

Workers power

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Fascist menace must be stopped

Socialism, Internationalism, Revolution

British Section of the League for a Revolutionary Communist International

No 221 April 1998 ★ 50p



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RACISM: Stephen Lawrence Inquiry

British justice - racist justice

FIVE YEARS after the murder of their son, the parents of Stephen Lawrence are still fighting for justice and to find out the truth of what happened to him.

Stephen's case is testimony to the racism which lies at the heart of the British justice system. From the start of the police inquiry on the night of his death, up to the current public inquiry, the whole story is riddled with racism.

Stephen Lawrence was attacked by a gang of white youths in April 1993 whilst he was waiting for a bus in Eltham, south London. He collapsed in the street and died of multiple stab wounds. Witnesses at the scene told the inquiry that his friend, Duwayne Brooks who was with Stephen, had explained the racist nature of the attack to the police. Another policeman who interviewed Duwayne at the hospital was told Stephen had been attacked by a gang of white youths, for no other reason than the fact he was black.

In the crucial hours that followed Stephen's death, the police totally ignored this aspect of the attack, which they were made aware of on at least two occasions. Yet, as Stephen's mum told the inquiry, over the days that followed, the police seemed more interested in finding out if Stephen was a gang member.

Meanwhile local people were coming forward with information about a gang of white youths, who called themselves The Krays. Their names were given as likely suspects. When the Lawrences passed on these names to the police, they were ignored. Michael Mansfield QC, the lawyer representing the Lawrence family, told the public inquiry into the case that,

"There is now overwhelming evidence that the police squad was provided with a wealth of particular information about the suspects."

Despite the fact that they had evidence against the five youths on the day after Stephen was murdered, the police did not act. It was not until two weeks after the murder that the five youths, Neil and Jamie Acourt, Gary Dobson, Luke Knight and David Norris, were arrested. 26 people had identified the gang members as the killers.

The Crown Prosecution Service refused to prosecute the five on the basis of lack of evidence. The Lawrence family were forced to take out a private prosecution of the five, but two never came to trial and the other three were found not guilty when the case collapsed.

The police deny that the failings of the investigation were caused by racism. In an internal review of the case in 1993, Scotland Yard found that the investigation had

"progressed satisfactorily and that all lines of inquiry had been correctly pursued".

As we go to press the public inquiry has been adjourned. Prior to the start of the inquiry the Lawrence family had questioned the record in cases involving racism of William Macpherson, the chairman. They were reassured by Home Secretary Jack Straw.

On the fourth day of the inquiry Macpherson stopped the proceedings on the grounds that a policeman had been accused of lying and had not been told about this in advance! He is obviously keen to allow Sergeant Nigel Clement time to go away and get his



The Lawrence family still waiting for justice

story straight. So much for Jack Straw's reassurances.

The truth is that the police force is racist to the core. And it is not just the police force which is racist, it is the whole (in)justice system.

At the same time as the Stephen Lawrence inquiry was adjourned, prison officer Richard Tilt announced, in the wake of the death of yet another black prisoner in custody, that black prisoners being restrained, are more likely to suffocate than white prisoners.

This is apparently not due to the amount of force but some physiological difference between races.

When pressed on this point, Tilt claimed that sickle cell disorder, a disease predominantly found in black people, was the reason. Strangely enough, only one of the five blacks recently murdered by cops using the "choke hold" suffered from sickle cell. Also, Tilt has not explained how sickle cell disease makes people more susceptible to baton blows (Brian Douglas), being

hung in a police cell (Mark Harris) or being subjected to excessive use of CS gas (Ibrahima Sey). The police and the courts cannot be trusted to right these wrongs. We must rely on our own means to challenge racist attacks, be they from civilians or the cops.

That's why we say:

- Support black self defence!
- Build joint black and white anti-racist defence organisations!
- Force the unions to support the fight for justice and against racism!

LOW PAY: GMB campaign

A minimum wage for all with no exceptions!

"EVERYONE FROM school leavers to 60-something workers should be entitled to the same minimum wage for doing the same job"

Ross Kemp, otherwise known as Grant Mitchell from Eastenders, set out this clear and concise case against setting a lower minimum wage for young workers at the start of the the GMB union's campaign.

New Labour is already dragging its feet over introducing a national minimum wage, which was a manifesto commitment. It has set up a Low Pay Commission that does not include a single low-paid worker and instead is

packed with academics, business people, well-paid trade union bureaucrats and other worthies.

Now the government has instructed the Commission to look at setting a lower rate for workers under 26. This is a disgrace and must be fought tooth and nail. Unions representing low-paid workers, like Unison and the GMB, realise there is a real danger that when the Commission reports back it is likely to set a minimum wage that is acceptable to the bosses but unacceptable to their members.

The GMB has launched a publicity campaign to pressure the government

and the Commission into including all workers whatever their age. There should be no exceptions to the minimum wage. As the singer Sonja Madden, from the band Echobelly said, "The minimum wage must surely be based on the right of everyone to achieve a basic standard of living."

Using pop and soap stars is a good way of getting the message across to millions of young workers that there is a fight on over whether or not they even get included in the minimum wage. We should use the launch of the GMB campaign to press for the entire trade union movement to take up this issue.

However, a publicity campaign will not be enough to ensure an end to poverty wages. But it's as far as the trade union leaders will go as they fear falling out with the Labour government.

Yet they know they can't let Blair get away with murder. They have to be seen doing something against a minimum wage that really does nothing about low pay because it is set at such a low rate or it has so many exceptions to it.

What we really need is a militant political campaign with demonstrations, pickets, strikes and publicity stunts that put hundreds of thousands of young workers onto the streets. We need a

campaign that fights for a decent living wage of £6. an hour and not the paltry figure that the Commission - or the trade union leaders - will eventually come up with.

To make the campaign a success young workers need fighting unions that are prepared to take on unscrupulous employers and the government if - and when - New Labour backs the bosses. Then the unions can be rebuilt in sectors of the economy where young, casual workers are dumped. John Edmonds of the GMB and Rodney Bickerstaffe of Unison will not do this for us. We will have to build this campaign ourselves. ■

Local Government Referendum

Vote "no" to the London mayor

IN MAY, Londoners will vote in a referendum on whether there should be a mayor and an elected assembly for London. Opinion polls show between 70% and 80% in favour.

Labour unveiled its plan for the mayor and assembly on 25 March. The press conference had barely ended when the battle for who should, or should not, be mayor began. Attention has quickly become focused on the personalities involved rather than the democratic implications for local government.

This is partly due to the fact that

all the main political parties are calling for a "yes" vote. The focus on the mayor rather than the assembly is also because the mayor will be the key figure. The referendum question itself, which links the mayor and the assembly in one question, shows that the two are bound together.

The previous all London authority was abolished 12 years ago by Thatcher. The Greater London Council (GLC) was seen as a focus of opposition to the Tories. It ran a number of popular campaigns and was seen as an effective voice for Londoners.

But New Labour's plans are not a

return to the GLC. Instead, they want to institute the position of a mayor for London. This individual will be given power and responsibility over transport, aspects of employment, the environment, strategic planning, the police and fire services in the capital. The mayor will control a budget of £3.3 billion.

The assembly will consist of only 25 people. Cardiff, a city a twentieth of the size of London, has a council with more than 50 councillors. 14 of the members of the new assembly will represent specific areas, 11 will be elected on a London wide basis. The elected assembly

will simply be a means of keeping a check on the mayor. Their job will not be to make policy, but to question and advise the mayor.

Supporters of the London proposals champion the American experience as an example to follow. In particular, they claim the mayoral system is "more efficient". But this "efficiency" has not helped the deteriorating state of US inner cities. We should oppose the mayor because it will leave the government of a city of millions of people in the hands of a single person as opposed to an elected assembly where different views and

political policies would be debated in front of Londoners. The mayor will take some powers out of the hands of local councils.

Whoever is elected, the introduction of a mayor and advisory assembly along the lines being proposed by New Labour will be a limitation rather than an extension of local democracy in London.

As the referendum question about the mayor is tied to the vote on an elected assembly, we are calling for a "NO" vote in the referendum on 7 May 1998.

- No Mayor!
- For an elected London assembly! ■

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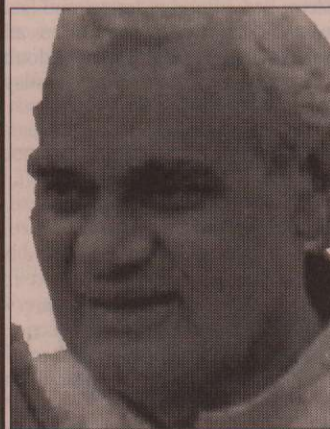
Where is Blair's Britain going?

Workers Power recently held its national conference. We report on the wide ranging discussions and the state of the class struggle ■ page 8 & 9



The German Revolution of 1918

It was 80 years ago this year that the German working class launched its own revolution. However as we explain the reformists of the German Social Democratic Party was able to derail and defeat the revolution. ■ page 6



Fighting communalism in India

The recent victory of the Hindu-chauvinist BJP in the elections has raised the spectre of communalist violence. We explain the background to the elections and the way forward for the Indian workers ■ page 11

EDITORIAL

WORKERS POWER 221 APRIL 1998

What's driving the war on welfare?

A SIMPLE QUESTION needs to be asked about Gordon Brown's "welfare-to-work" budget and Frank Field's welfare reform green paper. Blair, Brown, Field and Harman say that the welfare and benefit system needs reform because it doesn't work. So is reform needed to combat poverty or because welfare costs too much?

Labour, the Tories, the political pundits and professional economists all have the same answer. They believe, as the Bible says, that "the poor will always be with us". It is the question of how to cut the cost of poverty, not how to eradicate it, that is exercising some of the British establishment's most capable brains.

Gordon Brown's budget contained numerous measures aimed at easing the "benefit trap" that makes it uneconomic for unemployed people to take low paid jobs. The replacement of Family Credit with a Working Families Tax Credit, tax breaks for child care, subsidies for employers who hire the long term unemployed, National Insurance cuts for the low paid and increased child benefit were all designed to make it easier to transfer people off benefits and into the ranks of what US economists call the "working poor".

Frank Field's Green Paper was expected to announce radical changes to the benefit system that would force even greater numbers into low paid work – including not just the long-term unemployed but many of those certified as disabled – and shift the cost of providing for pensions and residential care in old age away from the state and onto individuals.

In the end, the Green Paper was long on philosophy, short on concrete proposals. The inside view is that Blair, having set up the maverick moralist Field to "think the unthinkable" and abolish the welfare state as we know it, bowed to the political pressure of the old-fashioned Labour right and vetoed most of Field's proposals – to the relief of many on the left. But that is only half the story.

Problem

The real problem is that modern capitalism cannot afford the welfare state created in the aftermath of World War Two: it cannot stick to the principle of universal benefits, free health care and a living income in old age because the whole economic system is terminally sick. It cannot provide full employment because conditions even approaching full employment fuel rampant inflation in this sick system.

In the name of low inflation millions are forced to endure not just poverty but the waste and destruction of their skills and their human potential. The capitalist system hurtles like a roller coaster through unpredictable cycles of recovery and recession: recessions kill jobs, skills and hope for millions of people and at the height of each recovery ever greater numbers of people remain jobless.



Frank Field: Blair told him to "think the unthinkable" about the welfare state

Every year, the government spends more than £30 billion to enable the poorest of us to house, clothe and feed ourselves and our families – a figure that excludes the benefits claimed by sick and disabled people and another £30 billion spent on pensions. And even under the Tories, who hated the poor and slashed benefit entitlement mercilessly, the benefit bill grew between by 5% and 10% each year.

No sane person can look at this picture of simultaneous mass poverty and multi-billion benefit spending and think the system works. For one thing, the vast majority of welfare spending is paid for by workers themselves: income tax and national insurance from our wage packets are the biggest source of government revenue, not the taxes on profits paid by the employers.

The Tories would have faced fierce opposition if they had proposed a root and branch reform of the welfare system, as millions of workers would have rightly seen it as an attack on the whole working class. But New Labour with its soundbites about being "for the many not the few" could count on a belief among millions of ordinary people that Labour is committed to fighting poverty.

Blair and his ministers have set off to find a "third way" between the Tory system of mass unemployment and benefit dependency and the original principles behind the welfare state – of a benefit safety net behind a system of full employment – that Labour and Tories alike now agree is gone forever.

The idea is that tax incentives for low paid workers and sweatshop employers – combined with a draconian benefit regime that forces skilled workers to take unskilled work for little more than dole – can "solve" the

unemployment problem.

Unfortunately for all of its advocates, this system has one fatal flaw: it only works when the economy is booming. When growth stops and factories close, banks go bust and shares plummet, all the tax incentives count for nothing. The only thing that counts is that benefits, that were once available to all, now come with the obligation to work for dole or starve.

Because capitalism cannot guarantee full employment, there is no third way. The real struggle is over who pays for the waste and human misery: the workers – in the form of higher taxes and enforced insurance systems for unemployment, health and old age – or the bosses. And because the bosses have no intention of paying, that struggle leads inevitably to question the whole existence of the profit system itself.

As the system gets sicker through every cycle of boom and bust, and profit becomes harder to squeeze out, the capitalists will get bolder in their demands for cuts to welfare provision. The real reason behind Frank Field's inability to "think the unthinkable" is that there is no solution to mass unemployment and poverty under capitalism.

So what is the answer? Many workers will have breathed two sighs of relief in March: the first when Brown announced that Labour would start spending money on child benefits and nursery education instead of simply continuing with Tory cuts, the second when Field's Green Paper backed off from radical short term cuts in welfare.

But there is no room for complacency. Brown's meagre handouts to the poor in the Budget were designed to heal wounds in Labourism rather than tackle poverty itself: to stave off

further parliamentary revolts and give New Labour time to establish a consensus for the far reaching attacks that are signalled – even if not actively proposed – in Field's Green Paper.

In that sense Brown and Field are there to perform a mesmerising double act while Blair attempts to establish political backing for a far reaching attack on welfare benefits. The fact that they hate each other's guts, that they come from different ends of the spectrum of the Labour right, and offer different brands of "new thinking" only makes the mesmerism more effective.

It is time for the working class to snap out of the trance. The starting point is to spell out the problem as it really is: **millions of people are poor**. Six million receive income support, the majority of them pensioners. One in four children lives in a family where nobody works.

Poverty breeds lack of hope, crime, ignorance, ill health, violence and abuse. The politicians who smarmily assure us that full employment is gone for ever are really saying that a quarter of the population must clothe itself from second hand shops, feed itself on own-label tinned food, live on crumbling estates ravaged by crime and drugs.

The only alternative is to *really* think the unthinkable: to start off from the fact that capitalism and poverty must be abolished together or not at all. To say that there is an alternative to production for profit: production for need. To mobilise the resources of society to meet human need, not to line the pockets of the bankers and big businessmen.

Adequate

A socialist society would, of course, provide adequate benefits equivalent to the minimum living wage for all. But under production for need not profit, there could be full employment and real, fulfilling work for all. Skills could be learned and developed in the knowledge that some new technical innovation or economic recession would not lay waste to years of training. Communities could come back to life because they could be based once again around the local workplaces – not the local dole, housing benefit and probation offices.

To the capitalists that is unthinkable because, to get it, you would have to abolish their wealth and power. To Blair, Brown, Field, Harman and the rest it is unthinkable because they are in politics to protect and serve the capitalists. Their lives are totally different and separate from those of the millions who rely on benefits and state pensions and they can never speak or act for the millions who live in poverty.

Only socialism can guarantee an end to poverty and unemployment.

And only a revolutionary socialist party can give voice to the needs of the poor and down-trodden that capitalism leaves despised, excluded and ignored. ■

WORKERS POWER

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FUND DRIVE: PRIZE DRAW RESULTS

The Workers Power spring raffle raised £317 and the lucky winner of the travel voucher for a holiday in Amsterdam was a reader in Edinburgh.

We held another raffle in London at our recent conference, thanks to a gift of a poster of Trotsky from the comrades of the Mexican section of the Trotskyist Fraction. This raised a further £62 which, together with donations over the last month, has taken our fund total to £16,026.45.

We are late in reaching our £20,000 building target and this does mean

that we are having trouble getting enough money to put down on the property we so desperately need for our national office. However, we are at last in sight of our target and we urge all our readers to redouble their efforts at fund-raising to help us get the money we need.

Send donations to Workers Power, BCM Box 7750, London, WC1N 3XX and make cheques payable to Workers Power, with "Building Fund" written on the back.

UNISON: Conference against the witch-hunt

Defend political trade unionism

THREE HUNDRED Unison activists defied bureaucratic threats and gathered in Newcastle on Saturday 21 March. The meeting was the first significant attempt to organise national resistance to the union leadership's witch-hunt of individual militants, left-dominated branches and the Campaign for a Fighting and Democratic Unison (CFDU).

Unison headquarters had advised branches that it was "inappropriate" to allocate money towards funding the event. Nevertheless, three Unison regions - London, Northern, and Yorkshire and Humberside - along with dozens of branches supported the conference.

The witch-hunt started in earnest more than three months ago on 10 December 1997 when the union's National Executive Committee (NEC) effectively proscribed the CFDU (see *Workers Power* 218).

Called at relatively short notice, the conference was not delegate-based. While there was an open debate it was unfocused and did not produce the sort of action plan that is desperately needed to beat the witch-hunters.

As a Workers Power supporter from the Camden branch noted, the day had great promise but was also a squandered opportunity. The "spirit of unity" did not translate into a concrete agreement "to go back to members with plans to link the opposition to the witch-hunt with the building of resistance to the Blairite agenda of continuing cuts in real pay and back-door privatisation through Best Value and the Private Finance Initiative."

Coup

The conference heard details of the right-wing coup that followed a branch merger and elections in Newham. There was also the continuing saga of the 15-month long persecution of the Leeds local government branch where full-time officials authorised a raid on the branch office and a barrister conducted a four-month inves-

tigation at untold cost to members.

The conference was also informed of the decision by a Unison disciplinary panel to expel activist Aidan Pollock - one of the so-called "Liverpool 4" - from the union for his role in organising a strike against a racist management in a home run by the local council's Social Services Department. Two other Liverpool members in the same case have been suspended from holding union office for three years after hearings which dragged on for more than two years and costs tens of thousands of pounds.

Much of the conference seemed a remarkable show of left unity, but the real differences emerged in a discussion of the motions accepted by Unison's Standing Orders Committee for June's national conference. The Socialist Workers Party (SWP), which had a substantial contingent in Newcastle, threw its weight behind a deeply flawed resolution from the Northern region, which made serious and needless concessions to the dominant wing of the bureaucracy. The resolution argues "that it is inappropriate to use Unison's funds to finance other political organisations".

A Workers Power supporter from Derbyshire County branch criticised the resolution's acceptance of an essentially apolitical trade unionism with branches barred from funding "political organisations". This plays right into the hands of Bickerstaffe and the other witch-hunters who proclaim "apolitical trade unionism" only as a cover for propagating their reformist politics free from challenge from revolutionaries in the union.

There is no such thing as "apolitical trade unionism". The fight for union recognition, rights at work, for the repeal of the anti-union laws, the battle for a minimum wage are all political struggles. The unions, as the bedrock workers' organisations in Britain, should also defend workers in every aspect of our lives - against the bosses' wardrives, racist attacks on our

community, the dismantling of the welfare state.

When bureaucrats accuse the left of dragging our political ambitions onto the union agenda, they are merely defending the status quo, whereby they control a monopoly over the union's politics. Unless this is challenged head-on, we will never win the unions for socialism. By walking away from this confrontation, presumably through fear of a little red-baiting, we leave Bickerstaffe and his cronies free to prop up the Blairite government. Meanwhile one and a half million Unison members will continue to suffer at the sharp end of New Labour's attacks.

Oppose

Yet, a series of SWP members in Unison stood up to oppose activists amending the Northern region's motion and, at one point, even argued against trying to composite it with a sharper resolution from the London region. Those who rightly stressed the glaring weaknesses in the Northern resolution were accused of "self-indulgence".

To their credit, CFDU supporters also maintained their criticisms of this resolution and upheld the right to amend it without engaging in a sectarian slanging match.

Leading SWP Unison activist, Yunus Baksh, told the conference that a failure to rally behind their position could well result in "irreparable harm" to socialists in the union through a victory for the Bickerstaffe leadership at conference. This was in sharp contrast to the SWP's rhetorical emphasis on "turning to the rank and file".

Speaker after speaker claimed that the SWP's arguments were striking an ever more resonant chord with ordinary members frustrated by the reality of New Labour carrying out Tory-style attacks. What their performance at Newcastle illustrated, however, was the SWP's unwillingness and inability to mobilise that rank and file sentiment behind a programme that actually challenges the ruling Unison bureaucracy.



Bickerstaffe wants the union kept safe for his New Labour politics

For all their bluster, the SWP have fallen in behind the Northern region resolution drafted by NEC member Dave Anderson, who had actually opposed the call for a lobby of the autumn 1997 Labour Party conference.

Without a programme which can link today's struggles to the fight for socialism and without tactics like the united front to draw rank and file opposition to the bureaucrats' agenda, the SWP are left with a bloc with left bureaucrats. Of course Dave Anderson should be enlisted to help stop the witch-hunt, but not at the expense of building the kind of rank and file unity needed to oust the bureaucracy once and for all. And certainly not at the expense of building support for political, socialist trade unionism.

In the run-up to the June national

conference, Workers Power supporters will be arguing for branches to put sharp amendments to the Northern region resolution, deleting its acceptance of a ban on contributions to "political organisations" and making it plain that branches and regions must have the right to decide democratically on affiliations to organisations that campaign to change Unison policy.

● We are pleased to report that Tory-controlled Bromley Council has backed away from its threat of serious disciplinary action against Unison branch secretary Glenn Kelly. A lobby of the preliminary hearing, showing considerable support within the branch for Glenn and a flood of letters and faxes from Unison branch committees and activists across London, were undoubtedly decisive in dissuading Bromley's bosses.■

Camden Libraries strike

Solidarity action can bring victory

LIBRARY WORKERS in the London borough of Camden have entered the second month of an indefinite strike against a wide range of management attacks, including the threat of closures, compulsory redundancies and downgrading of staff.

Nearly 130 Unison members walked out for the day on 20 February with the aim of saving 26 front-line posts. This protest failed to move council bosses and the action escalated to an all-out strike across the borough's 13 libraries, six days later.

The current management attacks on the library workers are against the background of yet another review of Camden's library service, conducted this time by the giant City accountancy firm, KPMG. As striker Claire Marriott explained to the Unison branch's annual general meeting:

"Each review over the past 10 years has reduced the service. For us, striking is the last resort. After all, library workers are not exactly renowned for their militancy."

The bosses' restructuring package has provoked anger among the work-

force. Helen, a young Scale 2 library assistant, said:

"If this downgrading goes through, I might as well be stacking shelves in Safeways - for better money!"

Since the strike began, evidence has emerged that the council's New Labour leadership and senior management have plans to shut seven of the 13 libraries and hive them off for an estimated £5 million. The KPMG report actually raised the possibility of selling two of the sites to real estate developers for the construction of luxury flats.

Council leader, Richard Arthur, admitted that "some buildings might be sold off after a public consultation" which would itself cost £60,000.

So much for David Blunkett's proposals for "Life Long Learning"! One striker, Pip, told Workers Power that management even planned to scrap the schools' library service. Local library user groups and NUT associations have backed the strike and lobbied the council on this point. We need to fight for workers and consumers' control over all educational and library services - these bureaucrats cannot be trusted.

Pickets have completely shut 12 of the 13 libraries, while periodically closing the remaining site. Although industrial action has prodded management into a partial retreat over redundancies and downgrading, library workers voted overwhelmingly to reject an offer which contained no written guarantees on these two key issues and carry on with the strike. In response council management withdrew from talks on 16 March. Workers now face a second month without pay.

The Unison branch has agreed a substantial weekly contribution to sustain the strikers. Individual offices have also initiated levies. Of course, such financial support is absolutely vital. But on its own, such money may not be enough to fend off all of management's attacks, even though the dispute has already sparked divisions between line managers and senior bosses as well as among Labour councillors.

Industrial action in solidarity with the library strikers by other Camden workers may prove necessary.

At the outset of the dispute, other Unison members in the Leisure and

Community Services Department voted to come out for three days in support - unofficially, if necessary. Unison's national headquarters moved swiftly, however, to undermine any defiance of the anti-union laws.

A letter from General Secretary Rodney Bickerstaffe disowned any solidarity action. The union's national bureaucracy excused itself from the fray by citing management threats to take the union to court. In the process, however, they have now opened up individual unofficial strikers to fines and even prison.

Given this criminal betrayal, the Leisure Department workers felt they had to back down. Since then, Unison's full-timers have simply sat on the branch's request for an official ballot on a one-day strike.

The experience of the library workers' dispute highlights yet again the need to force the Labour government to scrap the arsenal of anti-union laws built up by the Tories over the past 18 years. It also shows the urgency of building strong rank and file organisation at the base of the

union that can resist the considerable pressure wielded by Unison's national bureaucracy which is determined to make the union safe for New Labour, whatever the impact of its policies on members' jobs, conditions and public services.

Library strikers and other branch activists need to redouble their efforts to raise support for the dispute, but also to advance the argument for solidarity strike action. Camden's bosses have lined up 40 council services for Best Value pilots, opening up the door to further privatisation and job losses.

A victory for the library workers would scupper Camden's top managers' plans to intensify their attacks on other sections of the workforce. With Labour worried about the impact of the dispute on its electoral support, solidarity action could easily achieve such a victory for both the library workers and the service users.

● To invite a speaker, send a message of support etc. please contact Camden Unison, 59 Phoenix Court, Brill Place, London NW1, tel: 0171 911 1633.■

NUT Conference

Education for the bosses?

AT LAST year's Easter conference of the National Union of Teachers (NUT) David Blunkett, Labour's shadow education spokesman, addressed us knowing that within a month or so he would be in charge of education.

He told us that comprehensive education would be safe in his hands because, after all, he had once taught in a comprehensive school and his children had gone to one.

One year and a massive election victory later, has Blunkett saved comprehensive education in Britain? No. The reverse is the case. He is about to carve up the education system.

Labour does not intend to return grant maintained schools to Local Education Authority (LEA) control. Instead, they have been renamed foundation schools. Private fee-paying schools like Eton will continue to exist. And Labour intends to introduce specialist schools - arts and technology colleges - that will be encouraged to select according to ability.

Labour will maintain a three-tier education system. Your ability to pay or where you live will determine the quality of education your child receives. The rich will send their children to private schools, the middle classes will move to make sure their children can go to a foundation or specialist school, and the rest of us will be left with the underfunded, run down local comp.

Who will be running these 'com-



Teachers, students and parents unite

prehensive' schools? Blunkett and Blair intend to set up Education Action Zones (EAZs), taking more schools out of LEA control. These EAZs will be dominated by bosses. Business will be in charge of our schools and our children's education.

Prepare

Blunkett and schools minister, Stephen Byers, want to hand over to business consortia whole groups of schools, giving them free rein to rewrite the curriculum, tear up teachers' and education workers' contracts and even close down schools. A trimmed curriculum will be drawn up to prepare working class children to meet the needs of the bosses, who just happen to run the EAZs.

Individual teaching contracts will

BY A NUT DELEGATE

undermine the unions and weed out militant teachers. And the local community will have no say in running the schools whatsoever. In short, the EAZs are a frontal attack on the state education system.

There is a crisis in education - every teacher and parent knows that. But, like the Tories before, Labour need to find a scapegoat for the crisis in education, in order to justify their actions.

The major thrust of Blunkett's attack has been to blame poor teaching for the problems facing schools in Britain. The 'naming and shaming' of certain schools has been a disaster for the schools involved. Now Blunkett wants to be able to deal with 'incompetent' teachers quickly. The new procedures could

see teachers sacked within four weeks of being identified as failing.

The response of our union to this particular attack is pathetic. They sat down with the government and agreed! Whilst Labour sets about pulling comprehensive education apart, the NUT conducts surveys on questions to which everyone already knows the answers. Teachers do too much, teachers work harder than they used to. What a surprise!

Fight

Meanwhile, anything that might embarrass the New Labour government is kept off the agenda. Where is the campaign for decent funding for the school system? Where is the fight for our pay to be restored after years of Tory cuts? Indeed, where is the basic demand

for the abolition of the pay review body and the restoration of collective bargaining rights?

We are fiddling while Rome burns. It is time for someone to set off the fire alarm and warn everyone about what is occurring. That will be the job of rank and file teachers at the NUT conference in Blackpool this month.

- Militants in the NUT must fight all forms of selection and for a fully comprehensive education system.
- We must oppose EAZs and the Private Finance Initiative, which will effectively privatise state education. We fight for the nationalisation of all schools and for teachers', students' and parents' control of schools. Scrap Ofsted.
- Rather than sacking teachers, we demand a massive programme of training and staff development under workers' control.
- We demand the union launches strike action to fight for decent pay, to protect jobs and conditions. We should demand the restoration of our national negotiating rights.
- After years of Tory rule, we need a massive injection of funds into education. The scraps of funding Labour have come up with so far do not even begin to address the real needs within state education. The money can be found if we tax the rich, instead of letting them run our schools! ■

Stalinists fall out

Fading Star

WE MAY have already seen the last edition of the *Morning Star*.

The NUJ Chapel at the *Morning Star* newspaper has been on indefinite strike since 25 February. Editorial staff voted 12 to 3 in favour of an indefinite strike after the suspension of the editor, John Haylett. Haylett faced a number of charges of gross misconduct by the management committee and the chief executive, Mary Rosser, and was sacked on 27 February. Rosser has agreed to go to Acas with no "preconditions" but refuses to rescind the sacking beforehand, the key demand of the NUJ.

What may appear at first sight to be a dispute over the sacking of an editor by management and a strike in defence of him is, in fact, a faction fight among various Stalinist cliques. Making sense of the political rationale behind these

disagreements is not easy as the variety of factions, including the Communist Party of Britain (CPB) and leaders of the Socialist Labour Party (SLP), have been schooled in political obscurantism and bureaucratic manoeuvres.

In the "Morning Star" bulletin no 2, produced by the management committee, the strikers are accused of abuse, intimidation and violence. These Stalinists have got some nerve to cry foul in the face of their own stock-in-trade: political thuggery.

Yet the stakes are high. Each of these factions has seen its supporters and political influence drop dramatically over the last decade. *The Morning Star*, after the split with the Eurocommunists in the late 1980s, became an important power base of the pro-Soviet Union Stalinists with connections to the trade union bureaucracy. Although they even-



War of words

tually set up the CPB, it was the *Morning Star* that gave them the greatest influence.

Its articles cut any criticism of the "left" and even right-wingers within the bureaucracy so that it would keep sponsorship from trade union bureaucrats,

branches and regions. After the collapse of the Soviet Union, the *Morning Star's* orders fell dramatically. It now only sells 7,000 copies and relies heavily on its fighting fund to "keep the Star shining".

Prior to Haylett's sacking, he had been instrumental in pushing for the

successful removal of Mike Hicks as general secretary of the CPB. A new leadership of Haylett and the new general secretary, Rob Griffiths, want to wrest control from the old Hicks/Rosser clique and gain more influence for the CPB. Meanwhile, Scargill has approached the *Star* offering finance in return for control of the paper. This was rejected and it now appears that the SLP and CPB leaderships have had joint and secret discussions over the future of the paper.

The Morning Star and its supporters claim it is the paper of the labour movement needed to counter the mass circulation capitalist press. In reality it has served as an uncritical mouthpiece for the old Stalinist dictatorships, with headlines like "Comrades!" greeting Gorbachev and Deng Xiaoping shortly before the Tiananmen Square massacre. It has also served as an apologist for the trade union bureaucracy. The recent whitewash of the T&G leadership's treachery in the dockers' strike shows it is not a paper of the fighting labour movement.

If the infighting at the *Morning Star* leads to an earlier than expected death of the paper then we shall not be shedding any tears. ■

Reclaim our Rights

Break the anti-union laws!

FOUR HUNDRED delegates to the Reclaim our Rights trade union conference on 28 March heard various left union leaders and representatives of current disputes call for a campaign against the anti-union laws. Many also denounced the current TUC leadership for preparing a rotten compromise with Blair on the question of union recognition.

The Conference was organised by forces around the Socialist Labour Party including Arthur Scargill of the NUM and Bob Crowe of the RMT. The coalition of speakers assembled showed the problems of trying to construct a "broad alliance".

While Scargill and Bakers' Union

leader Joe Marino were talking left and calling for defiance of the anti-union laws, George Brumwell of UCATT wanted to "work with the TUC". Most of the platform speeches were fine on militant talk but the real test will come when the campaign has to decide on action.

Several speakers from the floor pointed to the lessons of the dockers' dispute and other recent strikes. If militants allow union leaders to give a "nod and a wink" to unofficial action, this lets the leaders off the hook. At best the strikers fail to get the full support of the union machine; at its worst it leads to total betrayal, as with Bill Morris and the dockers.

A supporter of Workers Power pointed to the need to build a movement rooted in the rank and file, capable of delivering solidarity action, breaking the laws when necessary, forcing the trade union leaders to fight and replacing them when they betray.

This was clearly not what the organisers had in mind. They had produced a pamphlet, *Repeal the anti-union laws*, for the conference which, whilst calling for a campaign, warns, "That campaign can only succeed if led by the TUC." So much for unofficial action.

The true aim of Reclaim our Rights is revealed by the pamphlet's focus on bringing the UK into line with UN guidelines on labour legislation. It even

calls on the bosses to see sense, because anti-union policy "helps inefficient employers and damages the national economy." You can just see the Magnet directors saying, "We must reinstate those strikers before the economy goes to the dogs!"

A unity conference of various campaigns including Reclaim our Rights and the Free Trade Unions Campaign, will be called in the summer. This conference must be able to take resolutions and amendments to the programme of the new organisation. It must commit itself to militant fighting policies and must base itself on the union rank and file, not sucking up to the heads of the TUC and the CBI. ■

WORKERS POWER TRADE UNION MEETING
NEW LABOUR - NEW POLITICS
18 APRIL 1998

The New Labour government opens up new opportunities and obstacles for socialists and militants. Many of the attacks are being dressed up as pro-working class measures, which our own leaders are helping to push through. But they can't do this forever, the working class will fight back, and when they do they will need socialist answers.

We are organising a meeting to discuss the tasks facing socialists in the unions today. We will also be drawing on the lessons of the struggles that have already begun in Europe, with both a French railworker and an Austrian postal worker speaking.

We encourage all our readers to come to this meeting.

Please phone 0171-357 0388 for details.

GERMANY 1918: Reformists versus the revolution

Blood on their hands

TOWARDS THE end of the First World War the workers of Russia rose in revolt against Tsarism. By October 1917 they had pressed on to establish, under the leadership of the Bolshevik Party, a Soviet (workers' council) Republic, the world's first workers' state.

This revolution was like a detonator. In its wake revolutionary struggles exploded all over Europe. The most important – for its result affected the fate of Russia and all of Europe for decades to follow – was the German Revolution, which began in November 1918.

Germany was ruled by the old Prussian landowning aristocracy, the Junkers. Their figurehead was the monarch, the Kaiser. Democracy was severely curtailed.

The big German capitalists – who stood to gain through expansion of a German empire achieved through the war – had no need for or interest in achieving a fully-fledged bourgeois democracy. They had become the allies of the Junkers and the enemies of the one consistently democratic class, the workers.

By late 1918, however, it had become clear that, despite its firepower and efficiency, the German war-machine could not crack the bloody stalemate that the imperialist war had become. The working class, including the workers in uniform in the army and navy, were breaking from the unthinking patriotism that had tied them to the war effort.

The German Social Democratic Party (SPD), the major working class party in Europe – and the one that betrayed the international working class in 1914 with its support for the imperialist war by Germany – was unable to contain the anger that was rising in the armed forces and the factories.

On 30 October the German High Command issued an order for a final naval assault on the British. Sailors in the northern port of Kiel, outraged by the futility of such an assault, refused to carry out the order. Over 1,000 of them were duly arrested.

Four days later the working class of Kiel came to their support. A general strike was launched and a mass demonstration freed the sailors. Following this success 2,000 armed workers and sailors marched to the town hall, occupied it and established a workers' and sailors' council. This took over control of the city. The German revolution had begun.

From Kiel the workers' and soldiers' council movement – undoubtedly inspired by the Russian revolution – spread rapidly throughout Germany. In Bavaria a socialist republic was declared.

In the Ruhr, the industrial heartland of the country, factories, armed units and whole towns were brought under the control of the councils. By 7 November the revolution had reached Berlin. Strikes and marches in the capital culminated in a massive demonstration outside parliament, the Reichstag, on 9 November.

The old rulers were terrified. The scope and strength of the revolutionary movement led them to panic. The Kaiser abdicated and the question of the republic was poised point-blank. It was at this point that they turned to the SPD to save them from the insurgent masses.

Just as they had obliged the bourgeoisie in 1914, so in 1918 the SPD – the archetypal social democratic reformist party – came to the rescue of capitalism once again.

Faced with the mass demonstration and desperate to contain it, Scheidemann, an SPD leader, declared the Republic from a Reichstag balcony.

But Scheidemann's action did not mark his sudden conversion to the rev-



Revolutionary workers and sailors occupy a government building

olution, despite him being attacked by other SPD leaders for his impetuosity. It was a calculated attempt to demobilise the mass movement that had made the declaration of the Republic an inevitability. From that point on the SPD strove to preserve the bourgeois republic from the working class which was clamouring for a socialist one.

November 1918 created a situation of dual power in Germany. Workers' and soldiers' councils existed as one pole of administrative and military power. The new SPD government, based on the machinery of the capitalist state, parliament and the military general staff formed the other. Such a situation was, of necessity, unstable. The struggle that ensued was dominated by the conflict between these two centres of power.

In the first phase of the revolution the overwhelming majority of workers and soldiers looked to the SPD as their party. Despite its betrayals, its organisational strength and its socialist traditions had enabled it to maintain this allegiance. The influence of the rev-

The key problem that both revolutionaries and counter-revolutionaries faced was resolving the dual power. This meant a workers' council republic or a parliamentary republic. The two could not co-exist.

olutionary left, led by Rosa Luxemburg and Karl Liebknecht, was marginalised. Thus, when the party formed a cabinet made up of SPD members alone the Executive Committee of the Berlin workers' and soldiers' council recognised the cabinet as the "Council of People's Representatives".

Using this authority, the SPD began to campaign for the closing down of the councils, establishing the supremacy of a National Assembly (parliament), and restoring order in the armed forces.

Eighty years ago the German working class, inspired by the Bolshevik Revolution in Russia, rose against the Kaiser. Here Simon Burrows examines the lessons of that revolution, a revolution that, in the end, was crushed by reformism.

By placing themselves completely at the service of the bourgeoisie, the leaders of the SPD revealed once again their fundamentally pro-capitalist nature.

In Berlin the SPD moved quickly to close down the councils. The SPD-dominated Executive Committee declared, as early as 11 November:

"All provisionally formed bodies in Greater Berlin, dating back to the beginning of the revolution, including those called workers' and soldiers' councils... are now defunct."

But the combativity of the working class itself prevented the SPD from peacefully carrying through their goals. As the revolution unfolded the SPD proved itself willing and able to secure their objectives by ruthless and bloody counter-revolutionary measures.

In Russia, the Bolshevik Party – armed with a programme for power and rooted in the workplaces – was decisive in 1917 in leading the revolution forward and defeating their own reformists, the Mensheviks. In Germany in 1918 no such party existed.

To the left of the SPD stood several groups. The Independent Social Democrats (USPD) led by Hasse, Kautsky and others, were the largest. They were also the most irresolute, offering from the beginning to bury their differences with the SPD and support the government. In a word, they were centrists of the classic sort, vacillating all over the place and useless in the revolution.

The key problem that both revolutionaries and counter-revolutionaries faced was resolving the dual power. This meant a workers' council republic or a parliamentary republic. The two could not co-exist. Caught in the middle of this debate the USPD, through Kautsky, urged the combination of the two! He wrote:

"Therefore, it is not a question of national assembly or workers' councils, but both."

The USPD's attempt to combine two different types of state was an attempt to harmonise two antagonistic classes. They failed miserably. Their best ele-

ments joined the Communist Party while their right wing rejoined the SPD. The most decisive force on the left was the Spartakist group, the forerunner of the Communist Party, led by Luxemburg and Liebknecht. The Spartakists, who rallied many of the best revolutionary young workers to their ranks, especially in Berlin, represented the vanguard of the revolution. They also represented the political immaturity of that vanguard.

It was not, in the first stages, a party. It had, in many ways, to be built from scratch. Moreover, despite their brilliance and revolutionary courage, Luxemburg and Liebknecht did not have a clear programme for victory, nor really the means of hammering one out. They lacked both the organisational and political advantages that stem from a previously built revolutionary party.

Liebknecht tended towards voluntarism, believing exhortation and example (he was a marvellous speaker and tireless agitator) would activate the masses. Luxemburg tended to view the very presence of the masses in the revolutionary process as a guarantee of



KPD leader Rosa Luxemburg: murdered at the behest of the SPD

victory. After a series of economic strikes exploded in December 1918 Luxemburg, speaking for the newly formed Communist Party (KPD), declared:

"By its mere appearance on to the scene of the class struggle, the proletarian mass has skipped over all the revolution's shortcomings."

The vanguard, then, was ill-equipped to weather the storm that was about to break. Knowing that the

Spartakists were still too weak to stage a successful uprising the SPD government decided to act. It knew full well that the strike movement would strengthen the Spartakists and jeopardise its counter-revolutionary moves.

Unable to use the regular army, it built up the Freikorps (far right militias), staffed by the most reactionary dregs of the professional soldiery, many of whom later became ardent Nazis. Following an armed clash with sailors in late 1918 it prepared to strike a death blow against the Spartakists and the revolutionary workers of Berlin.

In early January a poster appeared on the streets of Berlin. It was issued by the "Front Soldiers" and declared:

"Workers, Citizens:
The Fatherland is close to destruction. Save it! It is not threatened from without, but from within, by the Spartakus group.

Murder their leaders! Kill Liebknecht! Then you will have peace, work and bread."

A few days later the first stage of the counter-revolution began. The SPD deliberately provoked the workers of Berlin by dismissing a USPD police chief, Eichorn, from his post. When he refused to give up his post a general strike engulfed the city and a crowd of 150,000 gathered outside the police building.

The KPD, revolutionary shop stewards and USPD of Berlin immediately formed the Revolutionary Committee to meet the challenge. As the SPD threatened force to remove Eichorn, Noske, another SPD leader, placed himself at the head of the counter-revolutionary troops. Noske grimly declared: "Somebody must be the bloodhound".

This situation was unfavourable to the Spartakists. The bulk of the city's troops were confused and not ready to engage in a struggle for power. A defensive action was clearly necessary in the face of the SPD attacks. Such action may have won the support of the troops. But a struggle for power was premature.

Yet, the Revolutionary Committee decided to go on the offensive and launch a rising. As a result many of the city's regiments declared themselves neutral in the ensuing battle between the revolutionaries and the Freikorps.

On 7 January numerous key buildings such as telegraph stations and newspaper buildings were occupied. The call for a demonstration that day was heeded by 500,000 workers, many of whom were armed. But then the Revolutionary Committee hesitated and left the crowd standing in the cold, which dampened the enthusiasm of the Berlin masses. When the USPD then betrayed the revolutionaries by entering into negotiations with the SPD, much of the impetus of the previous few days was lost.

In the final battle for Berlin the Spartakists and the workers who supported them fought a heroic battle against the Freikorps, but they were isolated and overwhelmed. The reformists danced with delight. In an orgy of violence following their victory they gave the Freikorps leave to murder Luxemburg and Liebknecht and a host of other communists. Reformism was happy to drown the revolution in blood, smashing in the brains of the finest and most courageous class fighters in the process.

While we will never forget the martyrs of the January rising, the eagles as Lenin called them, we will honour them by taking to heart the lessons of their defeat. The counter-revolutionary character of reformism, the uselessness of centrism for the purposes of revolution and the centrality of building a revolutionary party are those lessons. And by remembering them we will ensure that one day the murders of Karl and Rosa will be avenged. ■

CWI: Socialist party tell the story of...

The secret International

THE CWI TRULY deserves to be called the "Secret International". For many years even members of *Militant* did not know of its existence.

For this reason alone Peter Taaffe, one of the tendency's longest-serving leaders, has performed a useful service in writing this little pamphlet. But the pamphlet confirms that the centrist method of the British section is also the method of its international tendency.

In 1964 Grant and Peter Taaffe launched the *Militant* as a "Marxist paper for Labour and Youth". Their strategy, formulated in the preceding decade, was one of long term, strategic entry into the Labour Party. In the following years *Militant* transformed itself into a hardened opportunist sect, aping the Labour bureaucracy's behaviour (even down to its dress codes) and transmitting, rather than challenging many of its backward ideas.

All of this was justified by a schema which said: the masses will come to the Labour Party first; we must stay in the Labour Party at all costs, including trimming our politics; however, we will make propaganda for a "Marxist Programme" (essentially the nationalisation of the top 200 companies, repeated ad nauseam by *Militant* delegates to party conferences) so that the workers will know us as the Marxists and will, eventually, come to us.

Like all schemas, this one was barren and, ultimately led to the crisis and split in *Militant* in the 1990s and the decline of the Socialist Party as a major force on the left. But for a time it yielded at least one significant result inside the Labour Party: *Militant* control of the Labour Party Young Socialists (LPYS).

Under *Militant*, the LPYS, despite its growth, remained a bureaucratic organisation in which the creativity and spontaneous radicalism of youth was stifled by the dead hand of *Militant*'s centrism. Its structure mirrored its parent, reformist party. Its initiatives kept it away from other youth, be they students or in other left groups.

The maintenance of *Militant*'s control became an end in itself and the LPYS suffered, turning in on itself and failing to intersect with mass struggles of youth, notably including the great miners' strike of 1984/85 which mobilised thousands of young miners in action.

After that strike the Labour establishment, under Kinnock, began to seriously confront the left with the aim of taming the Bennites and crushing the "entrists" i.e. *Militant*.

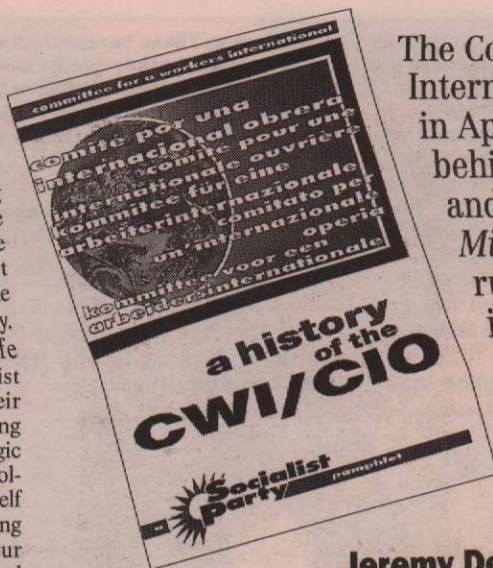
Formally *Militant* were in a good position to beat off such an attack. Not only did they control the LPYS but they had built up a formidable base inside local Labour parties in Liverpool and Scotland.

However, when the Labour establishment made its first move – expelling Grant, Taaffe and other *Militant* leaders – those leaders refused to fight. They accepted their expulsions under protest (and actually threatened to go to the bosses' courts!) rather than launch an all out fight against them. Why? Because they did not want to jeopardise their "Marxist influence" and bureaucratic control of the LPYS, by fighting.

This squandered a great opportunity to stop the attacks that were to come.

There was, as Taaffe points out, "genuine rank and file democracy which existed in the party" in the early 1980s and Tony Benn stood at the head of a large left movement, based in the branches.

Then came the Liverpool disaster. *Militant* councillors, who controlled the city council and had used their power to enact some useful reforms, refused to link up the struggle of the Liverpool working class in defence of coun-



The Committee for a Workers' International (CWI) was formed in April 1974. The main force behind the initiative was – and remains – the *Militant* Tendency, fore-runner of today's Socialist Party. Yet, the CWI was not mentioned publicly until 1994.

Last month the Socialist Party published the *History of the CWI* by Peter Taaffe. In this review

Jeremy Dewar looks at the lessons of this history.



cil housing, services and jobs, with the miners' strike. They had the opportunity to strike a decisive blow against the Tory government and split the Labour Party – and they missed it.

This is no exaggeration. In 1984 Liverpool council workers were ready to fight. In the same year dockers struck in support of the miners. Revolutionaries, boldly and openly proposing a class front against Thatcher, would have united the struggles regardless of their different origins, called a general strike in Liverpool and then tried to spread it to other cities facing similar attacks, repulsed the attacks of the bosses and the Tories, weakened the Labour right and enhanced the chances of building a revolutionary party.

Militant were put to the test, and

And in Liverpool *Militant* was ousted by the right.

Today Taaffe admits, "successful, independent work under our own banner could have been possible in Britain as early as 1985-86."

It is not simply a matter of what may or may not have been possible, it is a question of politics. They had demonstrated in 1984/85, during an acid test of the class struggle, that their programme and practice led to defeat for the working class. And the working class paid the price, in Liverpool and beyond.

Militant, throughout the 1980s, adapted to the reformist politics of their "host" organisation. Taaffe claims that "we had to skilfully adapt to this milieu but we never hid our ideas." This

Militant's international work during this period. In Sweden, Ireland, Germany and Belgium *Militant* made contacts and encouraged them to build groups within the social democratic parties and youth sections.

Deep entryism was developed into an international tactic, to be followed, whatever the conditions, in every country. This reached ludicrous proportions:

"In one case, Greece, we predicted the need to work in mass organisations even before they had been formally created. Almost as soon as the military junta had been overthrown in Greece in July 1974, our organisation outlined the perspective for the development of a mass socialist party... We even identified the figure who would lead such a party – Andreas Papandreu."



Militant's Liverpool councillors in 1984, led by Derek Hatton and Tony Mulhearn

found wanting. Their schema allowed for no bypasses. The Labour Party was the vehicle for change and, by accepting a financial package that (temporarily) got the council out of a fix (it involved creative accounting and the loan services of a Swiss bank) *Militant* strove to defend their position in the Labour Party. Liverpool was taken out of a potential united front with the miners and Thatcher was able to concentrate on defeating the miners first.

Militant behaved like reformists: sectionalist, cowardly and, ultimately, without reaping any reward for the working class from the council crisis. Indeed, on the back of the defeat of the miners, Kinnock made his move. Expulsions followed as *Militant* members were driven out of the party. The LPYS was closed down without a fight.

is not true.

Militant consistently promoted the idea that the LP could be transformed into a socialist party, obscuring the need to prepare for a split. Even worse, they proclaimed that an Enabling Act could be used to establish socialism through parliamentary means and that:

"An entirely peaceful transformation of society is possible in Britain, but only on condition that the full power of the labour movement is boldly used to effect this change." (*What We Stand For*, p25)

The revolutionary party, rank and file control of the unions, workers' councils and a workers' militia...all superfluous. As a result, *Militant* were totally unprepared for the attacks of the late 1980s.

This adaptation to reformism is even more pronounced when it comes to *Mil-*

This really is turning Marxism on its head. Entryism is a valid and sometimes necessary short-term tactic when there are reformist or centrist parties, who already have mass working class support, so long as revolutionaries can raise their programme within such parties.

But to encourage the building of mass reformist parties, where no such obstacles exist, reveals an unwillingness and even inability to take the Marxist programme directly to the masses! In the case of Greece, the error is doubled because Papandreu's PASOK party never had an organic relationship with the Greek working class and therefore remained relatively immune to working class pressure.

The CWI's problem, however, was that outside of Western Europe, there were few mass social democratic par-

ties to enter – hence the rush to dress Papandreu up as a "socialist" leader. The primacy of the working class was ditched when it came to developing sections outside of Europe.

In South Africa, for example, the CWI entered the petit bourgeois nationalist ANC as the Marxist Workers' Tendency around the paper, *Inqaba Ya Basebenzi*. Here, the CWI's reformist inspired hostility to armed struggle (learned in Ireland where the CWI has consistently denounced the progressive anti-imperialist struggle of the IRA) led them to adopt the opportunist strategy of seeking to win over the majority of the white working class before a revolutionary offensive, on the basis of purely economic struggles.

At the same time, a strategic orientation to the ANC – aiming to turn it into a mass workers' party – led *Inqaba* to abstain from the fight for the new, black trade unions of COSATU to form a workers' party and adopt a revolutionary action programme.

The result of all this, which Taaffe conveniently skips over, is that *Inqaba* failed to put forward any meaningful tactics or strategy during the South African revolutionary crisis of 1986-87. The ensuing democratic counter-revolution put the ANC into power, where Mandela revealed his true colours as a bourgeois democrat.

The South African fiasco reveals that the CWI does not understand Trotsky's theory of permanent revolution. Taaffe and co. have no conception of the anti-imperialist united front, nor of how to use revolutionary democratic demands in the fight for working class leadership.

The pamphlet ends with the turn to open party building in the 1990s and the perspectives for regroupment. But while the failures of deep entryism have led the CWI to make some criticisms of their past, their record of open party work shows many of the same errors being repeated. In particular, their British section, the Socialist Party, continues to mimic reformism.

Taaffe points proudly to the 220 recruits they made in the 1997 general election campaign. But recruits to what? The Socialist Party stood in that election on a reformist programme! They failed to mention the capitalist state and the need for revolution, the fight for workers' control and workers' council power.

Instead, they tailored their programme to the reformist audience of the British working class. As a result, in all but one or two areas, they got a derisory couple of hundred votes as workers in their millions opted for the real reformism of Blair's New Labour.

The real history of the CWI remains to be written. But the fact that the CWI are openly looking at their past and are prepared to admit to mistakes is to be welcomed.

Undoubtedly, this is in part due to the shrinking of the CWI and its British section in particular. Being forced to undertake open work, they are feeling the cold. In their desire to reach out to the masses the CWI shows an enormous capacity to ditch vital elements of the revolutionary programme.

Ironically, Taaffe concludes that, "we have to turn our back on the sectarian fragments who will never be capable of building genuine mass Marxist forces." The Socialist Party, however, is a fragment precisely because the strategy of building a mass section by blurring the distinction between revolution and reform failed, in Britain and everywhere else it was put into practice.

Dressing that same strategy up in the garb of "an open party" does not mark a radical break with a centrist past but a marked continuity with it – but one less likely to yield the same results in terms of growth and influence that the *Militant* Tendency once enjoyed. ■

Workers Power conference

NEW LABOUR IN OFFICE -

OVER THE weekend of 21/22 March Workers Power (Britain) held its national members' conference. The conference dealt with a range of issues facing Workers Power - our youth work and the building of Revolution, the independent revolutionary youth movement; our trade union work; plans for campaigns and the major features of the current political situation.

The conference was optimistic about our opportunities for growth today, an optimism based on the enormous success of Revolution, which

held its founding conference in November last year. But we also recognised that the assessment we made at our last conference, before the general election, of developments in the Labour Party, and consequently in the Labour left and the Socialist Labour Party (SLP), overestimated the speed with which a conflict between Blair and the trade unions would take place. We wrote:

"Taken together these attacks do not yet constitute a split with the unions but they are a stark confirmation of Blair's plans for such a split.

If his election victory is by a significant margin then he will move to provoke it sooner rather than later." (*Workers Power* 206)

In fact his victory margin was massive, but for almost a year, basking in the glow of the landslide, he has continued his attacks using the trade union leaders as allies. He is playing on an extensive mood of relief among workers that the Tories have been crushed which, in turn, has produced a large measure of tolerance for New Labour.

The union leaders are more than

just tolerant. These bureaucrats are doing everything they can to shield Blair - as their rotten betrayal of the Liverpool dockers and their current witch hunt in Unison both demonstrate.

Also, our belief that major struggles would break out with Labour shortly after the election reinforced our view that the SLP might be the vehicle that would rally disillusioned workers to a "socialist alternative". Clearly this has not happened, a factor that contributed to the SLP's demise into a tiny Stalinist sect.

At our conference we took these factors into account. Here we print the key political conclusions we have drawn, almost a year on from the election. They are conclusions that Blair cannot draw comfort from. For although he has enjoyed a honeymoon neither the health of the economy nor the patience of the working class will last forever. The split we predicted lies further in the future than we originally thought. But Blair's election victory has not removed it, or the class struggles that will provoke it, from the agenda. ■

New Labour in office

THE KEY features of British politics today can be summarised as:

- The massive Labour victory in May represents a major shift to the left in Britain

- The enormous electoral defeat suffered by the Tories, combined with ongoing deep divisions over Europe, will prevent them coming back into office for at least two parliamentary terms

- Blair has no immediate need to cut Labour's links with the trade unions having achieved reforms in the party, primarily Partnership into Power (PIP), which aim to insulate the government from dissent among the party rank and file and the trade unions

- The trade union bureaucracy remains the most important prop for, and ally of, the Labour government within the working class. It will strive to disarm opposition to New Labour's attacks on workers

- It nevertheless remains the Blairite faction's long term goal to achieve a "major re-alignment of the centre left", to break Labour's historic links with the trade unions and transform Labour into a second bourgeois party on the model of the US Democrats

- The experience of 18 years of vicious anti-working class Tory rule means that the Labour Government can count on a considerable source of support among workers who will be willing to give this government "a chance to change things"

- The Labour left will not provide an adequate political opposition to Blair. They are terrified of being expelled from the party "prematurely" and will continue to surrender to threats by the leadership. Their various programmatic alternatives are utopian and still based on variants of Keynesian state intervention

- The one thing that can throw the Blair programme into crisis is a massive rank and file revolt in the trade unions and working class which forces the trade union leaders onto a collision course with the Government.

Labour policy in its first period in office has focused on limited social and political reform without major economic changes. Where it has begun economic restructuring, in education and welfare, it is clear that its objective has been to lower the public sector deficit while protecting the gains the bosses made during the Tory years. Labour's inability to reconcile the needs of the bosses with the aspirations of the working class will provide a real foundation on which opposition to New Labour will grow.

Harman's attack on lone parents' benefits last year gave an indication of how this is happening. The attack, clearly seen as a determination to push through a Tory measure, caused widespread opposition among Labour voters, new and old. For the first time sections of the media exposed Labour ministers to the glare of hostile questioning on an unpopular policy deci-



Blair outlines his recipe for New Labour's success

sion. The government was clearly on the defensive and the revolt in the Parliamentary Labour Party (PLP) went well beyond the traditional "hard left" of the Campaign Group.

The Blairites themselves have learnt a lesson and will prepare the ground for such attacks more carefully in the future. New welfare "reform" proposals leave basic elements of income support and the health service in place and concentrate on the Welfare to Work programme. This response does not signal, as the Socialist Workers Party (SWP) claim, that the government is "weak". Rather, it shows that Blair is leading a right wing reformist government whose room for manoeuvre is constrained, but not yet eliminated, by the problems facing capitalism.

Welfare to Work has been given pride of place. The ideological offensive is based on "new dealism". No one, especially the young, declares Gordon Brown, will be able to stay in bed and draw benefits. The whole emphasis of the new deal - and this has a strong resonance within the trade unions - is on reducing unemployment, finding useful work for the young and encouraging training and education.

Clearly the benefit sanctions and the experience in the USA of the work displacement effects of these schemes, reveal its real purpose - it is an attack on the young unemployed. But Brown's use of the windfall tax does represent a state subsidy and incentive for employers to take on extra workers and provide some recognised training. This is the element of welfare to work that will

be trumpeted by the Government and applauded by the trade union leaders.

The second aspect of Welfare to Work that the government wants to put in place before it sets about attacking benefit provision is changes in the tax system for the low paid. They want to reduce taxes so that the poverty trap, where workers are worse off if they get a low paid job than they would be on benefits, no longer exists or is considerably reduced. The adoption of a minimum wage is part of this strategy. They also want to funnel state support for families on low wages via the employers.

Again the ideological offensive will present this as a massive shift in state resources to prevent whole sections of the working class rotting on the dole or in hopeless sink estates. Labour will hope to gain the support of "Middle England" for this programme. Then they can launch the offensive on the "undeserving poor" who stubbornly remain out of work and on benefits.

The government's ally in carrying through these attacks on the welfare state will remain the trade union bureaucracy. Although the decline in the size and influence of the trade unions means that the voice of the bureaucracy carries far less weight amongst the broadest sections of workers than in the past, they have had nothing but praise for the Welfare to Work legislation while remaining largely silent on the lone parent cuts.

It is no accident that it is in Unison, the major union for the public and social services sector, that a witch hunt has been launched against the left. Bick-

erstaffe recognises that as disillusion sets in with Blair's policies his craven alliance with Labour could come under pressure from rank and file action. He is attempting a pre-emptive strike against its potential leadership in the branches.

The union leaders will do everything in their power to isolate and undermine opposition to Labour's policies as well as any actions against the employers which might embarrass Labour - that is, any in breach of the anti-trade union laws.

In return for this they will insist that Blair delivers on his promises to them - the minimum wage, trade union rights at work and recognition. How far Blair will listen to their insistence is a different question.

For example, Blair will probably accept a compromise with the CBI on balloting for recognition. The pressure from the Old Labour supporters inside the Party will not prevent him from doing everything possible to sideline a measure which is an anachronism when measured against New Labour's aims and objectives.

There will be some sabre rattling from the union bureaucracy if they think Blair is trying to renege on these minor reforms. The reforms are an important

part of rebuilding union membership, which they regard as the key task of the moment as shown by the launch of membership drives. They believe they can achieve this via a benevolent government rather than through industrial action.

If the government substantially waters down or abandons its pledge on union recognition, there is a possibility that the union bureaucrats will sanction a campaign against the government. This is likely to focus on marches, special conferences, publicity campaigns and so on, and will certainly not include illegal political strike action. It would nevertheless represent an important stage in the emergence of antagonism between organised labour and Blair.

To really shake the leaders into action, however, there needs to be an upsurge in rank and file activity. At the moment the working class is recovering from the defeats suffered during the Thatcher/Major years. The Hillingdon strikers, the Liverpool dockers' defeat and the long Magnet dispute all show that the trade union bureaucracy can still isolate important groups of workers. If the workers involved in struggle cannot or will not lead an organised challenge across the unions to the leadership there is always the danger they will remain isolated and go down to defeat.

The key task for revolutionaries is to fight for an alternative to both New Labour and their union bureaucrat allies. We need to fight for action, for rank and file control of the unions and for a political alternative to New Labour's entire policy - an alternative that starts from today's struggles but links each of them, through a range of transitional demands, to the fight for socialism and working class power.

Above all this means building a revolutionary party to fight for such a programme and win ever greater



After New Labour, the deluge!

RESULTS AND PROSPECTS



Working class anger will grow with each new attack

Booming Britain?

IN SPITE of overall growth rates as high as 4%, there is a continued and growing divergence between the manufacturing and service sectors of the British economy.

The government's refusal to raise taxes and the granting of independence to the Bank of England have meant that interest rates have been raised to a very high level relative to the rest of Europe and the world. This has punished manufacturing by penalising exports, has caused a dramatic slow down in growth within this sector and will probably lead to a manufacturing recession within the next year.

On the other hand it has stimulated the services sector by reducing the price of imports and consumer goods. Whether or not the British economy as a whole goes into recession there will be an economic slowdown during 1998, with a rise in unemployment and an increased balance of payments deficit.

All of these factors could lead to a far more swingeing round of cuts and attacks on the working class.

The crisis of the South East Asian economies is likely to knock between a half and 1% off growth rates in the

west. But this assumes the banking and debt crisis can be contained within these countries. If the Asian working class is made to pay for this recession, this might be the case. But an explosion of working class struggle in South Korea, which forced it to default on debts, could quickly bring other countries and their banks, especially in Japan, into crisis. Such a series of events could trigger a global recession.

The South East Asian crisis has shaken the confidence of the bourgeois economists who, not that long ago, were busy proclaiming a new period of ever expanding growth without crises. The IMF bail out of the "Tiger economies" has already required twice the sums mobilised to rescue the Mexican economy in 1995. There is deep unease in bourgeois circles about the state of the Japanese economy and a desperate desire to contain the current crisis within the Tiger countries. The world economy approaches the millennium with greater elements of instability and potential crisis than has been seen since the mid-1970s.

Britain has begun its six month presidency of the European Union with the

launch of the single currency planned for 1999. Gordon Brown managed to defuse the political row over Europe last October when he ruled out Britain joining the single currency in the lifetime of this parliament and committed the government to holding a referendum if Labour decides to take Britain into the single currency.

Labour's stance on the single currency, which does not commit the government to any action until 2002, represents the partial resolution of the long-running crisis for the bosses over Europe

Labour's stance on the single currency, which does not commit the government to any action until 2002, represents the partial resolution of the long-running crisis for the bosses over Europe. Labour's position cuts through the issues that divided the Tories. It presents Europe as a good idea economically but still leaves room for manoeuvre on behalf of bosses with global interests. This was clear

from Brown's five point criteria for British entry into European Monetary Union.

But Brown's Euro balancing act will not stop the economic developments in Europe from having an impact on Britain. Britain's economy will be slowing down as the major European economies, Germany and France are seeing higher growth rates. This would help counter recessionary pressures in the UK.

European monetary union, if it is successful, is expected to contribute to growth within Europe by the turn of

uncertainty in the financial markets.

If the single currency fails, and again this will depend on working class resistance to the impact of the Maastricht criteria, it could cause massive financial instability within Europe. Another influence on the fate of the British economy will be the USA, which is now into its seventh year of upturn and will also slow down over the next period.

The slowdown in the British economy and continued attacks by Blair's government will undermine the working class' illusions in the Labour Government. Opposition to Blair could come from: the youth who feel the brunt of the attacks on benefits and of Labour's "law and order" campaigns; the students who will increasingly struggle to study under a burden of growing debt; the disabled organisations who are already mobilising against benefit cuts; a small but growing vanguard of workers becoming disillusioned with Labour's attacks on the welfare state.

It is impossible to say exactly when the fightback against the government will begin, or how widespread and deep it will be, but we can say that such a fightback is more likely this year than it was last, and Tony Blair's right wing programme is eroding the enormous well of support for New Labour that led to its landslide almost a year ago. ■

Labour's old left

THE LABOUR left remains weak, still shell shocked (even according to some of its own MPs) by the pace of Blair's attacks and the shape he has given to the government. The Campaign Group contains an active core of no more than 15 MPs.

The vote of the 47 on the lone parents' benefit cut remains an isolated example not a pattern of rebellion. The 47 opponents and the many others who abstained do not constitute a coherent opposition to the Blair leadership. They were a mixture of Bennite survivors, a handful of Campaign Group newcomers (like John McDonnell and Lynne Jones) and even old Hattersley-style social democrats such as Dunwoody.

Blair has accrued a series of constitutional advantages that will militate against the Labour left gaining influence in the local parties and party machine in the way that it did in the early 1980s. Blair's alliance with the trade union

bureaucracy is an enormous factor in Labour Party politics, depriving the left of a powerful lever outside parliament that it can use against the leadership.

We are a long way from the renaissance of the Labour left as a trend capable of leading masses of party members and trade unionists but since the election it does have a greater sense of confidence and is taking steps towards assuming an identity - rebel MPs, a coalition of forces in the party brought together around the struggle against Partnership in Power and the members who support the various Labour left publications, principally *Tribune*, *Socialist Campaign Group News* and *Labour Left Briefing*.

These forces will, over the next two years, position themselves to the left of Blair in such a way as to take advantage of the first serious crack in the alliance between Blair and the unions. They will become more vociferous and more organised over the next period.

Blair's long term project is to transform Labour, destroy its links with the unions and remould it along the lines of the US Democrat party (his maximum programme) or European Social Democracy (the project inherited from the days of Kinnock's leadership). 'Slowly but surely a process of realignment in British politics is underway.

Blair's success in fulfilling either variant of his project will increase the possibility of a split in the Labour Party and this is now far more widely acknowledged on the Labour left than it was in the 1970s and early 1980s. Then the goal was win the leadership of the party for the left. Today the goal is more modest - keeping the party Labour. If they fail, and even *Tribune* has acknowledged this, then a split may be necessary.

Ideologically, the Labour left is less homogeneous than in the early 1980s, with the decline of British Stalinism whose intellectuals often

wrote the script for documents like the "Alternative Economic Strategy" (AES).

Figures such as Alan Simpson are trying to take the left towards a less obviously nationally centred programme incorporating the Keynesianism of the New Deal (Roosevelt) variety and proposals for "putting international capital under a curfew" - a programme which is just as utopian as the old AES but which appears more "modern" and "relevant". It is also designed to appeal to elements of the trade union bureaucracy who may eventually be pushed into fighting Blair.

Ken Livingstone is also trying to modernise and cohere a "loyal-to-Labour" left. He is consciously seeking to form an alliance with sections of the old Labour right, on the minimal basis of stopping the Blairites' attacks on the welfare state and the union link. This, he hopes, will win the backing of Labour supporters outside the party (in the unions and single issue campaigns, etc.).

However, in Livingstone's scheme, the left cannot afford to propose alternatives to Blair's agenda, either on policy or internal democracy, without blowing this alliance apart. Events in the real world of class struggle and international

political instability could wreck this fragile coalition.

It is clear that neither the Labour left nor its counterpart in the now thoroughly bureaucratised Stalinist sect, the SLP, have a strategy to beat Blair. As for the most significant far left organisation, the Socialist Workers Party, it is not growing. Its inability to deal with reformism, its rejection of the transitional programme as a means of mobilising workers against their reformist leaders leave it disarmed in the present period, waiting for things to get better rather than having a strategy to make things better.

This means that for revolutionaries the task of the hour is to build a revolutionary party. The existing established "order" on the left is clearly floundering in the face of Blair's offensive. They must make way for those prepared to take the fight to Blair and all his allies. That is what Workers Power (Britain) exists to do. ■

Contact us on 0171 357 0388
if you want to join us and help
us build the alternative to Blair
and New Labour.

MIDDLE EAST: US reviews policy towards Iran

Wrestling for power in the Gulf

THERE HAS been no direct contact between the USA and Iran since the Iranian revolution of 1979. The revolution overthrew the Shah's regime in Iran and seriously damaged the dominant position of US imperialism in the Middle East.

The USA has imposed economic and diplomatic sanctions on Iran since the US Embassy hostage crisis in 1980. Full economic sanctions have been applied not only to stop US companies dealing with Iran but also against other nations.

The Middle East is central to the interests of imperialism and particularly the USA. The region has 65% of the world's proven oil reserves. The oil exports meet 70% of Japan's energy needs, 24% of Western Europe's and 19% of the USA's.

US imperialism is determined to control the region politically and militarily. While the USA has traditionally relied on Israel as its main ally in the area, it has had to develop an active policy towards other Gulf states.

Friendly

Gulf states such as Saudi Arabia and Kuwait are clearly seen as friendly to Washington and have actually kept a US military presence since the Gulf War. Iran, on the other hand, has been designated as hostile to the USA.

The USA has sought to isolate the Islamic regime and has pressurised other EU countries into doing the same. It has accused the Iranian regime of financing and arming 'international terrorism' and of exporting Islamic revolution. The USA encouraged Iraq to attack Iran shortly after the revolution, which led to a war with millions of deaths and injuries on both sides.

Since the Gulf war the USA has pursued a policy of "dual containment" against Iraq and Iran. Both of these countries have significant military power that could upset the balance of power and jeopardise imperialist interests in the region.

But this policy has recently come in for criticism. Voices are being raised within the USA questioning the policy against Iran and whether it has failed. Henry Kissinger, writing in the Washington Post, 28 October 1997:

"This policy [of economic embargo] is now being challenged by the contract of the Total Oil Group of France to develop an oil field in Iran. The largest foreign venture in Iran since the 1979 revolution, it also includes Gazprom, Russia's energy monopoly, and a Malaysian energy company."

Undermined

US policy towards Iran is being undermined in two ways. Firstly, the isolation of Iran through sanctions is being challenged by both Europe and Russia who favour a policy of trade and engagement. Secondly, there has also been a change in the political situation within Iranian society with a more open attitude towards the West, which has allowed the possibility to increase trade.

The European Union's policy of dialogue with Iran has caused friction between the USA and Europe. The French based multinational Total has concluded \$2.52 billion deals with Iran for oil exploration. German companies are making deals in the transport and

In February, Iran and the United States made contact through an international wrestling tournament, held in the Iranian capital, Tehran. **Hamish Abdol** explains the implications of this heavyweight version of ping-pong diplomacy for US policy in the Middle East.



Khomeini, Khamenei and Rafsanjani. Rafsanjani and Khamenei are involved in a faction fight over Khomeini's legacy.

telecommunication sectors. Meanwhile US firms are losing out.

With no possibility of friendly relations between Iraq and the USA in the foreseeable future, increasingly, the USA has fewer options in the Middle East. An important part of US policy has been to develop economic relations between Israel and the Arab countries. This was one of the reasons for sponsoring the peace process. The US-sponsored economic summit which took place in Qatar in November 1997 was a total failure with only Israel, Jordan and Yemen attending.

In contrast, an Iranian-sponsored summit of Islamic countries in December 1997, held in Tehran, was attended by 55 countries, to the dismay of the USA which tried to organise a boycott through diplomatic pressure. This embarrassment for US policy was followed by the lukewarm support given by many of the Gulf states for a new military offensive against Iraq earlier this year.

Another blow to US policy has been the development by Iran of closer economic ties with Russia and China. Iran stands accused of buying nuclear reactors from Russia, for civilian and military purposes. The Zionist lobby in the USA has been pressurising Washington to impose sanctions on Russia and China, as any development in Iran's military capability is a threat to Israel.

In Iran, changes in the Islamic regime may allow the possibility of change in US government policy. The Iranian presidential election in May 1997 saw the landslide victory of a moderate cleric, Khatami, over the favoured conservative candidate, Nateq Nouri.

Two important events have shaped recent political developments inside

Iran: the death of Ayatollah Khomeini, who turned Iran into an Islamic Republic and remained its undisputed leader till his death in 1988, and the collapse of the Soviet Union.

Khomeini's death opened up a long process of factional fighting within the regime. Prior to his death, Khomeini picked Khamenei to be his successor as

The election of Khatami is the first disorganised expression of the working class against the crises that have occurred within Iran and opposition to the regime's denial of its democratic rights.

the spiritual leader and guardian of the Islamic Republic. In this position Khamenei has tremendous power. He is answerable to no one save God and stands above the constitution with the right to veto any decisions made by the president or parliament. In opposition to Khamenei and the conservative wing a moderate faction was formed led by ex-president Rafsanjani.

Last May's election was the first chance the Iranian people had to intervene in the power struggle within the regime. Khatami, as the candidate of the moderates, received 70% of the vote. Clearly popular sentiment is not with the conservatives. The massive

vote for Khatami represents a partial resolution of the power struggle in favour of the moderates.

The collapse of the Soviet Union made it impossible for the clerical regime to continue with its previous policy of 'neither west nor east'. The effect of the collapse of the Soviet Union removed a major obstacle to US foreign policy. Iran's isolation was felt more acutely and sections of the regime began to search for ways to break out of it.

The Iranian working class has suffered 19 terrible years of repression at the hands of the counter-revolutionary clerical regime. The anti-imperialist rhetoric of the regime, whether from the moderate or the conservatives wing, is regarded with suspicion by the Iranian masses. They have had ample opportunity to witness the fake anti-imperialist credentials of the regime. But this does not mean that there are no genuine anti-imperialist feelings. Not only have they not gone away, but they still have a real resonance amongst the population:

"Look what the USA has done to those poor Iraqi people; first it got them into war with Iran, killing millions, then it rewarded them by bombarding them into destruction and it still wants to kill more of them."

Such comments are common in the working class districts of Tehran. And this sentiment is shared by most of the population in the Middle East when they see Israel being rewarded for aggression while Iraq is bombarded.

The working class and youth have suffered severely, being denied any political rights, the right to form trade unions or develop cultural expressions contrary to the views of the clergy. US aggression towards Iran and continued sanctions have in many ways helped the

regime to divert attention away from internal crisis.

The election of Khatami is the first disorganised expression of the working class against the crises that have occurred within Iran and opposition to the regime's denial of its democratic rights. It has been accompanied by a series of hard fought strikes by the working class. These are the first steps to the Iranian masses mobilising, not behind this or that wing of the bureaucracy but against the whole regime.

The economic crisis in Iran has intensified since the end of the war with Iraq. The Iranian currency is not convertible anywhere outside of Iran and inflation is estimated to be running at 150 to 200%. All the subsidies that were available to the poorest section of the population during the war have been withdrawn. For the first time Iran has become a country in debt, owing around \$48 billion. The main supply of hard currency is from the sale of oil and this has been seriously effected by the sanctions. Price increases have resulted in the ever increasing poverty of the working class in the urban centres.

Strikes

In the last two years there have been strikes in many sectors of industry for wage increases. This is the beginning of the working class organising itself independently. Iranian youth are also engaged in a low level of cultural struggle against the regime. In one working class district of Tehran on walls usually full of Islamic moral propaganda the words "Michael Jackson is god" have been written.

In the streets young men wear T-shirts with faces of the latest popstars from the west and women students turn the idea of wearing a scarf into a joke, usually resulting in arrests and harassment by the Islamic revolutionary guards.

The election of a moderate was no doubt welcomed by the US imperialists hoping to see a change in the Iranian regime but they are probably unsure of what the future has in store for them in the Middle East. A few years ago they had successfully created an alliance to bomb Iraq back to the Stone Age. They had pressurised both Israel and the PLO to engage in a peace process. It appeared they had support from the Gulf petro-monarchies to intervene militarily in the region and had neutralised the threat from hostile countries such as Syria and Iran.

Opposition

Now all of the USA's best laid plans have gone awry; the peace process has stopped and the USA got lukewarm support from its erstwhile allies for its policy against Iraq and outright opposition from the Arab masses.

But it is the Iranian working class and youth who will ensure that US imperialism is not simply stymied but kicked out of the region. Intervening increasingly in the political life of the Middle East, they can bring about the downfall of the Islamic regime. Their fight would not bring about a US-friendly government but a revolutionary workers' and poor peasants' government. Such a government would lead the struggle of the Middle Eastern peoples to end imperialist domination. ■

INDIA: BJP triumph in elections

THE PRESIDENT of India, KR Narayanan, has asked the leader of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), Atal Behari Vajpayee, to become prime minister and form the next government.

The BJP and its allies won the largest number of seats of any electoral bloc in the Indian general elections last month. With a total of 252 out of 543 seats in the parliament they will not be able to form a majority government. India will continue its long period of unstable governing coalitions. And the BJP could very well plunge the country, as well as its parliament, into turmoil.

The BJP is a right wing Hindu chauvinist party. It scapegoats India's minority groups, particularly its 120 million Muslims. Among its leaders are members of fascist groups like the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh and the Vishwas Hindu Parishad. It is notorious for demanding that a Hindu temple be built on the site of the claimed birthplace of Lord Ram in Ayodhya.

In December 1992, the BJP led a mob of 200,000 Hindu zealots to destroy, brick by brick, the mosque that stood on the site. This was immediately followed by communalist riots all over India leading to the death of thousands of people, mainly Muslims. The Shiv Sena party, which is a member of the BJP's electoral alliance, organised pogroms against Muslims in Bombay

Alarmed

The western media has been alarmed by the rise of the BJP and communalism within Indian politics. Of course, none of them trace the history of this violence back to the legacy of British imperialism, which forcefully divided the sub-continent in 1947, leading to eight million people being driven from their homes and 200,000 being massacred. Still less do any of these commentators understand why the "secular" Congress Party has been eclipsed.

Congress governed India for forty years. Many Indians, opposed to the brutal communalist politics that the BJP represents, will be hoping that the coalition collapses and that a Congress-led government is restored. But this will be no answer to the rise of the BJP and even more extreme chauvinist parties.

Congress claims the mantle of being a secular party representing all Indians, devoted to keeping India together as a multi-national state and fighting against

the domination of any one group within society. Yet it was Congress itself that refused to allow India's national minorities the right to determine their own future.

Congress has brutally repressed the Kashmiri people in the North West, who have consistently sought independence, and ordered the storming of the Sikh temple in Amritsar by the Indian army. Congress has even mobilised to block attempts to reform the caste system. It is a pillar of Indian capitalism, not a force for consistent democracy in the sub-continent.

The BJP and its closest allies have built a coalition of a dozen parties from among the increasing number of regional parties. It has had to tone down the worst elements of its anti-Muslim and chauvinist policies to achieve this.

Nevertheless, the fact that the BJP has become the biggest single party in the Indian parliament and has constructed a minority government should ring alarm bells for those opposed to communalism. Revolutionaries in India will need to advance a programme to unite workers and poor peasants against those groups that wish to see them divided on religious and national grounds. They will need to organise workers and peasants to defend all groups against the chauvinist measures that will be launched by the new government.

Crucially, socialists need to raise the right of self-determination for the nationalities. While we favour a unitary state, it cannot and should not be maintained by repressing the democratic will

BY DAVE ELLIS

of the national minorities. Only a consistent defence of their right to self-determination can pull the rug from under those parties who wish to turn India into a series of competing states, within which other minorities are oppressed. Only by defending the minorities, and their democratic rights within India, can we build resistance to the chauvinist BJP and its fascist allies.

Disintegration

Behind the rise of communalism lies the gradual disintegration of the Indian economy. On gaining independence, despite rhetoric about socialism, the Congress party pursued a state capitalist policy in order to counter the effects of India's imperial legacy. Industry was built up and, despite the regionalism and the different national groups, Congress was able to centralise government and incorporate the various ruling factions: the state bureaucracy, large landowners and industrial capitalists.

Economic stagnation over the last seven years has led Congress to pursue a neo-liberal policy of privatisations and deregulation. The old state industries were broken up and sold off, the state sector and civil service faced cuts and foreign investment was encouraged, especially in the service and banking sectors. This has intensified the poverty of the majority of the population and has not led to any lasting economic upturn.

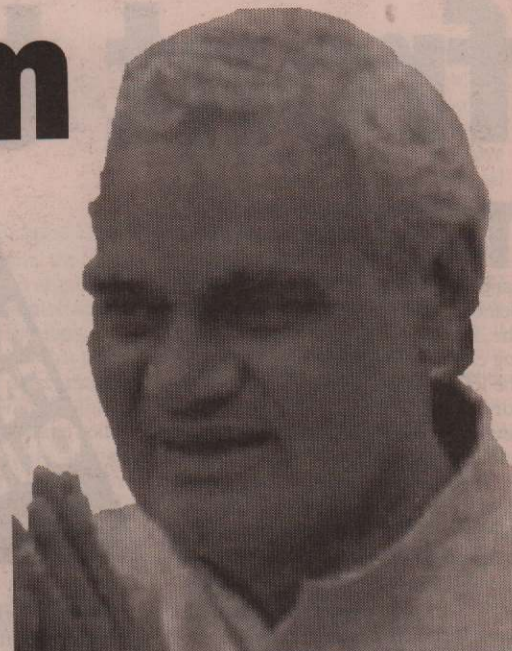
With the turn away from state inter-

vention, Congress was no longer able to unite and placate all of India's ruling factions. Local landowners and regional politicians saw their power and privileges threatened. This has led to the rise in the number of regional parties and an increasingly open use of the caste system and religious affiliations to secure votes and office. Thuggery and corruption was rife during the elections.

The BJP has opposed the economic reforms in their campaign against Congress. They have used a populist message blaming not only Muslims but also foreign capital for India's problems. Their call for swadeshi - self-reliance - has appealed to many Indians, impoverished by the neo-liberal policies.

In office, the BJP government the policy of "self-reliance" will become a weapon against the masses. The BJP will not take any action against foreign capital and will continue to pursue economic liberalisation and attacks on the working class and poor peasantry. But India's large working class must not turn back to the failed state capitalist policies of Congress when the inevitable disillusionment with the BJP coalition sets in.

A socialist programme of workers' control of industry, the expropriation



The BJP's chauvinist in chief, Atal Bihari Vajpayee

of the big capitalists and imperialist holdings, the breaking of the power of the large landowners and the satisfaction of the land hunger of the poor peasants, as well as ending the crippling debts they face, is the answer to the attacks that both Congress and the BJP favour in their defence of capitalism. It is the programme that can unite India's workers and poor peasants, undercutting the poison of communalist rivalry.

The working class must use all resistance to privatisations and austerity measures to build a revolutionary party that fights for the rights of all minorities, against the caste system and for a working class programme of public works to eliminate poverty and appalling living conditions, at the expense of Indian big business and foreign capital alike. ■

Turkey: workers resist austerity drive

THOUSANDS OF Turkish trade unionists took to the streets of Ankara and Istanbul throughout late February and March, defying the notoriously brutal riot police. In the most serious confrontation, dozens of demonstrators were injured after Ankara police unleashed volleys of tear gas and water cannon.

The trade unionists, most organised by the 500,000-strong Kesk union confederation, had walked out and marched against proposals to ban public sector strikes and further restrict collective bargaining rights. On Friday 6 March, telecommunications and rail workers in Istanbul joined the action, paralysing Turkey's biggest city as the police violence in Ankara fuelled workers' anger in other cities.

The latest anti-union legislation has the firm backing of new prime minister Mesut Yilmaz.

But the union protests are only the most visible symptom so far of a mounting crisis which threatens to engulf Yilmaz's fragile coalition government.

At the same time as provoking renewed working class militancy, the Yilmaz administration has become embroiled in a war of words with German Chancellor, Helmut Kohl, and intensified its efforts to crush the fighters of the PKK (Kurdish Workers' Party) through prolonged incursions into northern Iraq. Turkey also looks poised for another sharp con-

BY G R McCOLL

frontation with Greece over the partition of Cyprus.

The European Union (EU), following Germany's lead, has continued to block Turkey's entry into its ranks. In an attempt to prove its pro-western credentials, the Yilmaz government has proscribed the Refah (Welfare) Party for at least three years, thus dissolving the largest party in the previous parliament with barely a whimper of protest.

By combining rhetorical opposition to corruption with a programme of day-to-day welfare provision to the urban poor, the Refah became the first Islamist party to enjoy substantial national success in the more than 70 years since the birth of modern Turkey as a "secular state". It captured over 20% of the popular vote at the Christmas 1995 general election and its leader, Necmettin Erbakan, was briefly premier in 1996/97.

Even as the current coalition remains fully committed to the concept of the "secular state" Yilmaz walks a tightrope. He is keen not to alienate the Islamists entirely. In this context he has demagogically ascribed Germany's undisguised opposition to Turkish EU membership to Helmut Kohl's religious bigotry. Comparing Kohl's policies to those of Nazi Germany, he accuses him



Riot police do their bit to push through the austerity drive

of wanting to maintain the EU as a "Christian club".

Kohl's opposition to Turkish admission to the bosses' club, however, has little to do with religious prejudice. Cold economic facts, combined with racism, lie behind the EU's decision. Above all, Turkey has no chance of meeting the criteria for a single European currency.

A recent annual report to the European Commission noted that for all the tough Thatcherite talk of former premier Tansu Ciller, "Turkey has not yet managed to define an economic strategy adequate to control the public finances, to restrain inflation and stabilise the money supply".

In addition, there is an official unemployment rate of Turkish workers in Germany of 12%. With a population of

some two million Turks currently living in Germany, Kohl does not want any more coming into the country, as they would be able to do (theoretically) if Turkey became a signatory to the Schengen agreement (see *Workers Power* 219).

To underline the frustration of most of Turkey's key bosses, Yilmaz pulled a Turkish delegation out of an EU meeting, held in London in early March, to discuss the enlargement of the EU. Ironically, Britain has tended to be more favourable to Turkish admission, partly because of the country's strategic importance as a staging post for US and British imperialism's forays into the Persian Gulf.

Even Britain, however, has felt obliged to join the chorus of mock horror in the EU at Turkey's human rights record, which has given the EU a good excuse

to keep Turkey out. In the words of the report to the European Commission, "the programme of the Turkish government has so far had no discernible effect" in improving an appalling catalogue of human rights abuses.

Thousands of leftists continue to rot in jails, in a country where the military has constantly lurked in the wings since a 1980 coup which resolved an earlier crisis.

The Turkish far left has been dominated by variants of Stalinism for decades, with a number of groups heavily influenced by Maoist guerrillaism. They generally ignored a large and well organised working class and turned instead to a futile terrorist strategy, which saw hundreds killed, thousands jailed and still more leave Turkey for long term exile.

The recent wave of the Kesk confederation's protest strikes has ebbed, but revolutionaries in Turkey urgently need to offer a fighting lead to such resistance, generalising it across both the public and private sectors.

Combined with a strategy to organise the defence of such a general strike against the inevitable violence of the security forces, the Turkish working class has tremendous potential not only to get rid of its own bosses but to provide an inspiring example to their class brothers and sisters in the EU.

- For a general strike against the anti-union legislation
- No to austerity and privatisation programmes
- Free all leftist and PKK prisoners
- End the dirty war against the Kurds
- NATO bases out of Turkey/Turkey out of NATO.

FRANCE: Fascists make gains in regional elections

For a workers' united front to smash Le Pen

THE FRENCH REGIONAL elections and their dramatic aftermath are evidence of the increasing polarisation of French society. These events demonstrate both the opportunities and the dangers facing the French working class, as the traditional parties of the left and right fail to provide a way forward in the current situation of severe unemployment and squeeze on public spending.

The elections showed that the majority of working class voters were still prepared to give their backing to the main party of government, Jospin's Socialist Party (PS), which received 37% of the vote. Workers still look to the PS and its coalition partner the Communist Party (PCF), to deliver reforms and to hold off from the massive attacks on welfare, promised by the right.

But the coming period will see Jospin put to the test. Unemployment is running at 12%. Left wing and unemployed activists have organised demonstrations and occupations demanding jobs and decent benefits. Public spending cuts will see more attacks on services at local level.

The most striking results of the elections showed gains for both the far left and, disturbingly, for the right wing fascist front party the Front National (FN).

The FN's total national vote showed a small increase over the 15% it has received at the last elections. However, in many regions of the South the FN's score was over one in four, providing it with a decisive weight in deciding who would rule in these regions. This enabled it to propose a pact with the traditional centre right parties, the UDF and the Gaullist RPR.

In the past the FN has simply denounced the mainstream right. But over the last year or so, a faction fight has unfolded, in which political perspectives and the succession to Le Pen have been equally important.

KICK THE FASCISTS OUT!

Last month's French regional elections saw Jean-Marie Le Pen's Front National make big gains – not in votes but in political control: an agreement with mainstream right wing parties has handed the fascist front control in several areas. **Mathieu Roux** of Pouvoir Ouvrier (French section of the LRCI) reports on the new situation

The clear winner has been Bruno Megret, the "virtual" mayor of Vitrolles in the south (Megret was barred from standing, but got his wife to stand as mayor and now runs the town in her stead).

Megret believes the FN should adopt new tactics towards the right: make them an offer they can't refuse, then absorb them. He has been opposed by the more open fascist bully-boys who want to build a mass fascist party. Le Pen's brutal instincts push him towards the more open fascists, but he has had to accept Megret's control of the FN and his political acumen.

Once the election results were known, Le Pen immediately put Megret's plan into operation, proposing to support the right's bid for power in a number of regions. In five regions, all controlled by the UDF, Megret's strategy appeared to pay dividends as the right accepted the FN's votes.

But these dirty deals caused a huge outcry and mobilised the workers' movement. Up and down the country, workers and youth turned out to protest. Hundreds of thousands marched behind the banners of the left and the trade unions. Leaders of both the PS and PCF turned out to address the demonstrations.

The right, too, has taken fright. Sev-



The ugly face of French fascism

eral UDF regional leaders were forced to resign. Chirac told the RPR to keep out of the deals with the FN. Meanwhile, one major component of the UDF is calling for the creation of a new centre party.

The mass response on the streets shows the FN can be driven back, but there is no room for complacency. The FN poses a threat to workers and the oppressed both in and out of office. If it is allowed to retain its foothold it will entrench its anti-working class and

racist policies. The left must mobilise against every demonstration and racist manoeuvre of the FN.

The high scores of the far left parties is also proof that the French working class is ready for a more radical solution – on racism and other social questions. Both Lutte Ouvrière (LO) and the Ligue Communiste Révolutionnaire (LCR) gained seats in the elections (20 for LO, 3 for the LCR) with LO getting 4.7% of the vote – and in certain areas as high as 10%.

These votes are the result of several factors: the legacy of the mass movement of November-December 1995 and the upsurge in working class confidence it represented, and the rightward turn of the PCF, accelerated by its participation in government.

The LCR also scored highly in areas, like Toulouse, where they initiated militant campaigns against unemployment benefit cuts.

Unfortunately, the programmes on which LO and the LCR stood show that these organisations remain far from revolutionary politics.

The LCR – which stood under a bewildering 25 different names depending on local alliances – put forward a left reformist programme, in keeping with its recent congress decisions.

LO's platform consisted of a version of its "emergency plan" first put forward in the 1995 Presidential elections, which presents a number of transitional slogans (e.g. open the books, banning of sackings) but devoid of all aspects of workers' control. Indeed their platform made no reference at all to any aspect of working class struggle.

For these reasons and because neither party has any systematic organised relationship with the working class, our comrades of Pouvoir Ouvrier correctly called on workers to vote for the two mass workers' parties: to put them to the test of power and better expose the illusions that the majority of workers still have in these parties.

It remains to be seen what – if anything – LO and the LCR will do with their newly elected representatives. They ought to use the regional assemblies as platforms not only to issue denunciations of capitalism (LO's speciality) but, above all, to mobilise the workers, to arm them with an action programme to fight the current attacks from government and employers and – last but not least – to drive the FN out of office and off the streets. ■

RUSSIA: Yeltsin dismisses cabinet

All change, but no change

BORIS YELTSIN'S sacking of the Russian prime minister and the entire cabinet on 23 March was so unexpected that a radio newscaster, as he read the long list of names, was forced to reassure listeners: "This is no joke".

Prime minister and potential presidential candidate Victor Chernomyrdin was out. Organiser of multiple privatisations Anatoly Chubais was also shown the door. After discovering that, constitutionally, he could not give himself the job, Yeltsin appointed a 35 year old, relatively unknown minister for fuel and energy, Sergei Kiriyenko, as acting prime minister.

Yeltsin's motives, however, are no joke either. He is engaging in yet another political manoeuvre to shore up his own power and draw attention away from looming economic policy row.

Rival business interests are jostling for position in Russia. Chubais, hailed for some time as the leading pro-market reformer, is seen as too close to one section. Another group, led by tycoon Berezovsky, is said to be behind the sweeping changes. The forthcoming sell-off of the state oil company Rosneft, on terms unfavourable to Berezovsky, may have been the final straw.

Berezovsky also provided financial backing for Yeltsin's presidential election campaign in 1996. Fearful of Communist Party candidate Gennady

Zyuganov, Berezovsky and his associates paid for Yeltsin's election campaign. Berezovsky describes himself as an unpaid advisor to Yeltsin's chief of staff at the Kremlin, Yumashev, and Yeltsin's influential daughter, Tatyana Dyachenko.

It is clear that the sacking of the cabinet is linked to preparations for the presidential elections in 2000. Berezovsky and friends are keen to ensure a pro-market president.

Likely candidates such as the mayor of Moscow, Luzhkov, right wing general Lebed, and CP leader Zyuganov are seen as not sufficiently committed to capitalism.

Chernomyrdin, who had been running the country whilst Yeltsin was ill, is deeply unpopular. An alternative has to be found. Yeltsin himself may attempt to change the constitution, which rules him out of a third term of office. Significantly, Kiriyenko has no independent power base – unlike Chernomyrdin who has strong links to the energy industry.

Yeltsin continues to play one faction off against another – even, apparently, from his sick bed.

Yeltsin could also use the shake up to force the Duma (parliament) to hold elections. If they reject his candidate for prime minister three times, he has the power to dissolve the Duma and call new elections. This would have the advantage of silenc-

ing his opponents in the Duma for a period. An election at present is unlikely to benefit the Communist Party deputies.

But to see the recent sackings as just a game of power politics within the Kremlin would be only to see a part of the picture.

Yeltsin explained his decision by saying that Russia needed more "dynamism and initiative". But no radical change in direction is expected from the new administration. Kiriyenko announced at his first press conference:

"There will be no new government programme... There will be a continuity of policy".

Kiriyenko himself is strongly committed to exactly the same economic reforms and privatisations that Chernomyrdin and Chubais introduced.

On the day the news broke Sveta, an assistant in a Moscow toy shop, told the Financial Times: "Everything has changed for those in power but nothing will change for us".

She is right. Yeltsin hopes to diffuse some of the anger felt by millions of workers who have not been paid. Whilst the reformers can make billionaires of people like Berezovsky, it cannot afford to pay the wages of a miner or a teacher in the Kusbass.

The Russian economy appears to be relative-

ly stable. The redenomination of the rouble was successfully completed in the beginning of the year. Inflation is predicted to fall below 10% this year. And there are some signs of growth, a growth rate of 1.5% predicted for the first quarter of 1998.

But there are fundamental weaknesses at the heart of the economy. It is still distorted by debt. Enterprises owe millions to other enterprises factories don't pay for their gas or electricity. And \$1.5 billion is currently owed in back wages to public sector workers.

Ominously in the week after Yeltsin's announcement, news was leaked that the government had plans to sack 200,000 public sector workers, including 22,000 health workers and 68,000 teachers.

Cuts of \$4 billion are planned to meet conditions set by the IMF for future loans. While Yeltsin was busy denying the plans, the Federation of Independent Trade Unions was preparing for strikes across the country in defence of jobs.

Maybe Yeltsin thinks that by sacking a few Kremlin bosses, he can staunch the anger that will be provoked by sacking 200,000 workers. If so, then the Russian working class could well surprise him this time. And then things will change for Sveta and millions of other workers across Russia.

IRELAND: Unionists turn the screw

No justice, no peace

THE BRITISH and Irish governments have stepped up the pressure for a deal from the peace talks in Stormont. But the deal they plan is a profoundly reactionary one: it will betray the interests of the nationalist population, leaving them second class citizens in a statelet still dominated by unionist politicians and business interests.

At the end of March Blair called in John Mitchell, who set up the original peace talks, to force the pace in the peace process. Mitchell announced he would change the atmosphere of the talks, making them more upbeat by bringing in smaller tables and flowers! At the same time, Irish Prime Minister, Bertie Aherne promised to put more pressure on the Sinn Fein leadership to make further concessions. Earlier in the month, Clinton was wheeled in to sing the praises of a peace deal at carefully orchestrated St Patrick's Day celebrations in the USA.

No change of style or mood will disguise the bloody realities of the conflict in Northern Ireland or the day to day discrimination and threats suffered by the anti-unionist population.

Outside the talks, loyalist violence and threats continue. These threats come from the top of "respectable" unionism, not just from the paramilitary forces and the loyalist prisoners in the Maze. The Orange Lodges and unionist politicians are insisting that all their "traditional marches" will go ahead this summer along routes they choose - in other words they are demanding the right to enforce their right to terrorise catholic communities. In the last few weeks catholic areas of

As the Irish peace process nears its May deadline, **Lesley Day** examines the rotten deal that the British and Irish governments are preparing to railroad through.

north Belfast have been attacked by loyalist gangs with petrol bombs and sectarian attacks on catholic homes have continued.

The British press paints a picture of two sides - both as bad as each other - being dragged unwillingly into talks by the benevolent and neutral British government which will find a decent compromise. But this picture ignores the actual balance of forces in Northern Ireland and the extent to which this will be preserved in any deal.

Accuse

The police force, the RUC, is 90% protestant and over the last few months has time and again revealed its sectarian nature. It has conveniently ignored the clear evidence that the loyalist paramilitary force the UFF (represented by the UDP in the Stormont talks) has been carrying out sectarian killings. Meanwhile it hastened to accuse the IRA of involvement in attacks in South Armagh, without any published evidence.

Blair and Mitchell's plan for peace will leave all these inequalities intact. If a deal emerges it will be one marked by concessions to the unionist parties. The "spoiling tactics" of UUP leader David Trimble - such as trying to revive the question of decommissioning IRA arms and continually demanding the exclusion of Sinn Fein - are actually designed to wring more and more con-

cessions out of Blair.

Trimble has repeatedly insisted on the revival of a Northern Ireland assembly that will maintain the protestant ascendancy, even if it includes some minor elements of "power sharing". The UUP aims to preserve the union with Britain, the sectarian police force and protestant privileges in jobs and education.

Sinn Fein leaders McGuinness and Adams have persuaded a sceptical Sinn Fein rank and file that they should continue the attempt to get an "honourable" settlement. They pin their hopes on proposals for an all-Ireland or even London-Dublin council which can keep a unionist-dominated Stormont assembly in check. But a poll of delegates to the UUP conference in March revealed that only 20% were prepared to accept any cross-border assembly. And the Heads of Agreement outline deal, which Blair is working to, rules out the possibility of any serious executive powers being given to a cross-border body.

So the outcome of the Mitchell phase of the talks will either be breakdown or a peace deal massively weighted to the unionists. This confirms what Workers Power and the Irish Workers Group have argued from the start: that the peace process is a reactionary attempt to solve the Northern Ireland question for the benefit of British imperialism and cannot result in a just peace.

A Stormont "peace" will be no peace at all: daily life as experienced by the 42% catholic population will continue to produce resistance and demands for change. It will drive them time and time again to defend themselves against RUC and loyalist violence.

Sell-out

What is the alternative to the Stormont talks and a reactionary deal? In the face of the sell-out by the Sinn Fein leadership it is no surprise that break away forces like the Continuity IRA want to maintain the armed struggle. catholic areas must be defended against loyalist violence.

But a continuation of the old tactics and strategy of republicanism will not work. An effective movement to kick out the British army and dismantle the sectarian state must be based in the working class, must involve working class defence organisations and must have a programme to unite Ireland on the basis of a socialist republic.

Another alternative comes from socialists such as those around the SWP and the Socialist Party who argue that "working class unity" in common action can overcome sectarian divisions.

It can, but only to a point: that point is reached when working class struggle poses the question of Britain's right to occupy and rule part of a foreign country - Ireland. "Workers' unity" gained at the expense of ignoring the national question has proved fragile and inadequate.

Source

While the border exists, while the union is preserved, while the sectarian state remains - then simple calls for unity will not do.

Real unity can only be built on the basis of a fight to end discrimination, to remove the source of loyalist sec-

tarian killing and state repression: the border. That means fighting to get Britain out of Ireland. It means building a revolutionary socialist alternative capable of taking up both the national and class questions in a single programme for a workers' republic.

As those involved in the peace talks back-stab their way to a "deal" that can be presented to the Irish people in a referendum, only one thing is certain: it will be a reactionary deal, not worth the paper it is written on, guaranteed to work only if the anti-unionist population is prevented or stifled from using the assemblies set up to fight for its rights.

What we fight for:

- Withdraw British troops and grant Ireland the right of self-determination now
- Disband the RUC
- Release all republican prisoners
- Convene an all-Ireland constituent assembly to decide on any constitutional proposals
- For a 32 county socialist republic of Ireland.■

ROISIN McALISKEY: Extradition threat lifted A pawn in the imperialist game

ROISIN McALISKEY was released from custody last month and the threat to extradite her to Germany was lifted.

Roisin McAliskey spent 16 months in the hands of the British state, victim of a spurious charge that she was involved in the bombing of a British army base in Osnabruck in Germany. She was sent to Castlereagh detention centre and later spent six weeks in an all-male prison. She was held for months through a difficult pregnancy in the notoriously bad conditions of Holloway prison. Only a public outcry and tireless campaigning by republicans, socialists and women's groups forced the government to allow her to stay in hospital after the birth of her child. The brutal treatment made Roisin seriously ill causing both physical and mental breakdown.

We should celebrate the release of Roisin McAliskey and the lifting of the threat of extradition. But we

should not forget the lessons of her 16 month incarceration and what it teaches us about the nature of the British state and Labour Home Secretaries.

It was clear from the start that there was no serious evidence against Roisin. Jack Straw was repeatedly advised that there was no possibility of her being convicted in Germany. But instead of immediately releasing her and denying the extradition, Straw chose to keep McAliskey in jail, both to maintain his "tough on crime" stance and, doubtless, as a pawn in the games of concession and counter-concession played around the peace process.

Roisin was a political prisoner. The British system of divide and rule in Northern Ireland rests on a draconian system that allows the imprisonment, extradition and associated mental and physical torture suffered by Roisin McAliskey. It must be fought, it must be scrapped.■



NEW ZEALAND: Auckland electricity blackout

Privatised to destruction

If you ask a Thatcherite economist to name a model country for the capitalism of the future the answer, surprisingly, is often New Zealand. Throughout the 1980s first Labour, then Conservative governments in New Zealand slashed public spending, privatised everything in sight and then removed most of workers' rights at work. Now things are going wrong in this beacon of the capitalist future. Very wrong. Comrades from our sister organisation, **Workers Power New Zealand/Aotearoa** explain the situation.

SINCE 20 February Auckland, the largest city in New Zealand, has been blacked out by a massive power failure. The failure has been caused by a newly privatised part of the electricity industry, Mercury Energy. Shops and businesses are closed, residents are being evacuated and the universities are being shut down. The final cable delivering power to Auckland's central business district failed and Mercury Energy is floundering as it tries to mend the connection.

land's central business district failed and Mercury Energy is floundering as it tries to mend the connection.

Power

As the supply cables have gone down one by one and as the power crisis lurches from bad to worse people are asking themselves why? Why in the most important area of the biggest

city in NZ is there no power?

The short answer is capitalism. The longer answer begins with the neo-liberal programme of state sell offs and privatisation begun more than a decade ago. Power generation and supply we were told was being opened up to the efficiencies of competition and the market.

Try telling that to anyone in Auckland now. The reality of the market has brought central Auckland to its knees.

Mercury Energy has simply followed the lead of other state and privatised industries where the bottom line is profit.

They have cut the workforce in half over the past years, laying off the very workers who repair and maintain the cables that have failed. They were fully

aware of the potential problem posed by 30-year-old cables and increasing demand five years ago. But the newly restructured power company was more interested in its short term profit margins than guaranteed and regular supply to its consumers. The Auckland power crisis shows us what is in store from the raft of privatised and semi-privatised companies that are the trophies of neo-liberalism.

Provide

The crisis rubbishes the neo-liberal idea that the state cannot provide essential services such as power as efficiently as the private sector.

If ever there was a case for renationalisation this is it! To the list can be added virtually every other state sell off.

Yet the New Zealand government wants to increase competition in the electricity market and privatised water provision this year. We say turn the lights off in parliament, let's run the system ourselves.■

Victory to Kosovo

TWENTY-FOUR coffins lined up side by side – men, women and children – massacred by the same Serbian “anti-terrorist” paramilitary squads who started the Bosnian ethnic cleansing.

A raid with helicopter gunships on the villages of Likosane and Cirez in the region of Drenica started the present crisis. Demonstrators in Kosovo’s capital, Pristina, and other towns were gassed and clubbed for protesting against these atrocities. In the assault on a “terrorist base” in the village of Donji Prekazi up to fifty people were killed and thousands fled from the surrounding area.

The crackdown on ethnic Albanian resistance to the Serb occupation had begun on 28 February. A successful ambush by fighters of the Kosovo Liberation Army (UCK) of a Serbian army unit led to the punitive raid in the Drenica area.

The verbal response of Madeleine Albright and Robin Cook was immediate. “We are not going to stand by and watch

the Serb authorities do in Kosovo what they can no longer get away with doing in Bosnia” said the US Secretary of State.

This certainly made the Serb authorities stay their hand, as did the militant response of the Albanian population in Kosovo and beyond. On 14 and 15 March, 50,000 people demonstrated in Pristina and 20,000 in Skopje, the capital of Macedonia.

Although France, Italy and Germany have different and often opposing interests in the region, they all want to “normalise” the situation and are, therefore, much more sympathetic to the Serb position. Visits to Belgrade by the French and German foreign ministers produced the propaganda ruse of the arrival of a team of Yugoslav government “negotiators” in Pristina. The Albanian leaders quite rightly refused to meet them

under the guns of the Serbian army. Since then, an “illegal” general election has been held

in the province in which 70% of the population turned out to re-elect Ibrahim Rugova president and a parliament with 130 deputies.

The 1.8 million ethnic Albanians who make up 90% of the population of Kosovo should not place any hopes on the Anglo-Saxon imperialists. Any further intervention into the region by their forces – already established in Bosnia and in Macedonia – will not aid the national freedom and independence of any of the Balkan peoples. Quite the reverse! Both Britain and the United States have indicated that there “can be no question of independence for Kosovo”. Why? Because Slobodan Milosevic, on whom they are relying to deliver the Serb side of the reactionary Dayton Peace Accords, could not survive the “loss” of Kosovo.

Why, then, are London and Washington “talking tough” about military reprisals if he attempts mass ethnic cleansing or genocide in Kosovo? Because they know that any large scale repression would provoke an intervention from Albania itself and aid from

the Albanians of Macedonia too. It could possibly start another pan-Balkan war if Greece were drawn in on Serbia’s side.

It is this threat of war on a grand scale – possibly engulfing the whole region from Greece through to Turkey – which unites all of the imperialist powers. That is why NATO troops are already lined up along the Macedonian border, with reserves in the Aegean Sea. More may be deployed along the Albanian frontier. These troops serve no progressive purpose and are merely there to contain a Kosovan blood-bath and prevent solidarity from Albania and Macedonia. That is why revolutionaries in the west must fight for all NATO troops out of the Balkans.

The maintenance of an imperialist peace – Dayton style – cannot be the goal of revolutionaries or the working class internationally. This peace, this “new world order”, is based on the USA (and Britain and France) as world policemen – licensed to kill wherever their economic and strategic interests

are involved, and licensed to maintain national oppression wherever it is in the interests of stability.

The stability that they have in mind is to safeguard capitalist and imperialist exploitation, or in the case of the former Stalinist states of the Balkans, the completion of the restoration of capitalism. That is why the “ethical” foreign policy of Robin Cook is a sham. The right to self-determination is totally empty if one choice – complete state independence – is excluded as an option from the outset.

The recent uprisings in Kosovo marked a new phase in the Albanian revolution, which began with the armed insurrections in and around Vlore in southern Albania in spring 1997. Enormous possibilities have opened up for the working class with these events, but also great dangers. On these pages, we print a resolution of the International Secretariat of the League for a Revolutionary Communist International. Also we report on the solidarity work of the LRCI’s Austrian section, ArbeiterInnenstandpunkt.



Victims of Serb repression

THE STRUGGLE of the Albanians for self-government started in the 1870s. Armed uprisings against the Ottomans resulted in the creation of a small Albanian state around Vlore in 1912. But the national self-determination of the Albanian people, including those who already constituted the great majority of the inhabitants of Kosovo, was repeatedly thwarted by an unholy alliance of the major capitalist powers.

Convened

At the congresses convened by the Great Powers in Berlin in 1878 and London in 1912/13 the Balkans were divided into a series of small and weak states – all clients of one or another of the Great Powers. On the one hand Austria and Germany, and on the other Russia backed by France lined up Serbia, Montenegro, Greece and Bulgaria against one another. The “Balkans powder keg” exploded three times in these years, the last of which proved the fuse which set off the first world war.

The Serb Kingdom was the great beneficiary of having chosen the winning imperialist alliance (Britain and France). The creation of the Yugoslav monarchy after World War I – the Kingdom of the Serbs, Croats and Slovenes – put the ethnic Muslims of Bosnia and Albanians of Kosovo and western Macedonia under the domination of these “ruling nationalities”, but especially the Serbs. What resulted was the systematic oppression of the Albanian population living in Kosovo, Macedonia and other parts of the country.

Subsequently, Kosovo saw frequent riots and uprisings, partly spontaneous, partly organised by petit bourgeois nationalist guerrillas – the “Kacaks”. The latter had a progressive policy of rejecting collaboration with the imperialist powers or attacking the Serb

minority in Kosovo. They focused their attacks exclusively on the occupying Serb army, police and bureaucrats. It is no surprise that the Yugoslav Communists, as the only party which opposed national oppression and supported the right to self-determination in the 1920s and 1930s, drew their strongest support from the Macedonians, Albanians and also the German minority.

At the end of the war there was a new armed uprising in Kosovo, led by Shaban Polluzha and supported by many Albanian partisans. They were routed by Tito’s forces and many were shot. Delegates from Enver Hoxha’s Stalinist government in Tirana were sent to Kosovo to investigate. They were captured by their “communist brothers” and shot. The Hoxha leadership was forced to swallow this and never raised the question in succeeding decades.

Tito’s split with Stalin in 1948 converted “Moscow loyalist” Enver Hoxha’s Albania into a bitter foe. Tito had to mollify the Serbs – as the majority nationality in Yugoslavia.

Sacred

For the Serbs, Kosovo was sacred territory, central to the national myth on which Serb nationalism had been founded at the turn of the nineteenth century. Kosovo was the site of a great defeat by the Ottoman Turks – the Battle of Blackbird Field. It was regarded as a sort of crucifixion of the Christ-like Serbian nation, which then suffered five hundred years under the Islamic yoke before its rebirth. Yet, the real Kosovo was a backward poverty-stricken territory from which most Serbs had emigrated and was 80-90% Albanian in population.

The Albanians were the only people in Yugoslavia who were denied their right to self-determination throughout the life of Tito’s state. Nevertheless,

several factors meant that this was not as severe as in the inter-war period. Titoist Yugoslavia was a federation of national bureaucracies seeking – as far as possible – to avoid friction between themselves. There was significant growth of the economy and living standards for all Yugoslavs in the three decades after the war. The massive migration of Kosovo Albanians to developed capitalist states (Switzerland, Germany and Austria) resulted in significant material support for their families at home.

Nevertheless, as Yugoslavia descended into stagnation and ever more market reforms disrupted and regionalised the economy, the rivalries between the bureaucracies increased. National tensions were fuelled by economic distress and the equilibrium of the Yugoslav Federation was lost. Kosovo had received limited autonomy within Serbia in the early 1970s as part of a project by Tito to weaken the Serbian bureaucracy relative to all the others. This had been deeply resented in Serbia – where Tito’s Croat-Slovene background was not forgotten.

In conditions where there was no internationalist proletarian force to lead the masses of Serbia and Kosovo against the post-Titoist bureaucracies, the latter kept a hold on “their” populations by fanning the flames of chauvinism. The most dramatic example of this was the rise of Slobodan Milosevic in Serbia. He launched a new chauvinist offensive against the Albanians. They reacted with mass demonstrations and strikes, particularly by the

miners who occupied their pits. The LPRK (which is today the LPK, “Peoples’ Movement of Kosovo”) organised a mass petition for independence, which gained 700,000 signatures.

In the end, the Serbian army imposed the dissolution of Kosovo’s autonomy in 1989. All Albanians were ruthlessly sacked from public services and industry. In the schools and the university, education was conducted only in Serbo-Croat. Clearly Milosevic hoped to drive out the intransigently nationalist sections and assimilate the rest of the

population. Indeed, 400,000 Albanians have left Kosovo to work abroad since 1990. But, preoccupied by the war in Bosnia, he was unable to fulfil his aim of clearing and assimilating Kosovo.

The Albanian masses mounted stubborn resistance, building their own underground education system. They conducted their own referendum, voting unanimously for separation and independence from Yugoslavia. In 1992 they also elected a parliament, which is dominated by the bourgeois democratic pro-imperialist LDK of Ibrahim Rugova. The second party is the Parliamentary Party of Kosovo, now headed by Adem Demaci, often known as the “Mandela of Kosovo” because of the many years he has spent in prison.

In the recent past important developments have changed the political importance and social explosiveness of the Albanian national question. Most important was the Albanian revolution of spring 1997. It enormously boosted the morale of the Kosovo Albanians and led to the widespread smuggling of

weapons to arm guerrilla fighters. Furthermore, the overthrow of Sali Berisha removed a reliable agent of imperialism, who also had a firm grip over the traditional Kosovan leadership (which is – like Berisha – closely linked to the northern Albanian ethnic group, the Gëgs).

Of course the new Albanian government of Fatos Nano is also an agent of imperialism and supports a peaceful solution with no change of borders in the short term. For this reason, like Berisha, Nano collaborates with Rugova. But it is a much weaker government, with less control over its country, the people and the bourgeois political institutions. Moreover, it is still in conflict with Berisha. In addition the Nano government cannot exert the same amount of control over Rugova as Berisha had.

Rugova’s strategy was, in essence, a policy of peaceful coexistence with the Serbian repressive forces. He called on the masses not to demonstrate or rebel, but instead to build a shadow state with a privileged bureaucracy. His policy is oriented towards drawing in the imperialist powers. While he is formally the president of the independent republic of Kosovo, he calls on the UN to make Kosovo a UN-protectorate and asks NATO to send troops to defend it! It is no surprise that this policy of exclusively passive resistance has exhausted and disillusioned the masses, whose conditions are constantly deteriorating.

Since the beginning of October 1997, there have been several mass demonstrations of up to 20,000 people despite Rugova’s calls to stay at home. There is also a fast growing guerrilla movement, the Kosovo Liberation Army (UCK), which has carried out a series of armed attacks on the occupation forces.

Western journalists report that the UCK has already turned parts of the region into no-go areas for the Serb

It is now plain that the masses, after a decade of savage oppression, want to get out of Yugoslavia. All genuine democrats must support their right to do so.

Albanians

LRCI: Solidarity in Vienna

"We will all go to Kosovo to fight"

THROUGHOUT MARCH, members of the Gruppe ArbeiterInnenstandpunkt – Austrian section of the LRCI (ASt) – have taken part in demonstrations of solidarity with the Albanians of Kosovo. Nearly 2,000 Albanians rallied in Vienna to protest against the Serbian terror, to call for the right of self-determination and to demand autopsies on, and an enquiry into, the circumstances of the killing of villagers in Drenica.

Austria has a large Albanian immigrant and refugee population and the demonstration was organised by a committee representing all the Albanian parties and clubs in the country. The ASt was invited, along with all the parties in parliament and the Austrian Communist Party, to speak from the platform.

However, beyond some journalists and two speakers from the Green Party no Austrians bothered to come. The ASt comrades themselves informed the left about the event in advance and it was also announced in one of the big daily newspapers. The mood of the demonstrators, most of them workers and also a substantial number of them young, was very militant. Slogans like "Drenica, Drenica", "We will all go to the Kosovo to fight", "UCK, UCK" were repeatedly chanted.

The two speakers of the Green Party and the liberal journalist Christine von Khol spoke in favour of autonomy, non-violence and dialogue. The Albanians were, of course, happy that at least someone in Austria spoke against Serbian oppression. But such liberal slogans couldn't satisfy the urgent needs of their struggle. So they

received some friendly but modest applause.

It was left to the ASt to speak out on the most burning tasks of international solidarity. We were the only ones to call for international solidarity with the national liberation struggle of the Kosovan Albanians, for critical but unconditional support for the armed struggle of the UCK. We warned against any illusions in imperialism and argued against any interference or intervention by NATO. The response was overwhelmingly enthusiastic. Our speaker was interrupted several times by applause and slogans like "International Solidarity", "Freedom for Kosovo" and "UN, NATO, Milosevic – Hands off Kosovo".

The ASt contingent carried a banner with the slogans, "For a Socialist Balkan Federation! Solidarity with the national liberation struggle in Kosovo!" and distributed a leaflet condemning the treacherous, corrupt and pro-imperialist Rugova leadership and arguing against any imperialist intervention as well as against any UN or EU sanctions against Serbia. It also pointed out the need for arming the people and a strategy of mass action to overcome the limits of the guerrilla struggle of the UCK.

The response was tremendous. Not only in that we had to print more leaflets during the rally because after the first 20 minutes all were distributed, but also because of the

large amount of literature that we sold.

In the evening there was a debate in an Albanian centre. The room was packed, many people having to stand because there were no free seats. The debate – where the ASt had a speaker – polarised between the representatives of the LDK (Rugova's party) and ourselves who, along with other militant Albanians, criticised Rugova's pacifist and pro-imperialist policy.

We made several contacts with militant and particularly younger Albanians and will continue solidarity work with the national liberation struggle of the Kosovo Albanian workers and youth. ■



Serb brutality in Pristina

forces. There is a growing sympathy for them amongst the population. There are other revolutionary petit bourgeois nationalists like the Unikomb – Party of National Unity of Albania – who favour mass demonstrations and an armed insurrection rather than guerrilla warfare, which is necessarily elitist.

Nearly the whole Albanian population rejects a federal solution within "Yugoslavia". This is a purely Serb state since Montenegro is small and totally Serb in language and culture. No Serbia-Montenegro-Kosovo federation would give the Albanians meaningful equal rights. Yet imperialism insists that the Albanians limit themselves to autonomy with Yugoslavia. It is now plain that the masses, after a decade of savage oppression, want to get out of Yugoslavia. All genuine democrats must support their right to do so.

The workers' councils which emerged in Southern Albania last year have disappeared. This fact, taken together with the democratic aspirations of the masses, means we must call for a revolutionary constituent assembly in Kosovo, elected by Albanian workers and peasants, whose deputies must be recallable by local and regional councils if the masses are not to be deceived by their own representatives, as occurred in Albania last year.

While workers and students should

demand that the LDK government supports their struggle, they should have no illusions in the pro-imperialist, bourgeois clique around Rugova. They should be removed as quickly as possible. Workers and students should build committees of struggle and elect leaders out of their own ranks.

The mass support for the guerrilla struggle of the UCK in Kosovo reflects the desire of the workers and peasants to fight against the Great-Serbian chauvinists. But, while actions against agents of oppression and collaborators are justified and necessary in insurrectionary situations, Kosovans cannot and must not replace mass struggle with a strategy of individual terror. Only an organised mass defence militia in the villages and towns could create the basis for a successful armed insurrection.

Guerrillaist

While we criticise the petit bourgeois guerrillaist strategy of the UCK, we critically support their struggle. We therefore support campaigns for material aid for the Albanian people and its liberation struggle.

The League for a Revolutionary Communist International calls for

- Support for the revolutionary struggle of the Kosovo Albanians for national liberation!

- Immediate recognition by all states of the "Republic of Kosovo"!
- The absolute and unhindered right to self-determination! It must be the free choice of the Kosovo Albanians whether they want to live in an independent Kosovo Republic, in a confederation, federation or complete union with Albania!
- Full rights for the minorities inside this area (Serbs, Greeks etc.)!
- For a Socialist Federation of the Balkans!

Communists oppose any change of the borders by imperialist diplomacy. We call on the masses of Kosovo, Albania and Macedonia, who have already organised heroic struggles against their oppressors in the past 12 months, to solve the national question in a revolutionary way.

The imperialist agent, Rugova, demands that Kosovo should become a UN protectorate, occupied by NATO troops. This would be a catastrophe for the national liberation of the Albanians, for the liberty of all the Balkan peoples and in particular for the workers and peasants.

Therefore, all socialists and democrats say:

- Imperialists – Hands off the Balkans!
- All NATO/SFOR troops out of Bosnia, Macedonia and Albania!



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

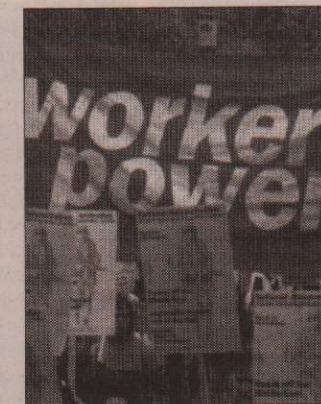
is an integral feature of capitalism systematically oppressing people on the basis of race, age, sex, or sexual orientation. We are for the liberation of women and for the building of a working class women's movement, not an "all class" autonomous movement. We are for the liberation of all of the oppressed. 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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British Section of the League for a Revolutionary Communist International

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Stop Blair's retreat on union recognition

Time to fight for union rights

NEARLY ONE year after the election there is still no sign that Labour will honour its manifesto promise of a law to force employers to recognise unions where more than half the relevant workforce votes for it.

The employers, in the shape of the Confederation of British Industry (CBI), are insisting on so many changes to the legislation that it could be at best meaningless and at worst a new weapon to attack union rights!

This has stirred "Old Labour". The Trade Union Group of Labour MPs warned of a revolt if Blair gives in to the CBI. John Edmonds, the leader of the general union the GMB, threatened a countryside-style march on London.

Edmonds should use the power and money of the GMB to organise such a march right away. If a rag-bag of reactionaries, defending wealth and aristocratic privileges, were able to wring immediate concessions from Blair, think what a mass march of workers could do.

Commentators are predicting that Blair's final decision could be a "defining moment" for the Labour government: the first direct clash between the interests of the bosses and the organised working class. Something the union leaders are keen to avoid.

They have quietly accepted that the whole gamut of Tory anti-union laws will remain. They have done nothing about Labour's retreat from John Smith's promise of "employment rights from day one". In the public sector they have restricted opposition to derisory staged pay increases to a few posters and leaflets.

For them, a purely verbal



Noon's workers in dispute: their management refused union recognition but will Labour's proposals help them?

spat with Blair over recognition can mask the absence of a fight over pay, conditions and union rights in general.

But it is vital that the rank and file of the whole trade union movement makes this fight a lot more than a symbolic tussle, and forces Labour to honour its commitments in full.

Recognition means that employers agree to negotiate with the trade unions on pay, conditions and health and safety. It means union members have a right to be represented in disciplinary hearings.

In those industries where employers went on a derecognition rampage under the Tories – notably the print, publishing and transport sectors – the final

wording of the law will be all important.

Labour's manifesto promised a majority vote of the "relevant workforce". But what is the "relevant workforce"? The employers will divide and restructure businesses to make it difficult to get a majority, unless the law specifically forbids this. The CBI wants the employer to define the "appropriate bargaining unit". It also wants non-voting workers to be treated as "no" voters. It wants ballots to be triggered only by a preliminary ballot, with 30% voting for a vote.

It wants to exempt small companies with less than 50 employees from the law – a concession that would leave some

of the most exploited and bullied workers, those in the sweatshops, unprotected. This would also be an invitation to big employers to break up businesses to avoid talking to the unions.

Even where recognition is won the CBI wants to restrict the bargaining agenda to pay, hours and holidays. It insists that employers should have the right to circumvent agreed pay and conditions by issuing individual contracts. One worker at a derecognised magazine publishers in London explained what this means in practice:

"Come the day of the pay rise the toilet cubicles are full of people quietly ripping open envelopes to find out what

they've got. The percentage pay rise is never published – you have to guess. Plus it's all supposed to be secret. When they launch or buy-in new magazines you always find out that these workers' contracts have bits missing – like paid overtime. And job titles mean nothing. You can have one person on a higher grade earning less than somebody on a lower one – since derecognition pay has stagnated...except for the managers."

One of the most ludicrous things about the proposed new law is that there are no sanctions proposed against employers who simply choose to break it. The TUC has not opposed this, calling instead for a binding, central arbitration committee. What use

is arbitration without massive fines and the power of legal enforcement?

If the CBI gets its way it will be an uphill struggle to win recognition in plants where the bosses are determined to resist. But it could also open up further rounds of derecognition. Employers where there is no tradition of organisation could spring a ballot on the workforce, probably combined with a one-off bribe, to get themselves legal backing for derecognition.

The union bureaucrats, whose whole existence revolves around mediating between the rank and file workers and the bosses, see derecognition as a threat to their own livelihoods. The NUJ, at its annual conference last month, voted to target 50 big workplaces for recognition. It voted for resources and full timer time to be put behind the effort. But ultimately the effort will have to come from below.

It is likely that some indication of the final wording will be given in April, with the White Paper *Fairness at Work* published in May. We must flood the unions now with resolutions demanding a recalled TUC congress to plan resistance if Labour gives in to the CBI. There must be a mass campaign of demos, meetings and pickets. There must be massive backing throughout the unions for each and every existing struggle for recognition.

But what we really need is a comprehensive set of rights at work, applicable from day one, and the repeal of all the Tory anti-union laws. After all we don't want "fairness at work" – as if the Tories upset some sort of even balance. We want a massive shift of power and income away from the fat cat managers and towards the workers. ■

For a mass march now! Recall the TUC!