political fight. What do they propose?

"... a new regroupment for the development of Marxist theory and practice needs to be developed... As well as making propaganda for the idea of a new socialist party, [Marxists] have to try to show in practice how socialists, and other radical forces, can work together to build a broad socialist alternative." (*Socialist Democracy*, issue No. 1)

can sit in a room and discuss with each other.

This is how former SLP parliamentary candidate Ian Driver describes the purpose of the Socialist Democracy Group. In *Labour Left Briefing* (February 1998):

"... a growing number of socialists are disaffected with the traditional authoritarian organisations of the left. In their place we should establish a democratic, broad-based, inclusive movement with a multiplicity of views, currents and tendencies which span the socialist agenda from left reformism to revolutionary socialism. A number of us have recently come together under the name of the Socialist Democracy Group, to look at ways of starting this process."

## Mishmash

That is what this "regroupment and rapprochement" has yielded so far. A mishmash of different programmes and political projects and no united organisation at all. The building of a revolutionary party has not been brought a single step closer by all of this discussion. Instead, the result will just be more splits. As Lenin wrote, "all splits take place under the slogan of unity".

The *Weekly Worker* anticipates our argument and has a response:

"We reject the charge that we are programmatic agnostics... we believe that in a party regime motivated by genuine democratic centralism, with the right to form open factions, many of the divisions that today wall working class militants in to hermetically sealed sect-tombs would quickly be revealed as episodic and secondary." (*Weekly Worker* 22 January).

So, without being "agnostic" on programmatic questions (i.e. what the workers need to do in the class struggle), we are expected to believe that once all the left-wing fragments get together in a common group, all their programmatic differences will evaporate as we discover that they are not really very important.

This is a philistine disregard for the centrality of the revolutionary programme – the very thing that makes a socialist a revolutionary and not just a left talker. But we don't need to speculate: history is full of examples of these unprincipled get-togethers without programmatic agreement. Do they result in the participants discovering that their differences were "secondary"? Every single one of these rotten fusions has resulted in exactly the opposite – more splits as the distinct groupings founder at the first practical test the class struggle throws in their path.

Every revolutionary party that has ever been built was founded on the basis of a clear revolutionary programme: the RSDLP in 1898, the Bolsheviks in 1912, the Communist International in 1919, the real CPGB in 1920, the Fourth International in 1938. Of course this can unite (not merely "regroup") tendencies from different origins – but only if they reach accord on fundamental programmatic questions.

However, the unity of programmatically disparate tiny groups separated from the masses will achieve nothing except a new publication for debate, in addition to all the other existing factional publications, and one extra meeting per week at which the various groups argue it out.

This is not a party or "revolutionary unity" in the Leninist sense at all. It is a discussion group. Revolutionary militants today can be forgiven for having better people to talk to than those who admit "quite explicitly" to being "products of profound defeat", ignominious or otherwise. ■

**J**OHAN MAJOR failed to end the Irish war but he did begin the most serious peace offensive by the British state for many years. Major's attempt to produce a settlement was crippled, in part because of his government's dependency on the votes of the Ulster Unionist parties.

Tony Blair and his Northern Ireland minister Mo Mowlam, freed from such constraints, relaunched this offensive last summer in concert with Bertie Ahern's Fianna Fail-dominated coalition government in Dublin. The IRA rewarded Blair's initiative, particularly his dropping of the demand for the decommissioning of weapons, with the announcement of a second total ceasefire in July 1997.

By December a delegation from Sinn Féin (SF) had visited Blair at Number 10. They came with attaché cases where previously their comrades in the IRA had come with mortar bombs.

The Unionists fumed at Blair's "capitulation to the terrorists", but the meeting, and SF leader Gerry Adams' description of it as a "good moment in history", seemed to point to real progress in the peace process. It appeared that where John Major had been attempting to manoeuvre the IRA into a total surrender Blair was prepared to negotiate a serious peace settlement.

The terms of that settlement were set out in the Framework Document of 1995, put forward by the British and Irish governments as a basis for resolving the conflict in Northern Ireland. In fact, the purpose of this document was to achieve Major's goal of an IRA surrender, but by different means. That is, the entire document promised the introduction of sufficient reforms in the functioning of the sectarian statelet as to pull the sting of anti-unionist insurgency and disaffection, while leaving the current Unionist veto over the constitutional fate of the six counties intact.

#### Step

The document's crucial promise to republicans was a North/South body with executive powers. In other words, it offered a partial all-Ireland governmental body. Its powers were left vague, deliberately; but the very offer of such a body meant that SF could claim it was a step towards their goal of a united Ireland.

On the other hand, the Unionists were promised a veto in order to keep them on board. The document met their

## Ireland

# BRITAIN'S TREATY

The Irish "peace process" claimed the lives of nine Catholics, murdered by Loyalist death squads, in the seven weeks up to 31 January 1998. At the same time one of the pro-Union parties, linked to the sectarian killings, walked out of the talks, the British and Irish governments produced a thoroughly pro-Unionist blueprint for a settlement and there was also the announcement of a long-overdue inquiry into the massacre of unarmed Catholic demonstrators by British troops on Bloody Sunday, 30 January 1972.

The murders and the political fluctuations at the peace talks underline quite how fragile the peace process really is. It is fraught with contradictions, writes **Mark Harrison**, that arise from the one thing the British government has said is not up for discussion: the right of the Unionists to veto any move towards ending the partition of Ireland.

demand for the creation of a Northern Ireland Assembly (albeit with power sharing arrangements) and insisted that "the current constitutional status of Northern Ireland [that is, its existence as part of the UK] will not change save with the consent of a majority of the people of Northern Ireland, clearly expressed."

Northern Ireland was created in 1921 by Britain, against the democratically expressed will of the majority of the Irish people in the elections of 1918, who voted for a united Ireland. Britain acted to ensure the domination of the north east of the island by the minority of Protestants who happened to be a majority in those six counties.

At the time this Protestant-dominated enclave was the most industrially developed region and a valuable asset for Britain. Through maintaining it as part of the UK the British state could maintain a foothold in Ireland, continue to reap profits and exercise domination over the Republic.

Of course, this was undemocratic. Not only was the statelet of Northern Ireland created against the will of the majority, it was created by terrorising the nationalist population in the six counties into submission. Catholics and

even Protestant anti-unionists were killed in their hundreds.

Thousands were forcibly driven from their jobs and burnt out of their homes. A sectarian state emerged, based on the rule of an artificially created Protestant "majority". As the first prime minister of "Ulster" (which now comprised only six of the nine counties of the old Ulster in order to ensure a Protestant majority!) said: "I have always said I am an Orangeman first, a politician and a member of Parliament afterwards. All that I boast is that we are a Protestant Parliament for a Protestant state."

#### Denied

The result of this historic abortion of democracy in Ireland was brutal oppression for the nationalist minority. They suffered state terror, discrimination in jobs and housing and, no matter how they voted, were denied any say in political life. They were an imprisoned minority. And eventually they revolted against their oppression.

Their revolt led to the modern Provisional IRA. It led the British state to send in its troops to underpin Protestant rule. The inability of the British to defeat that revolt by armed force has

ushered in the current peace process. But if the Protestant veto is maintained why have SF accepted the Framework document as the basis for a settlement? It is not just because of the promise of an all-Ireland executive body. It is primarily because their own strategy for driving Britain out of Ireland has failed.

The IRA, and their political counterparts in SF, began the struggle against Britain in the belief that an urban guerrilla war could secure victory. As the struggle evolved they became convinced that the efforts of a small group of volunteers, substituting itself for a mass struggle against the British occupation forces, could wear down the army and exhaust the British ruling class. The military struggle, an entirely justified tactic, increasingly became the sole form of struggle.

As a result, while the IRA maintained mass support throughout, they also came to realise that their military capacity was insufficient to drive out the British army. The best they achieved was a stalemate, but one that necessarily led their supporters to ask, where is it all leading to? War weariness was growing, fuelled by a series of tactical blunders (the Warrington and Shankill bombings etc.).

The answer to this stalemate situation was provided by the current Adams/McGuinness leadership. They never renounced the legitimacy of the IRA's armed struggle. Nor did they question the elevation of guerrilla war from a tactic into an overriding strategy. But they supplemented that struggle with a new political dimension.

#### Pressurise

They set about building SF into an electoral machine that could garner enough support in the nationalist community to enable it to pressurise its constitutional counterpart, the Social Democratic and Labour Party (SDLP) into a pan-nationalist alliance.

Having achieved this by the late 1980s, they then used their new relationship with the SDLP, embodied in the influential Hume-Adams agreement, to extend the pan-nationalist alliance to Dublin, specifically Fianna Fail, and the influential Irish-American lobby in Washington. Nurturing this alliance paid off: in the six counties with SF's growing electoral support and, internationally, with the growing recognition of the importance of involving SF in any peace settlement.

The invitation to Downing Street in

# The Loyalist veto, alive

**T**HE POSSIBILITY for a settlement is real. But so too is the possibility of renewed war. The events of the last month highlight just how possible.

Five months on from the second IRA ceasefire, the British state, with Blair at the helm, has continued to demonstrate a fundamental allegiance to the Unionists and their hostility to the nationalist community. Not a single significant concession has been given to the nationalists.

In place of demilitarisation, the British have used the ceasefire to refit and rebuild their military bases, particularly in the border areas. The recent mistaken shooting of an RUC officer by a British soldier has been shrouded in secrecy. But it is well known in Northern Ireland that the soldier was part of a surveillance operation against the IRA.

The RUC, the bastion of Protestant sectarianism, carries out its daily routine of harassment in the nationalist communities. In December it fired 160 plastic bullets at a nationalist demonstration. It carries out regular stop and search actions against Catholics as well as house raids. At the same time its patrols pulled out just before the recent Loyalist assassinations of Catholics despite, in one instance, appearing to indicate that it had prior knowledge of a planned attack.

In the labour market Catholics are

still two and a half times more likely to be unemployed than their Protestant counterparts. Indeed, the scandal of Belfast City Council has been left untouched by the British. The Unionist majority uses its position to block SF (which has the same number of seats as the UUP) from chairing any council committees and allows the SDLP to chair only one. The Unionists thereby guarantee sectarian control over patronage and job allocation.

A handful of prisoners of war have been repatriated but Britain, despite endlessly demanding confidence-building measures from SF, has not released a single prisoner.

#### Agenda

The only "concession" was the creation of a so far untested Parades Commission. Even this is designed to defuse trouble rather than eliminate the annual orgy of Orange bigotry at the heart of the marching season. In short, the British government has greeted the IRA ceasefire and the whole peace process as a means to push through its own agenda rather than address the concerns of the nationalists.

Notwithstanding this, the Unionist Parties have uniformly denounced any concessions and Dublin's interference into the affairs of "their" statelet. It was these supposed concessions – not the execution of Loyalist Volunteer Force (LVF) leader, Billy Wright –



Loyalist death squads

that prompted the recent round of murderous attacks on Catholics.

Indeed, the Irish National Liberation Army (INLA) stressed that their shooting of Wright was in direct response to his own admission that he had orchestrated the murder of several Catholics in December last year. And Wright, as a paramilitary, knew the risks he was taking, as did Jim Guiney, the

Ulster Defence Association (UDA) commander executed by INLA last month.

The murder of nine Catholics by the UDA (or Ulster Freedom Fighters – a UDA flag of convenience) and LVF, working together, was not motivated by revenge.

Its premise was outlined by Johnny Adair, one of the UDA leaders whom

Mowlam visited in Long Kesh. The killings, he said, were "to terrorise the Catholics, the whole lot of them".

The illusory concessions to the nationalists served the purpose of raising the threat of a Protestant backlash, which in turn suited the UUP's respectable politicians – Trimble and Maginnis – at the negotiating table. They could point to this danger and demand that the peace talks accept their terms of reference or face a descent into violence and chaos.

#### Counter

The "respectable, non-violent" politicians were using the Loyalist paramilitaries as a bargaining counter. They were not worried that nine innocent people were killed and several others wounded. Indeed, while Maginnis informed Gerry Adams that he wouldn't speak to "fucking murderers" (i.e. the IRA), the same man visited Long Kesh to have a cosy chat with Loyalist murderers just after Christmas and then explained that the killings were an understandable consequence of... British concessions to the nationalists:

"If you look at what has happened over the last number of months, with concession after concession given to the Provisional IRA, it's not surprising that people become dispirited and say 'the only thing that works is violence'. Unfortunately the Secretary of State



# TRACHEROUS PEACE

December seemed the ultimate victory for this strategy. But the cost of this strategy suggests that the "victory" is hollow.

Not only has SF mirrored the IRA's elitism in the sphere of diplomacy – with the political leaders and negotiators rather than the mass base of support playing the decisive role – but they have relegated the goal of a united Ireland to the dim and distant future.

It exists as part of SF's rhetoric and maximum programme but not as an operative objective. Instead, there is an effective acceptance of partition with the hope that an all Ireland inter-governmental body can eliminate its worst sectarian excesses.

The Republican leadership has rejected a class-based alternative to this strategy. This would have stressed a mobilisation of the nationalist community in a mass struggle against the British occupation and the sectarian state, combined with a working class programme that could mobilise the workers in the south against their bosses – instead of treating them as pan-nationalist allies.

## Exploitation

Such a programme would also have addressed exploitation in the six counties, with the hope of breaking sections of Protestant workers from their attachment to Unionism. SF have instead left themselves with only the maintenance of the "peace process" itself. SF president Mitchell McLaughlin summed it up:

"We won't be deflected from the peace project. There is no alternative to the present negotiations except to slip back into the abyss and that must not happen."

For the British this lowering of political sights has been an enormous boost, explaining their willingness not only to do business with the political repre-



Trimble and Maginnis – Blair keeps his Unionist friends happy.

sentatives of the IRA but to offer concessions like the Bloody Sunday inquiry to enable SF to prove to its supporters that their strategy is yielding some results.

If the process results in a constitutional settlement short of the ending of partition, and is accepted by SF, it would mark the party's evolution from a revolutionary nationalist movement into a constitutional one, essentially indistinguishable from the treacherous SDLP.

If this development in the nationalist camp has encouraged London and

Dublin into thinking that there is a real chance for a settlement based on the reform of the sectarian state, they can also take heart from the cracks that have appeared in the once monolithic Orange bloc. Sections of the working class and middle class who benefit most from the sectarian state's guarantee of privileges for Protestants are opposed to any concessions. They are represented by Ian Paisley's Democratic Unionist Party (DUP) which is boycotting the talks altogether.

However, the continued participation in the talks of the main Unionist

Party, David Trimble's Ulster Unionist Party (UUP), together with those parties linked to the Loyalist paramilitaries (the Ulster Democratic Party – temporarily expelled from the talks – and the Progressive Unionist Party) still encourages London and Dublin that a settlement remains possible.

For the UUP a settlement replacing the old model of the sectarian state that still enables its supporters to retain their economic benefits – albeit within the context of power-sharing – could prove acceptable. Likewise, the smaller parties, while resolutely

opposed to ending partition, would be prepared to see reforms based on a power-sharing assembly.

The sticking point for these Unionists will be the powers of any all-Ireland bodies. Any apparent move towards Irish sovereignty over the affairs of the six counties will be opposed since it would threaten their veto. Anything merely cosmetic would be acceptable, even welcome, if it brought economic benefits to them and their supporters.

These factors point towards the possibility of a peaceful settlement, but the contradictions associated with partition and the threats posed by either its maintenance or abolition to the nationalists and unionists respectively, reveal the possibility of such a settlement being undermined.

## Violation

The Protestant veto means that 42% of the statelet's population will continue to be subordinated to a minority within Ireland as a whole. And so long as partition exists this violation of democracy will fuel anger and carry the potential for the national question to re-emerge as a detonator for revolution even if a peace settlement does emerge from the current talks.

At the same time, if Britain were to undermine the Protestant veto and impose anything opening the door to a united Ireland, an extremely violent Protestant backlash is a real possibility.

The developments of the last month show how explosive this contradiction is. Whatever happens, one thing is clear – while the republicans surrender the revolutionary nationalist tradition and the counter-revolutionary Orange bloc splinters, the opportunity for building a socialist vanguard will increase. Its task will be the forging of a revolutionary communist party, based on a programme that fuses the solution to the class and national questions. ■

# and well

and her team have done nothing to contradict that notion."

He was echoed by the Church of Ireland Archbishop, Robin Eames, who excused the killings by referring to the "deep feeling of resentment" among Protestants at the concessions to the nationalists.

Yet until the announcement of the inquiry into Bloody Sunday there had not been a single substantial concession. And that inquiry was opposed 100% by Ken Maginnis and Trimble.

The reality behind all this talk of concessions was simple – the UUP and the other Unionist Parties are determined to block any settlement that creates an all-Ireland body with executive powers. They happily used the death squads to convince the British government of their intransigence on this question.

How did the British respond? Mowlam went to plead with the jailed Loyalist commanders. She said of the UFF statement declaring a ceasefire "I welcome that it appeared to indicate that there will be no further UFF involvement in terrorism for the present."

Contrast this with Mowlam's attitude to the IRA and you suddenly realise that Blair's declaration, two months into his administration, that he was a "Unionist" means just that. The IRA/SF are an enemy that he has to negotiate with. The Unionists and their terror gangs are, when all is said and

done, allies in the fight to preserve the union.

At the height of Loyalist terror Blair caved in. The Protestant veto showed that it was alive and well. And Trimble, who unlike Gerry Adams and John Hume had been consulted by Blair throughout the drafting of the new proposals for a settlement, had the biggest grin on his bigoted face since his triumph at Drumcree in 1996.

SF were rewarded for their drift into constitutionality with the Heads of Agreement (HOA) document, put forward as the basis for negotiations, although a subsequent British/Irish paper maintained the idea of an all-Ireland executive body.

## Decisive

The HOA replaces the Framework proposal with the proposal for a council of the British Isles (a Unionist demand). It assures the Protestants that the Northern Ireland Assembly will be the decisive power in the six counties and representatives from it will not be required to serve on the Cross Border Council. No wonder David Ervine of the Progressive Unionist Party declared:

"If there is a full stop or comma changed in that document before negotiations, we will be out. It will be finished."

The voice of progressive Unionism? The voice of democracy? No. The voice

of Orange supremacism delighted that it can still whip the British into line when it has to.

While the HOA has not derailed the peace talks entirely – despite SF's rejection of it and the IRA's statement warning that it could never be accepted as the basis for a settlement – it has served an important purpose: it has reassured the Unionists that Britain is still on their side.

Anti-unionists should draw a lesson from all of this. Concessions to the British and the Unionists will not produce a progressive and just solution to the national struggle in Ireland. They will only lead to the nationalists being forced into ever greater concessions. Dublin – which agreed to the HOA – is a profoundly unreliable ally, just as it has been since the establishment of the Republic.

Against both the HOA and the Framework document, revolutionaries, republicans and all consistent democrats in Britain and Ireland should rally to the fight to end the scandal of partition once and for all. As we move closer to the May deadline and the referendums that will follow, we should counterpose to the pro-imperialist settlement the demands for:

- The immediate withdrawal of all British troops from Northern Ireland
- The disbanding of the RUC and the Royal Irish Rangers
- The immediate release of all republican Prisoners of War
- The right of self determination for Ireland as a whole
- The convening of an all Ireland constituency assembly to decide on any constitutional proposals arising from the talks
- For a 32 county socialist republic

## Bloody Sunday inquiry

**THE ANNOUNCEMENT** of a new inquiry into the British massacre of 14 unarmed nationalist demonstrators on 30 January, 1972 should be given a cautious welcome.

Cautious because its composition remains in the hands of establishment judges. Welcome because it gives socialists and republicans the chance to raise the issue of British brutality in Ireland and the injustice of its continued occupation of the six counties.

The Widgery inquiry was a total whitewash. The fact that George Robertson, Labour Minister of Defence wanted to prevent a new inquiry shows that the army has a lot to hide, like the testimony of the private whose officer told him and others the day before the massacre, "Let's teach these buggers a lesson – we want some kills tomorrow."

## Pretext

The truth of Bloody Sunday is well known. An unarmed civil rights demonstration in Derry was blocked by the army. Minor rioting broke out. The army ordered the 1st battalion of the Parachute Regiment, to "deal" with this rioting. The Parachute regiment was an offensive unit brought in to retake the Bogside, a barricaded nationalist stronghold

effectively controlled by the IRA. The minor rioting was their pretext. Terror was their method.

Widgery concluded that the troops had been fired on. His evidence was the testimony of 40 troops. Of the 538 civilian testimonies offered to the inquiry he only admitted 15. He refused to take forensic evidence.

The Irish government has now published a dossier exposing the Widgery report and proving beyond doubt that the troops were not fired on first, that the 27 minutes of carnage that they indulged in was a deliberate act of terror against the nationalist community and that the lives of 14 innocent civilians were designed to regain the initiative in the British state's war against the nationalists.

Whatever the new inquiry concludes, we must use its existence to raise these facts, especially among British people who have swallowed so many lies about the Irish war. And we must use it to fight for justice for the families of the victims of Bloody Sunday and for justice for the entire nationalist population who have suffered so much terror at the hands of the British and whose heroic resistance has been for so long deceitfully represented as criminal "terrorism". ■

## Museveni's Uganda

# Pillar of the new African order

British and American commentators have recently heaped praise on President Yoweri Museveni of Uganda. A model for the so-called "new breed" of African leaders, he is viewed by some as a liberator in Rwanda, Congo and southern Sudan and the author of a rare economic success story to boot. **Keith Spencer** unearths a very different reality.

**I**N JANUARY 1986 Yoweri Museveni and his National Resistance Army (NRA) took power in Uganda. Museveni and his troops promised to end the civil strife which had torn the country apart during the past 20 years under the regimes of Milton Obote and Idi Amin. Rejecting the policies of Obote's previous regime, the National Resistance Movement (NRM, political wing of the NRA), set out to nationalise industries and to introduce state control of the import/export market.

A decade later in 1996 Uganda won praise from the World Bank for successfully adhering to successive pro-imperialist structural adjustment programmes. It was rewarded with having part of its bank debt written off. It received \$34 million worth of arms from the United States with the aim of strengthening it as a bulwark against Islamic Sudan. Finally, Uganda's pro-Anglophone foreign policy made it a key player in East Africa, politically and militarily supporting the successful Rwandan and Zairian oppositions and the continuing fight by the Sudanese People's Liberation Army (SPLA) in southern Sudan against the Islamist regime in Khartoum.

How did the NRM's transformation from anti-capitalist guerrilla movement to favourite of the West happen?

It occurred in three main stages and involved a purge of its top cadres in the government and the re-organisation of its structure. A toothless system of "district government" sits alongside a total ban on party politics. On top of it all sits Museveni, who was trained in (then) pro-China Tanzania and rumoured to have fought with the MPLA in Angola. He is now a respected African statesman, wined and dined in the major imperialist capitals.

## Terror

By 1986 Uganda had fallen into chaos. Production had virtually ground to a halt and there was a history of state-directed terror which reached its height under Idi Amin but did not disappear with his downfall. Guerrilla movements

operated in the north and the NRA in the south.

In power, the NRM set out to rebuild the economy using the state as the main instrument. By early 1987, prices for basic consumer goods were fixed and a state monopoly over essential goods was introduced. Yet, inflation was still running at 147% and GDP had declined by 2%. The NRM abandoned its state capitalist agenda and opened negotiations with the World Bank.

In May 1987 the Economic Recovery Programme (ERP) was introduced. It set out to liberalise prices for basic foodstuffs, devalue the currency, privatise parts of the economy and scrap state controls on imports/exports. Alongside the stick of the ERP was the carrot of aid and donations. Funds

tion has now become a commodity like any other, with full cost now being charged. The poorest 50% of kids are excluded even from primary school. Higher education is now a middle class preserve. The health system, ravaged by civil war, has been privatised by default and in many places charges have been introduced. Meanwhile, over 70,000 state sector jobs have been destroyed.

In short, Museveni has made friends in high places but not even repaired the damage done to Ugandan society during the war. And with the country's debt rising there is less and less prospect of him doing so. Not surprisingly, given this sorry record, Museveni has chosen to tighten his grip on power.

Like Laurent Kabila in Zaire last

eni is Britain and the USA's policeman in the region.

## Insurgents

The NRA has been faced with insurgents in the north since it seized power. When, in 1989, the National Islamic Front came to power in Sudan and started backing the LRA, a regional civil war erupted in Uganda. Museveni retaliated by supporting the SPLA, who sought secession for southern Sudan. In doing so, he won US backing, with Washington supplying weapons to Uganda to combat the LRA and to support the SPLA. By 1992 there was an arc of countries on Sudan's southern border – Eritrea, Ethiopia and Uganda – backed by the US, all supporting movements against Khartoum.

In 1990, the Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF) launched an attack from Uganda to oust President Habyarimana. A number of exiled Rwandans had fought with the NRA and now the favour was being returned. In 1994, the RPF ousted the genocidal Rwandan regime. Then in 1996-7, Uganda, along with Rwanda, also militarily supported Laurent Kabila's ousting of Mobutu in Zaire. Uganda's southern and western borders, which had been subject to attacks, were now secured.

In both cases, Uganda deepened its alliance with Washington and London, by effectively helping to sweep the influence of their imperialist rival, France, from the region. This embryonic Anglophone alliance in Africa – if it survives – would stretch from Eritrea on the Red Sea to Congo on the Atlantic ocean. Uganda's own role has been to give support to the RPF, Kabila and the SPLA.

## Safe

Museveni and the NRM have made Uganda safe for imperialist investments. It is, however, no haven for the workers and peasants who continue to be exploited by international capital. The danger in places like Kenya, where President Moi still clings to power, is that illusions may grow in the Uganda "model" and the Anglophone imperialist countries as liberating forces.

Socialists must highlight the reality of Museveni's record on the economy, democracy and workers' and peasants' living standards to the African masses. He is a stooge of US and British imperialism and a friend to the bankers and multinational corporations.

Whatever economic growth has been achieved, has come at the expense of jobs and essential services for the poor. Meanwhile, Uganda's debt has risen to monstrous proportions – five times its annual export earnings. Should this debt be called in, Museveni is sure to try and make Uganda's impoverished masses again pay for the bosses' crisis.

Yoweri Museveni is an enemy of African liberation and socialism, as surely as Kenya's Daniel arap Moi and General Abacha of Nigeria. The so-called "new breed" of African leaders must be ruthlessly driven from power by Africa's working class and poor peasantry on their road to an Africa free from dictatorships and Western exploitation. ■



Yoweri Museveni

## Uganda since independence

Uganda declared its independence in 1962. Its first post-colonial government was formed by the Uganda People's Congress of Milton Obote. The governmental structure was fashioned after the "Westminster model" and so lacked any mechanism for incorporating traditional power bases and rulers.

Obote set out to modernise the state and economy in a bureaucratic manner with no involvement from Uganda's workers and peasants.

Within four years, civil strife between the centre and the countryside led to Obote abrogating the constitution with the backing of the army. There then followed a period of internal conflict as Obote set out to destroy his enemies and break the power of the traditional rulers. In 1968 widespread nationalisations of foreign banks and companies occurred.

In 1971, Obote was overthrown by Idi Amin, a British-trained army officer. Initially, supported by Britain, Amin was expected to impose stability and a kind of peace. Instead, replacing Obote's cronies with his own, the Amin regime intensified oppression and lined its pockets from the country's coffers.

In 1972, Amin took over the property of the country's Asian population, who owned some of the larger private companies. Throughout the 1970s the situation worsened until Amin was overthrown by the Tanzanian army supported by Ugandans.

In 1981 Obote won a disputed election. In its wake, several guerrilla movements began a struggle against the government resulting in Museveni coming to power in 1986. The Ugandan Constitutional Committee estimated in 1992 that 1.5 million people had been killed and an equal number were tortured, imprisoned or forced into exile during the Amin and Obote regimes.

Uganda in the 1970s and 1980s became a nightmare – but it was a nightmare dreamt up in London, Paris and Washington. Uganda's successive regimes – and others like them such as Mobutu's Zaire and Bokassa's Central African Empire – were backed by the imperialist powers.

Without the involvement of the masses in determining their own lives and future, the state machine became solely the means by which one ruling elite after another enriched themselves at the expense of the people. Against the corrupt constitution of Museveni, Marxists argue for the fullest extension of capitalist democracy in the form of a revolutionary, sovereign constituent assembly, convened and guarded by the organisations of the workers and poor peasants and their militia. However to break from imperialism and enter onto the road to socialism it will be necessary to build a new type of state based upon the power of the oppressed masses – a soviet state.

Such a fight will break with the rotten regimes of Obote, Amin and Museveni and will complete the unfinished business of 1962, securing real independence for the Ugandan masses. ■



Young soldiers of the Ugandan army marching to the North. Continuing war in the north of Uganda is a running sore for Museveni

## INDONESIA: Suharto on the brink

# IMF bails out dictator

**WHEN PRESIDENT** Suharto of Indonesia, who has been in office for 30 years, announced on 20 January that he would be standing for a seventh term, the Indonesian currency went into freefall.

The collapse of the currency reflected investors' loss of confidence in the Indonesian economy and, more importantly, the fear that Suharto's determination to hang on could lead to a political explosion.

Since the mid-1970s Indonesia has experienced rapid growth, often growing by more than 10% each year. By the mid-1980s it was seen by some economists as the "Asian Tiger" with the most potential. With a population of nearly 200 million, important reserves of oil, gas, coal and other minerals, and an important agricultural export sector, Indonesia was seen as a crucial market and investment area for capitalists in the developed countries.

But as in other "Tiger" economies the frenzied growth rates disguised real problems. Three decades in power had encouraged increasing corruption in the Suharto regime. His extended family and cronies filled military, business and parliamentary positions, growing rich on the massive patronage and protection afforded to their business interests. An estimated 20 to 30 families, many linked to Suharto, dominate the 20 conglomerates that own at least 80% of the top 400 companies in Indonesia.

The boom in the 1990s was increasingly fuelled by short-term borrowing from domestic and offshore banks. The national debt increased enormously.

The bubble burst spectacularly at the end of July shortly after the run on Thailand's currency. Since then, Indonesia has been struggling to restore confidence in its economy. Its currency has suffered sharp decline after recurrent runs by speculators. The stock market fell 40% between July and November. In October Suharto's government had to go cap in hand to the IMF.

The IMF quickly put in place a loan to bail out the regime. At \$43 billion it was the biggest since the Mexican crisis of 1995 – a record quickly broken in December when South Korea received a loan of \$57 billion. The IMF, which after all is only the collective bailiff of the imperialist system, quickly set out its terms. Import controls were to be cut, large prestige projects, part of the national development plan, had to be cancelled or postponed, foreign investment restrictions had to be lifted, privatisation programmes were to be speeded up and government procurement programmes had to be transparent and open to foreign competition.

As elsewhere in South East Asia, the IMF made sure that imperialist capital would increase its penetration into the economy in exchange for its rescue package. At the same time the IMF, always sensitive to the demands of US foreign policy, did everything it could to cushion the effect on the Suharto regime which has long been an ally of US imperialism. Initial demands for cuts in fuel and food subsidies were dropped because the regime pointed out the likely impact on the masses just before the presidential "election" in March.

Suharto's government is right to be worried about the impact of the current crisis. The collapse of the Rupiah will push up inflation. In October and November students and other activists clashed with police on demonstrations demanding a freeze on prices. Already workers are being laid off on big construction sites, further swelling the ranks of the unemployed. Employers are trying to avoid paying the usual year-end "13th month" bonus – an essential



First line of defence? Riot police guard a Jakarta courtroom

part of the workers' pay – sparking a rash of strikes. Further bank closures are expected. While the regime closed 16 of the country's 240 banks to please the IMF, at least 70 other banks are still open only with a prop from the regime.

Added to this is a severe drought in parts of Indonesia that is dramatically reducing the winter rice crop, the most important of the year. The fires in southern Borneo, caused by unrestricted clearing and burning of forests by agribusiness, have restarted, following a lull during the monsoon season. In short, Suharto faces the most difficult economic crisis of his 30-year rule – in circumstances where the demands for political change, repressed in 1996, show signs of growing apace.

Other countries in South East Asia are going through similar economic turmoil but Indonesia is the one that worries the imperialists most.

Countries like South Korea and Thailand with recently established parliamentary systems have a democratic "safety valve". The new President of South Korea is able to denounce the old government and declare himself "shocked" at their economic mismanagement and ask the trade unions to be understanding and give him time.

Indonesia has no such safety valve and the imperialists know it. They are attempting to bolster a deeply discredited and unpopular regime, which grimly clings to power thanks to a rigged political system and ongoing political repression.

Under a series of laws passed in 1985 the government allows only three political parties: GOLKAR, PDI and the PPP. It screens candidates and runs the rigged elections. The elected "parliament", the People's Consultative Assembly has 425 elected members and 75 military members appointed by Suharto. The consultative assembly, which will elect the President, adds another 500 members to the parliament, all of them appointed by Suharto!

The economic crisis, combined with the indirect presidential election in March, opens up a dangerous period for both the regime and the radical opposition. A growing protest movement against unemployment, inflation

Indonesia has debts of \$140 billion, the IMF on its back and a corrupt president who refuses to relinquish his grip on power. **John McKee** looks at the explosive situation building up in the world's fourth most populous country.

and growing poverty could well become focused around a struggle against Suharto's presidency. This would challenge the very basis of the regime.

In 1996 Suharto faced difficulties in the build-up to the national elections of the Peoples Representative Council. Resentment within sections of the military and business to Suharto's "crony capitalism", which favoured his own family and clique at their expense, led to a proxy struggle over the leadership of one of the three legal parties – the Democratic Party of Indonesia (PDI).

The figurehead in this struggle was Megawati Sukarnoputri, daughter of the independence leader and first President Achmed Sukarno. Sensing a challenge to his power, Suharto had Megawati removed as leader of the PDI, and replaced by a stooge. Megawati immediately became the focus of all the opposition to Suharto, especially when the PDI's headquarters was stormed to drive out Megawati supporters on 26 July 1996.

This attack on the PDI led to an explosion of anger and riots on the streets of Jakarta, which were brutally suppressed by the police and army. Suharto followed this up with a wave of repression against opposition activists, specifically targeting the radical Peoples Democratic Party (PRD) and the leaders of various trade union organisations. They were accused of communist subversion and given long jail sentences.

Protest on the streets was the last thing that Megawati or anyone else in the bourgeois opposition wanted. Megawati, who had been a member of parliament for years and never challenged the basis of the regime, wanted the opposition to Suharto to stay strictly within parliamentary limits.

In the ensuing elections in May 1997 the government party, GOLKAR,

secured a massive victory by fraud, claiming 70% of the vote. The PDI dissidents called for a boycott and the stooge PDI received an insignificant 3% of the votes. It had previously controlled 25% of the seats in parliament. But again Megawati avoided any calls for action around the elections. The bourgeois opposition might be divided on many things, but on one it is absolutely united: it wants to avoid the masses mobilised on the streets at all costs. These bourgeois leaders might want to see the back of Suharto, but only with a smooth and orderly transition that guarantees continued exploitation of the masses.

Nevertheless, if such a mass movement does grow and begin to make headway, this bourgeois opposition will, of course, quickly move to put itself at the head of the movement and steer it into safe channels.

The Indonesian masses and the Asian left have the negative experience of the Philippines to guide them in such a situation. Here, the bourgeois opposition to Marcos managed to harness and control "people's power" and, as a result, swindled the workers and peasants out of the possibility of affecting fundamental change in the economy: One set of landlord and capitalist exploiters merely replaced another.

Unfortunately, even the most radical of the opposition groups, the People's Democratic Party (PRD), has shown a consistent tendency to cover up for and sow illusions in bourgeois figures like Megawati. While the PRD prides itself in mobilising the masses and being at the forefront of their struggles against the regime, at the same time they extend "critical support" to the PDI and have called on the masses to support Megawati as a presidential candidate.

The PRD is following a long and dangerous tradition, adopting the Stal-

inist theory of stages which limits the immediate struggle to the fight for democracy and relegates social and economic questions. For this they need "democratic allies". The PRD is trying to develop what it describes as a "political front" which will lead to the forming of a "Peoples Coalition Government". This is nothing other than a Stalinist-inspired "popular front", which limits the workers' demands to those believed to be acceptable to the "progressive bourgeoisie".

As a result, the PRD puts forward a programme for such a government, limited to a series of democratic rights: the right of assembly, freedom of political parties, of trade unions, an end to sexual discrimination, separation of church and state, the right to work, self-determination for East Timor etc. It completely fails to address what really condemns the masses to exploitation and misery – Indonesian capitalism and imperialist exploitation. Neither does it broach the key question for the masses struggling to overthrow the New Order regime: how to break up Suharto's military machine.

Without fighting for the expropriation of the landlords – for an agrarian revolution, without calling for the cancellation of the debts owed to the imperialist bloodsuckers, without expropriating the Indonesian and imperialist capitalists and developing an emergency plan to direct all the state resources to alleviating poverty and ending exploitation, all calls for the "right to meaningful work" or the "right of those who till the land to own it" remain utopian. Worse, by tying the proletariat to a programme that is acceptable to the bourgeois democrats, a noose is being prepared for the workers and peasants when the "democrats" turn on them for pursuing their own demands.

Only a revolutionary workers' and peasants' government based on workers' councils and supported by the land hungry masses, could really dismantle the Suharto regime and guarantee the masses both democratic and social rights. Fighting for such a programme in Indonesia today means building a revolutionary, Trotskyist party, not resuscitating a bankrupt Stalinist one. ■

## FORTRESS EUROPE: Bastion of racism

# Open the borders!

**O**N 27 DECEMBER 1997 a boat carrying 839 refugees docked at an Italian port. Most of those on board were Kurdish, others had fled the carnage of Algeria's civil war. A few had come from Sri Lanka and Egypt.

Their arrival sparked an intensive campaign of diplomatic pressure, spearheaded by the German government and designed to force Italy to tighten its "liberal" immigration controls.

While Germany's interior minister, Manfred Kanther, chastised both Italy and Greece for failing to stem a supposed tide of Kurdish immigrants into Europe, both France and Austria moved swiftly to strengthen the policing of their Italian borders. Before January was over, foreign ministers from across the EU had met in Brussels to sign a "refugee action plan" to reinforce visa and asylum procedures.

Despite the boast of Italian president Luigi Scalfaro that his country would continue to welcome refugees with arms "wide open", Romano Prodi's coalition government immediately implemented measures agreed by police chiefs from six EU member states after an 8 January meeting with Turkey's security head, Necati Bilican.

Italy agreed to tighten its border controls and to co-operate with other member states in the tracking of "illegal" immigrants, in line with its obligations as a recent signatory to the Schengen treaty. Confirmation of Italy's hard line came on 25 January as Italian police announced the detention of 60 Kurds and Albanians who had been seized aboard a boat off the Adriatic coast.

The Schengen framework, named after the Luxembourg town where it was first signed by several EU states in 1985, is the cornerstone of "Fortress Europe". On the one hand, Schengen guarantees the free movement of labour between member states. On the other, the explicit purpose of the agreement is to develop a co-ordinated approach to strengthening barriers to immigration from outside the EU.

### Block

Across Western Europe, governments have sought to block entry to people from the Third World and the former Stalinist states of Eastern Europe who are seeking refuge from war or political persecution, or simply hoping to escape grinding poverty in their homelands. The Schengen and subsequent Trevi agreements brutally exclude people on the basis of their skin colour and country of origin, at the same time as boosting the powers of police forces to act beyond their national borders.

Britain has never formally signed up to the Schengen framework. Tony Blair's Labour government has instead reasserted the line of its Tory predecessors that the British state must retain overall control of its own immigration policies and their enforcement.

But in its role as EU president for the first half of 1998, the Blair government has committed itself to working behind the scenes to ensure that the Schengen framework proves a more effective obstacle to immigrants and refugees. Britain has already agreed to Schengen's provisions for greater "international security co-operation", widely seen as a prelude to the creation of a Europe-wide police force.

The immediate trigger to the diplomatic crisis that unfolded in early January was the increase in the number of Kurds arriving in Italy, primarily from south-eastern Turkey (northern Kurdistan) as well as northern Iraq and Iran. The Italian authorities reported that more than 2,600 Kurds had arrived between July and December 1997, with a notable increase at the very end of the year.



European politicians have demanded still tighter border controls in response to these Kurdish refugees

According to both Turkish human rights organisations and representatives of the Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK) – the main force opposed to continuing Turkish rule in northern Kurdistan – the responsibility for the surge in Kurdish arrivals lay with the Turkish government.

Angered by yet another rejection of its efforts to gain entry into the EU at the mid-December Luxembourg summit, the Turkish state appears to have actively encouraged Kurds to flee not only the war zone in the south-east but also ghetto areas in Istanbul and Ankara.

The EU has repeatedly cited Turkey's human rights record as a key reason for refusing it entry to the club for Europe's major players. Whilst the Turkish government has faced pressure from EU states to halt the exodus of Kurds, the EU continues to turn a blind eye to Turkey's occupation of northern Iraq in its effort to crush pockets of Kurdish resistance. For all the bleating about human rights abuses, Turkey remains a valuable NATO ally.

The United Nations High Commission on Refugees (UNHCR) refuted the charge that the Kurds fleeing Turkey for Italy and Greece were simply "economic migrants". Instead, the UNHCR highlighted the reality of Turkey's "dirty war" against the PKK, its sympathisers and the Kurdish peasantry as whole, which has taken 30,000 lives since it began in 1984.

In response to EU pressure, the Turkish authorities staged a nationwide sweep in the first half of January, arresting hundreds of people holed up in decrepit flats and hotels in the backstreets of Istanbul and other cities. Iranian and Iraqi nationals were among those arrested on the basis that they

### BY G. R. McCOLL

were immigrants who supposedly intended to enter EU countries. On one day alone Turkish police took more than 1,300 people into custody – the vast majority of them Kurds.

Horrifying evidence of the desperation which drives many Kurds to flee to western Europe came on the evening of 5 January when a Kurd faced with deportation to Turkey entered the airport at Monchen-Gladbach in the north west of Germany, doused himself with petrol and set himself alight, dying of burns shortly afterwards.

In sharp contrast to the Council of Europe's declared intention of promoting "tolerance, respect and understanding", the immigration policies of the EU and each of its member states have only strengthened racial prejudice and scapegoated immigrants and "ethnic minorities" for the economic and social ills of capitalism in Europe.

### Stripped

John Major's Tory government played the race card with the introduction of the Asylum and Immigration Act 1996, which stripped asylum seekers of benefit rights and encouraged racial discrimination by bosses through mandating checks on the immigration status of job applicants. Since its election, the Labour government has not modified this legislation and instead pursued the policy of detaining hundreds of asylum seekers in purpose-built centres like Campsfield near Oxford and "ordinary" prisons like Rochester.

The British-led EU attitude to the civil war in Algeria illustrates the hypocrisy of Robin Cook's "ethical" foreign policy. Cook has proclaimed that

an end to the bloodshed in Algeria would be a top priority for the EU in the first half of 1998. But Cook and his fellow EU foreign ministers have turned a blind eye to the mounting body of evidence which reveals that the Algerian military is complicit in – and sometimes directly responsible for – horrific massacres of whole villages.

EU states have generally denied refugee status to hundreds of Algerians fleeing the carnage, with Britain detaining dozens of Algerian asylum seekers and even deporting some back to a country where more than 100,000 have died as a direct result of six years of war. There is no indication that the EU states are about to open their doors to the victims. Indeed, a major motive for an EU intervention at this stage is to stave off the prospect of a "flood" of refugees.

In February 1997, the French government introduced the Debre law which attacks all non-European immigrants, who were to face fingerprinting on arrival in France. The legislation gave still more powers to the police to hunt for "illegal immigrants".

German legislation in 1997 imposed a special residence requirement on the children of immigrants, even though they were born in Germany. Both Chancellor Kohl's CDU and the German Social Democrats have been posturing against immigration in the run-up to the country's September general election. The Social Democratic interior minister in the state of Lower Saxony actually called for Germany's withdrawal from Schengen so it could introduce tougher border controls.

Two cases of large-scale death at sea highlight the murderous impact of Europe's immigration laws. In March an Italian naval vessel sank a makeshift boat, killing 87 Albanians who were

fleeing the conflict in the south of their country. This occurred just as Italian troops were gathering to lead a 6,000-strong force to restore "law and order" in Albania.

At the end of December 1996 nearly 300 immigrants from the Indian sub-continent died when a crazed captain rammed the crowded launch he had forced them to board. The European media all but ignored this case of mass murder and the cynical trade in human life which lay behind it.

The extreme difficulties faced by immigrants seeking entry to "Fortress Europe" leaves desperate people at the mercy of ruthless racketeers who rip off their life savings. But for those who survive the journey and find their way into Western Europe, the grim reality is police harassment, racist violence and discrimination in the job and housing markets.

Across the EU in 1996, thugs from far right organisations claimed the lives of at least 20 immigrants. The figures for last year are not yet available. Another nine were killed by unidentified racist attackers, while 11 died in police custody. In Italy, the murders of undocumented immigrants with no identification papers have frequently gone unrecorded.

But asylum seekers, immigrant workers and youth have not been passive victims in the face of state racism and street violence. The "sans papiers" movement which emerged from the occupation of a Paris church in the summer of 1996 sparked a wave of protests in several French cities, involving thousands of trade unionists as well as intellectuals and immigrant workers.

### Resistance

Still more resistance arose in February 1997 in response to the Debre legislation, despite the failure of the main parties of the left, the Socialist and Communist, to mount any serious opposition to the bill in the National Assembly. While Jospin's "left" coalition, elected in June, has failed to repeal the whole of the previous Government's Act, the movement in France was enough to extract some important concessions.

Anti-racists and labour movement activists have a key responsibility for ensuring that the demands of detained asylum seekers, who staged rooftop protests at Campsfield and hunger strikes at Kent's Rochester prison and of immigrants like the "sans papiers", get taken up by the organised working class across Europe.

They must be clear, however, that anxiety about the impact of the single currency on jobs and living standards has only fuelled racist violence: it is not the root cause. The capitalist system itself breeds racism, which has plumbed its most barbarous depths in a century scarred by imperialist rivalries.

To root out racism altogether we need to overthrow capitalism and replace it with democratically planned production and distribution internationally, according to human need and not the dictates of private profit.

Meanwhile, it is crucial that socialists in Britain and across the whole of Europe mount vigorous campaigns against racist immigration laws.

- Stop all deportations
- Full citizenship rights (including state benefits) for all immigrant workers
- End the criminalisation of and bans against the PKK in Germany, France and elsewhere
- Scrap the Schengen and Trevi agreements
- Abolish all immigration controls
- For community self-defence, with full labour movement backing, against racist violence from the police, organised racists or fascists.■

**The Tories' legacy includes an unresolved battle over European integration. Colin Lloyd examines Labour's attempts to defuse a major row in the British ruling class.**

## Countdown to a single currency

# Brown goes for austerity

**I**N THE RUN-UP to the 1997 general election, Europe and the single currency dominated the headlines. The Tory party was tearing itself apart over European integration and barely a day went by without some bosses' think tank issuing a dire pronouncement for or against European Monetary Union (EMU).

Less than a year later the situation is very different. Britain has begun its six-month presidency of the European Union and the launch of the single currency is set for the start of 1999. But the media's "foreign policy agenda" is dominated by Robin Cook's trips to glad-hand Far Eastern dictators, the question of whether his new partner can travel with him at the public's expense. Europe has become all but a "non-issue".

### Europophobic

The unprecedented political calm over Europe has resulted from some major decisions taken last summer by the main party leaders. William Hague effectively defused the EMU row in the Tory party by abolishing party discipline on the question.

Now Tory politicians can argue for or against monetary union without fear of splitting the party. The likes of Kenneth Clarke and Michael Heseltine can sign letters to the broadsheets denouncing the official Europophobic line and hailing the necessity of the single currency.

Effectively, this means the Tories are reconciled to remaining out of political power at least until the British ruling class has made and implemented a decision on the single currency.

Meanwhile, Chancellor Gordon Brown was able to defuse the political debate on Europe last October when he laid out the conditions for Britain joining and clearly ruled out participating in the single currency in the "first wave", due to start on 1 January 1999.

At the time of Brown's statement to the House of Commons, it was easy to mistake Labour's stance as yet another version of John Major's "wait and see" policy – more spin than substance, and designed simply to wrongfoot the Tories.

This interpretation would be wrong, however. Labour's stance on the single currency, though it does not commit the British government to any action before 2002, represents the partial resolution of a long-running crisis of ruling class leadership over Europe.

This virtual paralysis reflected real material divisions within British capitalism. Britain, historically, traded with its Empire and the USA far more than with continental Europe. Since joining the then European Economic Community in the mid-1970s, however, Britain's trade with Europe has grown to over 50% of its total exchange of goods and services. But in terms of foreign investment, and also political and military alliances, it has remained far more integrated with Washington. It has also been more tied to investment outside of the EU than any other European imperialist country.

Thus, British industry and finance has been pulled in conflicting directions: some firms, like avionics giant GEC-Marconi, are drawn towards mergers

with European firms and into greater European trade. While all international capitalists favour greater openness and integration in the European market, such Euro-oriented firms support moves to go beyond this towards the creation of European super-companies – for example Airbus Industrie – that can compete globally with US or Japanese giants. They also favour the creation of supra-national governmental organisations like the European Central Bank that are necessary to make the single currency work.

Other huge corporations, like British Airways, chemicals giant ICI or BP in the oil industry, already operate on a

tial effect on US and Far East-oriented multinationals – they also opposed EMU on grounds of principle. They were obsessed with the threat to national sovereignty posed by EMU. And for them entry into the single currency would have undermined something even more important: the umbilical connection between the Tory party and an ageing, extremely reactionary middle class base who would never forgive a party that "abolished the pound".

Labour's new strategic stance cuts through these issues of "principle" while maintaining important "maybes" on behalf of the big bosses with truly global interests.

TUC General Secretary John Monks hopeful that union members can be placated with a few crumbs from the Social Chapter.

Having committed itself in principle to the single currency, however, Labour's stance contains an important set of caveats on behalf of the anti-Euro section of the ruling class. In October Gordon Brown outlined five "tests" for the practical viability of British entry into EMU. These are:

- The British and European economies must show "sustainable convergence" – both of business cycles and susceptibility to inflation,
- Europe's economies need to become

Instead, they represent a comprehensive policy framework within which British imperialism will move decisively to join the single currency early in the next century. Fundamentally, Brown recognises that there are two essential preconditions for joining:

- a sustained attack on working class living standards in the name of "fighting inflation" and "reducing public spending" and
- a strategic solution to Britain's peculiar economic weaknesses: its tendency to boom and bust, coupled with the inflationary character of all economic recoveries – both fundamentally based on the decline of British-based manufacturing industries and the subsequent sucking in of imports whenever the economy enters into an upswing.

Brown identifies these tendencies as the key threat both to "convergence" and "flexibility".

### Decline

For the Chancellor, there is no prospect of rebuilding Britain's manufacturing base, and no immediate solution to the skills gap that opens up in each economic recovery. In short, there is no long-term prospect of reversing Britain's century of decline as an imperialist power. But in the meantime Brown's prescription is short and sharp:

"We will need a period of stability, with continuing toughness on inflation and public borrowing."

This is the key to Labour's economic policy between now and the next election. Blair and Brown are determined to solve Britain's lack of competitiveness, its tendency – whether in or out of EMU – to fall behind the more dynamic imperialisms of continental Europe. They are determined to solve it on the backs of the working class. That, fundamentally, is why we have an "Iron" Chancellor, why nurses will get a real pay cut, why schools will sack teachers this year and next.

And it is not the case that coming out of Europe or boycotting EMU can simply stop the attacks. The Tory leadership around Hague, most of them born-again Thatcherites and rabid Eurosceptics, offers the exact same economic medicine: low pay, spending cuts and "flexible" working.

### Struggle

Workers should struggle against such austerity packages, whether prepared by New Labour or the old Tory right. But at the same time they also need to reject the "Little England" ideology which has characterised the historic response of the Labour left to European integration. It is neither possible nor desirable to turn the clock back to a mythical golden age of state economic planning in an "independent capitalist" Britain.

The only reliable allies of British workers in opposing Brown's efforts to make us pay the price of their bosses' admission to the Euro will be our class sisters and brothers in the rest of Europe, who – especially in France (see p15) – have already given us lessons in how we must fight not only to defend the remaining gains of the welfare state but to launch a struggle for a workers' Europe. ■



Workers from Europe march outside the recent EU summit in Luxembourg

world scale. It is the bosses of these firms, not just the British beef-eating small shopkeepers and *Sun* journalists, who have expressed powerful reservations about EMU. They do not want to see their influence over the British state's economic, political and military policies weakened by ceding control to pan-European structures.

So there is a real material division of interest within the British ruling class, which was exacerbated by the 18-year rule of a Tory party, dominated by short-sighted "Little Englanders" as the Thatcherites consolidated their triumph over Ted Heath's pro-European Heath wing of the party.

By the end of their nearly two decades in power, the Tories had become a virulently Europophobic party. The Tories in office had become dysfunctional for pursuing the long-term interests of the majority of British capitalists on the question of European integration. Key sections of the Tory leadership scorned the views of the pro-European big capitalists. At the same time, they could no longer cut deals on behalf of the Eurosceptic wing of the ruling class because they had substituted nationalist vitriol for diplomatic manoeuvre.

The Tory Eurosceptics were not just opposed to EMU because of its poten-

In principle, according to Gordon Brown, the single currency is a good idea economically and Britain intends to join. While it represents "a major pooling of economic sovereignty", the benefits justify it. Therefore, Labour does not oppose EMU on the grounds of "sovereignty". The "principle" Labour does operate from is "the consent of the British people". Blair is committed to a referendum if and when Labour tries to take Britain into the single currency.

### Cloaked

This last issue, though cloaked in fine democratic phrases, is in fact a warning to the bosses. The subtext is: "We will do your bidding and take Britain into EMU" is the subtext, "but not at the cost of losing an election to a Murdoch-led right wing backlash: the majority of ruling class has to back us, and take 'public opinion' with them."

Tony Blair's mid-January speech in the Hague calling for the creation of a cross party, pro-European "patriotic alliance" was a blatant attempt to enlist the support of Clarke and Heseltine against such a backlash. After all, New Labour already enjoys the commitment of the dominant wing of the trade union bureaucracy to the single currency, with

more "flexible" to cope with their vulnerability to high levels of unemployment.

- EMU has to be shown to provide for more productive investment in Britain,
- There have to be clear benefits to the financial services industry, based in the City of London: concretely, the City must not be eclipsed by Frankfurt in Germany as a trading centre,
- EMU must not raise unemployment in Britain.

The latter point has special significance as both Tory Europophobes and much of the Labour left rejoiced at the aftermath of "Black Wednesday" in September 1992 when Britain crashed out of the Exchange Rate Mechanism. Some commentators wrongly pointed to this event as the real start of recovery from recession in an effort to pin the blame for soaring unemployment in the early 1990s on moves towards a single currency.

Brown's criteria in general, while couched in the rhetoric of "defending Britain", are fundamentally economic and attempt to define British imperialism's interest from a purely economic, Euro-oriented standpoint. While the "Five Tests" may provide comfort for the anti-Euro wing of the big bourgeoisie, they do not reflect the narrow economic interests of that section.

## BOOK: The New Feminism

## Lipsticks and Wonderbras

**N**ATASHA WALTER'S much-hyped new book claims to be a celebration of the new feminism. It starts in style, attacking the idea that feminism should concern itself primarily with behaviour or dress and arguing that "what we should ask of feminism now are concrete political, social and economic reforms".

But after this promising opening what follows is a disappointment. The "new feminism" turns out to be little more than the defence of the right to wear lipstick and some woolly ideas about social improvements.

Walter makes some standard observations: the women's movements of the past won important gains. As a result, "everywhere you go, you see women flexing their muscles and demanding equality". Women have greater independence, more legal and civil rights than they did three decades ago.

## The New Feminism

Natasha Walter

Little and Brown £17.50

Reviewed by Lesley Day

Yet alongside these gains there are still huge problems. Even when they are in full time work, women earn only 80% of the average hourly male wage and, as 45% of women work part time, the gap in income is even greater.

Walter also recognises that poverty, the burden of childcare and lack of opportunity still weighs heavily for large numbers of working class women. Feminism, she argues must tackle these material questions and inequalities.

She blames the "old feminism" of the 1970s for becoming bogged down in questions of sexuality and individual behaviour and concentrating on self-

help. "Feminism", she argues, "has overpersonalised the political and over-politicised the personal".

This criticism is spot on – but Walter fails to understand the roots of feminism's mistakes and consequently her own recommendations lead women down the same blind alley.

Despite her recognition of the different experiences of middle class and working class women, Walter wants to build a feminism stretching across classes. She contrasts a visit to Alison Thorne of the Institute of Directors in her plush Pall Mall office and one to Hannana Siddiqui from the Southall Black Sisters.

While Walter admits there could not be a "manifesto that both women would sign up to", she argues they are both "working for the same end; equality for the sexes; power and self respect for women". The problem is that the Insti-

tute of Directors exists to plan how better to exploit the labour of millions of working class women and men, including the super exploitation of thousands of black women.

For Walter, Margaret Thatcher can be as much of a heroine as the leaders of the miners' wives movement:

"Margaret Thatcher began to map out a language women might feel comfortable about using even when they were running the country's economy or sending troops to war".

Not a word about the fact that it was Thatcher's policies that condemned women in Britain to insecure work and poverty.

If Walter's main error is to celebrate this cross-class alliance, she is also seriously off beam when it comes to cultural and "personal" questions. When she claims the right for women to dress how they want, it turns out that they

must dress just like her.

The old feminists of the past in boots and dungarees must go. In come lipstick, high heels and power dressing. Walter seems oblivious of the dangers of replacing one stereotype with another and the PC police with the fashion police.

More serious is Walter's celebration of heterosexuality and the family. This appears under the guise of wanting men to have more of a role in childcare and the home.

But from this apparently innocuous point Walter goes on to declare that, "A consensus is growing up among social care professionals that fatherless boys are likely to be involved in criminal behaviour". Which professionals? What consensus?

Bad luck if you're a single mum or a lesbian woman, you don't get a place in Walter's brave new feminist world. ■

**F**ROM A conversation between the two principal characters in playwright Neil LaBute's first feature film, *In the Company of Men*: "women ... inside they're all the same – meat and gristle, just simmering with hatred". No wonder many feminists in the USA branded this film misogynous!

But this line quoted in the context of 95 minutes of an all too believable and very dark satire is part of the indictment of a society that breeds the likes of sexists Chad and Howard. These two ambitious lieutenants of an expanding corporation are unlikely "buddies", though this is no tale of male bonding.

Their employer sends them for six weeks to an anonymous middle American city, where the hapless but work-obsessed Howard is put in charge of a key project. His colleague Chad, a mate from university days, can project a witty and urbane facade on top of a well-muscled body. Beneath this seductive exterior, Chad bristles with barely concealed contempt for the whole of our species.

Chad reserves particular venom for

## FILM: In the Company of Men

## Men behaving badly

socially oppressed groups. His banal verbal cruelty turns to the sadism of a Marine Corps drill sergeant when he confronts a young black management trainee, whose flaws include "hanging out with the guys in shipping" – that is mixing with the mainly black manual workforce.

But Chad and Howard are both bitter and twisted, apparently emerging from the break-up of long-term relationships. Howard gets embarrassed when his mother receives phone calls from his ex-fiancée. Meanwhile, Chad conjures up images of his ex, "bimbo blonde" Suzanne, riding across the Arizona desert "without a care in the world".

Fuelled with Scotch in a hotel bar,

*In the Company of Men*  
Written and directed  
by Neil LaBute  
On general release  
Reviewed by Jo Smith

Chad hatches a scheme to exact revenge on womankind during their six weeks in Hicksville. Howard agrees to be part of the plot to flatter and seduce a vulnerable girl, who is to be dumped by both with supreme indifference.

Chad finds a suitable victim in Christine, a deaf, 95 words per minute typist from a temp agency. At once naive and intelligent, Christine evokes late

1950s Hollywood images of beauty and sexually excites both men who start dating her.

In an awkward conversation with Christine, Howard swiftly admits that he has risen from a blue collar family, where his older brothers got "their union cards the day they left high school to work at the local Chrysler plant", but that he went on to university on a baseball scholarship before his pitching arm gave out in his second year. After that, it was "all the biz".

Christine likes him but has fallen for Chad's self-evident charms. Howard, however, has persuaded himself that she is the love of his life, even after a junior manager has suggested that you "can't have time for a girl like that,

in a company like this".

This is a clever film. Suffice to say that Chad outmanoeuvres Howard at every turn and leaves his manager a thoroughly broken man, while Christine, the intended victim, survives – albeit with psychological scars.

On the whole this is an unflinching portrayal of the essential corporate man in the Clinton years. Ruthless amorality wins the day and the triumphant Chad is part self-styled Nietzschean superman and, to borrow Monica Lewinsky's supposed nickname for Bill Clinton, one serious "schmucko".

The misogyny charge does not stick: the only real disappointment is that director LaBute is a practising Mormon! ■

## TELEVISION: Mosley

## A very British fascist

**"C**OMING NEXT, a major four part series: *Hitler* – the power, the glory, the passion..."; if they tried to broadcast a TV series about the "human drama" of the rise and fall of Hitler or Mussolini there would be an outcry.

Incredibly, British TV viewers will be treated this month to a four part drama about Oswald Mosley, the British fascist leader whose black-shirted thugs terrorised trade unionists, socialists and ethnic minorities in the 1930s and 1950s.

If the tone of the trailers and preview clips are anything to go by, Mosley is set to become just the latest in a long list of whitewash jobs done on the British fascist leader. When Mosley died in the early 1980s, even *The Guardian* praised his "intelligence" and statesmanlike bearing.

Now Mosley's story will be retold as a TV drama, complete with sex, violence and vintage cars. There will be lots of action scenes as Mosley's black-shirts take on the cloth capped "reds", thus repeating the lie that fascism and communism are "as bad as each other".

It certainly won't tell the real story of Mosley's rise and fall and the fight against fascism in the 1930s. And it certainly won't explain that the key to fascism is class.

Mosley started off as a Tory politi-



25,000 anti-fascists with clenched fists surround Mosley's blackshirts in Trafalgar Square, 1936.

cian in the "social imperialist" mode: he wanted a strong "white" British empire and social reforms to guarantee social peace in Britain. That kind of Toryism was defeated in the inter-war years and Mosley turned next to the Labour Party.

When Labour formed a national

government with the mainstream Tories, Mosley left to found the New Party, which quickly evolved into the British Union of Fascists (BUF) inspired by Hitler. Mosley was supported by a section of the Conservative party including press baron Lord Rothermere whose Daily Mail issued the never to

be forgotten headline "Hurrah for the blackshirts". His propaganda was violently anti-Semitic.

Fascism grew in the 1920s and 1930s as a direct response to the threat of workers' revolution. Fascist movements are used by the ruling class as a weapon of last resort when the army

and police cannot contain workers' revolt. Fascism is mass reactionary violence aimed at the working class. It uses nationalism and racism to divide the working class and sap its fighting strength. Its aim is to smash the workers' movement.

All over Britain the BUF was met with mass resistance. Workers took to the streets in tens of thousands to prevent Mosley's marches. They were faced with rampant and bloody violence and met it with determined violence of their own.

The "Battle of Cable Street" on 4 October 1936 is the most well known confrontation: tens of thousands of East End workers turned out to stop 3,000 fascists protected by 5,000 baton-wielding police. It was the same story throughout London and throughout Britain's big cities in the mid 1930s.

In 1935 the BUF had 250,000 members. By 1940 it had just 9,000. What made the difference was mass working class resistance which never flinched from physical confrontation. Without that Jews, socialists and trade unionists would have lived under a reign of fascist street terror and the option of a fascist government would have remained stronger for the bosses in Britain.

The Mosley series will ignore these lessons, preferring the idea that Mosley destroyed himself – through vanity and bad tactics.

A veteran of the Cable Street demo, Yvonne Kapp, described it like this:

"Short of murder and mayhem, no force could have broken up that tight packed solid press of people, a human barricade, in stoic and apparently immovable strength".

Who will tell their story? Not Channel Four. ■

France

# Unemployed fight back

**FRENCH UNEMPLOYED** workers have shaken the country with a wave of occupations of the equivalent of benefit offices. They have raised the potential for a truly mass fight against the scourge of unemployment and the lousy benefits paid to the unemployed.

The movement began in December, when a number of local unemployed groups, in particular the "Agir contre le chômage!" group (AC! - "Act against unemployment!") occupied the offices of the "Unedic/Assedic" - the government body that provides the equivalent of supplementary benefit.

The occupations took place in the town of Arras in the north and in Marseilles in the south. Their demand was quite simple: they wanted a £150 Christmas bonus for all the long-term unemployed.

The Unedic is a joint union-bosses-government structure, headed by Nicole Notat, the leader of the increasingly open class-collaborationist trade union, the CFDT. Notat refused to pay up, claiming that the Assedic had no money.

**Support**

After a couple of weeks, there were clear signs of the movement flagging, with only a few dozen unemployed involved in each occupation. Things really took off just before Christmas, however, when the main trade union, the CGT (which is close to the Communist Party), decided to support the movement.

Assedic offices all over the country were occupied and demonstrations of employed and unemployed workers took place in most major towns. The demand for a Christmas bonus, upped to £300, was supplemented by calls for an across-the-board rise in all benefits of £150 a month, including the creation of a new benefit for the under-25s. At

the moment, this key section of the unemployed receives no benefits whatsoever.

The government then found £50 million worth of funds for re-training and promised that 216,000 unemployed would receive additional transport benefit of just £3 a week!

As the movement grew in scale, with more and more occupations, the government realised it would have to act. All the more so because all the opinion polls showed 80% of the population backed the struggle and thought the unemployed were absolutely justified.

The leaders of AC!, the CGT unemployed workers group and other organisations of the unemployed were called in for the French equivalent of beer and sandwiches with the Prime Minister. The result was a government decision to release £100 million for unemployed benefit.

As the AC! representative put it: that made £30 for each unemployed person! Jospin refused to give any more money, saying that the government's Maastricht targets would suffer and that everyone had to make sacrifices to meet the Euro deadline!

The government expected the unemployed to say "thank you very much" and go home. But having got virtually nothing, not surprisingly they kept the movement going.

Infuriated, Jospin ordered the riot police in, smashing up the occupations in an operation that was carefully described as the "evacuation" of the Assedic offices.

In a key moment, as part of a day of action on 27 January, the CGT organised over 20,000 people in three separate demonstrations in Paris (unemployed, railway workers and road maintenance). Despite the fact that all three movements were focused on

unemployment, the CGT kept them apart.

The CGT's role is easy to explain: there are four Communist Party ministers in Jospin's government. The PCF has to walk a tightrope between support for mass movements that its rank and file demands, and the desires of the apparatus to participate Jospin's pro-capitalist government.

The other reason for the CGT's desire to scupper the movement is that the government has been able to shift the focus of debate from benefits to the 35 hour week. As part of its package of pretend reforms, the PS-PCF government has put forward a bill that will introduce the 35 hour week by the year 2000. The proclaimed aim is to encourage the bosses to create jobs.

**Flexibility**

This might sound excellent, but the small print is revealing. There is no guarantee that there will be no loss of pay, the 35 hours will not be compulsory and job creation will be paid for by the taxpayer. This law is part and parcel of a long-held bosses' plan: flexibility. The 35 hour week will be calculated annually, allowing companies to change the working week as it suits them.

Faced with the determination of the PS and PCF reformists to stop the unemployed movement, and to help French capitalism while pretending to help the workers, the French labour movement must build a mass unemployed workers' movement fighting for:

- 35 hour week with no loss of pay, under workers' control and with job creation.
- Full benefits for all unemployed set at the level of the minimum wage.
- Retirement on full pension for all workers at 55 years. ■

India/Bangladesh

# Free Golap Jetiya

**A GENERAL** strike was staged on 9 January in the north eastern Indian state of Assam to demand the unconditional release from jail in Bangladesh of Golap Jetiya, General Secretary of the United Liberation Front of Assam (ULFA).

Jetiya and two other ULFA comrades were arrested in Bangladesh on 21 December. Jetiya's wife and two children have been missing since the arrests.

Jetiya faces a battle against deportation to India, which would mark a major defeat for all the national liberation movements around the Indian sub-continent.

Though Bangladesh and India have

no extradition treaty, the Awami League government handed more than 40 ULFA members to Indian authorities during the past two years. India's High Commissioner has demanded Jetiya's extradition under the terms of a bilateral agreement on counter-terrorism secretly concluded in 1997.

**Assistance**

The chief of ULFA's military wing has called on the Bangladeshi government to refuse India's demand, citing the debt owed by Bangladesh to the people of Assam for their assistance during the 1971 war of liberation from Pakistan.

The Bangladeshi constitution, written in the glow of victory by the first Awami League government, pledges support for the struggles of all oppressed nations around the world. Yet since independence the state has continually refused to recognise national minorities in Bangladesh and slaughtered separatists and communists.

We demand:

- The unconditional release of Golap Jetiya and his comrades Bablu Morma and Lokki Prodiv
- Disclose the whereabouts of Jetiya's wife and children
- Stop the secret deportation of ULFA members to India. ■

# 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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- Indonesia: the IMF backs Suharto

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## HANDS OFF IRAQ

# Britain and USA out of the Gulf!

**A** HUGE military force is being assembled in the Gulf: aircraft carriers, cruisers, stealth bombers. Their target is Iraq. US and British imperialism look likely to plunge the Middle East into another destructive war.

The USA has 30 ships already in the Gulf, with 300 warplanes and several hundred Cruise missiles. Britain has one carrier group already in place, headed by HMS Invincible, and another led by the carrier *Illustrious*, is on its way. Three more nuclear-powered US aircraft carriers are also moving in.

US Secretary of State Madeleine Albright has been despatched by Clinton to attempt to get permission to use air bases in Saudi Arabia and Bahrain. But with the carriers in place and using the base on Diego Garcia, they could launch a serious attack on Iraq even without the Persian Gulf bases.

The war of words is well underway. The USA and Britain are there to teach the "bloody dictator" Saddam Hussein a lesson. He has weapons of "mass destruction". All of this is hypocritical doublespeak.

The US and Britain have lots of friends who are "bloody dictators", like Suharto in Indonesia. When the media describes the USA and British forces they have "tactical" and "strategic" weapons; they don't merit the term "weapons of mass destruction".

Yet thousands of Iraqis will be destroyed by these weapons if Britain and the USA go to war.

The current crisis has been developing since September

when Iraq moved to expel United Nations weapons inspectors. The Iraqis have informed the UN that presidential sites, Saddam's numerous palaces, are off-limits. They deny the existence of chemical or biological weapons and they are demanding the lifting of punitive UN sanctions.

Throughout the autumn and into the winter sabres have been rattled. When the weapons inspectors were allowed back into Iraq the 16-strong team included 14 US or British inspectors in a clear act of provocation.

*Now the US is gearing up for more than just words.*

Clinton, in his state of the union speech, warned Saddam, "You cannot defy the will of the world". But whilst the UN Security Council might be united in wanting Iraq to co-operate with the weapons inspectors, there is not yet unanimity on the question of using military force.

Both Russia and France have spoken out against the military option, preferring diplomatic manoeuvre. In recent weeks, however, the position of France has been shifting. As the USA and Britain appear determined to go ahead with a military strike, the French seem to have decided they must support them or risk isolation.

At the end of January, the UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan also appeared to be giving in to the inevitable. In a speech in Geneva he said, "Force may have to be used as a last resort."

Clinton's intransigence and the fact that the US Congress is more unified in its support now than it was for Bush in 1991 is clearly having some

impact on those who had favoured the diplomatic option. Russia, which has important trade links with Iraq, is looking increasingly isolated.

What is remarkable about this situation is that the specific war aims of imperialism remain unclear. A senior US military officer is quoted in the *International Herald Tribune*:

"We still have a lot of work to do. We've got to clearly understand what the end-state would be."

The problem is threefold:

First, nuclear bombs may well be required in order to penetrate the strongest of the Iraqi underground defences. The US military admit that they have no idea exactly how many missile systems the Iraqis have. Is the USA really prepared to fire the first nuke since 1945 on the grounds of denying Iraq "weapons of mass destruction"?

Secondly, any prolonged war could undermine support for the US from other Middle Eastern countries, where governments would come under pressure from their own populations.

Crucially, there is no obvious candidate to replace Saddam whom the USA and Britain could rely upon. Leaving the Iraqi people to decide their own fate, without a reliable armed dictator in place, is not an option the imperialists would like to contemplate.

If the US and Britain only want to pressurise Saddam, a short attack might suffice, though it could actually strengthen Saddam's position both internally and across the region.

But whatever US and British



The West's weapons of mass destruction

imperialism decide, the "end-state" for the Iraqi masses will be death, destruction and more suffering.

Workers throughout the world must oppose this war. Saddam Hussein is a dictator, but US and British imperialism are not liberators. Their inter-

vention into the Middle East is designed to secure the strategic interests of international capital, specifically oil supplies.

A victory for imperialism will be a defeat for the international working class. The Iraqi people have every right to resist a military onslaught. International-

alists should stand with Iraq against imperialist aggression: it is the job of the Iraqi people, not US bombers, to get rid of Saddam. ■

- US and British Troops out of the Gulf!
- End Sanctions now!

## END SANCTIONS NOW