

# Workers power

Socialism, Internationalism, Revolution

British Section of the League for a Revolutionary Communist International

No 222 May 1998 ★ 50p

Inside this issue:

Eight page pull-out section

**No justice, No peace!**

**Class Struggle**

Why we say

**"VOTE NO"**

to the Irish peace deal

**workers power**

## RECOGNITION: TUC BOWS TO BOSSES AND BLAIR

# Fight for



Critchley workers on strike for recognition

# union rights!

### WORKERS IN firms that recognise trade unions get:

- higher pay rates;
- safer working conditions;
- better contracts and fairer grievance procedures.

That's why, in poll after opinion poll, four out of five workers say they would like to join a union. And that's why the bosses are fighting hard to dilute the forthcoming law on union recognition.

Labour gave a clear manifesto pledge to restore full trade union rights wherever a majority of the "relevant workforce" win a recognition ballot.

Despite 90% of Labour MPs and all the TUC affiliated unions supporting this, Blair is about to break his manifesto promise. He is prepared to ditch the unions and go along with the bosses' outfit, the Confederation of British Industry (CBI). The CBI want:

- exemptions for employers where the workforce is 50 or less
- employers to decide who is the "relevant workforce"
- all abstentions to be counted as "No" votes
- a ban on strikes for union recognition
- proof of 30% union mem-

bership before a ballot and derecognition ballots if 30% favour one

- recognition to mean limited pay negotiating rights only.

This would turn recognition rights into their opposite: the right of the bosses to get the names of trade unionists in order to victimise them; ban strikes; limit trade union powers; ignore millions of workers stuck in small, viciously anti-union workplaces; and, crucially, to derecognise unions where they already exist.

At ADT Security Services the AEEU represents 823 members – a clear majority of the 1,500 engineers. The company claim the relevant workforce is all 4,000 of its staff, including office workers, cleaners and even managers, and are threatening to derecognise the union. In the last week of April, the AEEU won a 95% majority for strike action against this attack, but if the CBI gets its way such a strike would be outlawed.

Predictably, the TUC has watered down its position and proposed a compromise to the Labour government. General Secretary John Monks emerged from an emergency TUC General Council meeting on 20 April



Monks: anything you say, Tony

to declare:

"There could be a case for a minimum vote in order to ensure that there is a basis for sustainable collective bargaining."

Why? Surely, if just one worker wanted to be represented by a trade union, the employer should recognise that worker's right. As Unison chief, Rodney Bickerstaffe, pointed out in reply to Monks, "We should not be in a position of talking tactics or waiting for Mr Murdoch's view".

Stupid tactics at that! The general council's concession of

a 30% threshold and exemption for workforces of 10 or less (i.e. 3.5 million of Britain's lowest paid workers) will only encourage Blair and his buddies in the CBI to press even harder for their full package.

Bill Morris of the TGWU has called the forthcoming White Paper on recognition, "fundamental for the future of workers' rights". Along with Ken Jackson of the AEEU and Lew Adams of the rail drivers' union, ASLEF, Morris has pressed for a recall congress of the TUC. John Edmonds of the GMB, not-

ing how Blair caved in to the reactionary massed ranks of the Countryside March a few months back, has raised the demand for a national demo to support the TUC's position.

These union bureaucrats are directly dependent on union members' subs. Recognition is crucial in persuading millions of workers who favour trade unions to join one. After all, if your boss refuses to negotiate with your union or allow union officials to represent you, why join? These union leaders want to rebuild their subs base through a set of legal rights, guaranteeing recognition. That is why they are sabre rattling.

But they are not prepared to lead a fight for workers' rights that goes beyond the odd demonstration and behind-closed-doors deals. Lew Adams wrote in last month's *Socialist Campaign News*, "The government's honeymoon period is long over... We may have to mobilise our full lobbying strength." The problem is that lobbying will not be enough to win full trade union rights – we need mass workers' action.

All the union leaders have a far more limited view of union rights and how to fight for them.

Every TUC union favours an Independent Representation Agency to decide on the "relevant workforce" and a Central Arbitration Committee to administer the new law, rather than leading a fight for workers' control in the workplaces. None of them support a campaign of strikes – from Noon's food factory to ADT Security Services to every sweatshop in Britain – to win our demands.

If union recognition laws are to benefit derecognised, unorganised and super-exploited workers, we need:

- no exemptions for small firms, no minimum turn-outs, for unions to decide who constitutes the "relevant workforce" and no derecognition ballots
- the right to full recognition and full negotiating powers for all trade union members
- full employment rights for every employee from day one
- the right to strike for union recognition and over any other issue
- repeal of all the anti-union laws.

This is what the Labour government should have implemented in its first week of office, never mind its first year. It is what we demand of it now. ■

**RECALL THE TUC!**

Now turn to page 3



## Tameside care workers' strike

## Time to step up the action

**WORKERS FOR** Tameside Care Group (TCG), which runs privatised elderly people's homes, have walked out in response to proposals by their manager, Alan Firth, for pay cuts, loss of sick pay and holiday entitlement. To add insult to injury, Firth has also just been awarded a £9,000 a year wage rise!

TCG represents the latest manifestation of the infamous Tameside Enterprises Limited (TEL) established by Labour councillors. TEL collapsed in 1992 with debts of £3 million, amidst a massive corruption scandal – many of the directors were convicted. The result of this collapse was a union agreed pay cut and no pay rise for the last five years.

In October 1997, the GMB and Unison finally agreed to ballot for industrial action over pay, winning overwhelming support from the workforce. Management's response was to propose a further round of pay cuts! Then on the 30 January, they issued 90 day notices of redundancy. A second, joint union ballot resulted in a 4:1 vote for indefinite strike action, and the care workers have been out since 30 March.

The dispute is now at a key stage. With the 90 day notices due to expire, the strikers need support and a strategy to win.

After several weeks of indefinite strike action, management are determined to ride out the dispute. The longer it continues, the greater the chances of a drift back to work, a union

sponsored sell-out, and the likelihood of defeat. If recent disputes like the dockers, Magnet and Hillingdon have shown us anything, it is that protracted disputes can strengthen the position

of the bosses and wear down the strikers.

Those workplaces where TCG workers or agency staff are scabbing on the dispute have to be picketed out. Mass, mil-

itant pickets must refuse to let the scabs through, even if this means breaking the anti-union laws. Agency offices should be targeted for direct action and disruption by the strikers and their sup-

porters – every care worker should refuse to work with agency employees and unions should organise effective boycotts now.

The workplaces where the strike is solid need to be occupied. Strikers' control of emergency cover can ensure residents are not at risk, while securing TCG's property as ransom.

The strikers need to demand that the Labour Council supports them and that TCG is taken back under council control. Seven years of private sector operation have clearly failed the residents and the workers.

Many strikers realise the significance of Labour's promise to introduce a minimum wage. Yet, under current proposals, those care workers under 26 would not be included in a minimum wage and government proposals for a level to be set at around £3.20 an hour would not address the chronic problem of low pay in the care sector – the proposed pay cut for the Tameside care workers would be above this level. The strikers must demand that Labour sets the minimum wage now, at a level that meets the needs of workers – £6 an hour. ■

**WP: How is the strike going?**

Elli: The dispute, amongst trade union members, is absolutely solid. Out of 11 care homes we have six out completely; two with about 50% of the workforce out and three homes where the strike is weak. We have been out for over three weeks now, we are not going away. Now we have done three weeks, we are not giving in... Management are using nursing agencies, APEX and Allied Medicare to scab on the dispute. It looks as though Allied Medicare are recruiting a scab workforce to replace us after 1 May, the day the 90 day notices expire.

**WP: It seems that management are serious about breaking the workforce. What's your next step?**

Elli: We have to increase the pressure on the Trust board, and make them accountable. At the moment nobody on the board is taking responsibility. Tameside council, which is Labour controlled, has a 20% share in the Trust. They say they "sympathise" but can't do anything. But, Alan Firth, the TCG manager, is blaming a council grant cut for having to cut pay. Yet, the "non-profit making" Trust actually made £750,000 last year. Firth now blames the Bank of Scotland for refusing to allow this money to be spent. Other people on the Trust board include a local NUT branch official who refuses to take sides. It seems

**Elli, a Tameside catering worker with over twenty five years of employment in elderly care and taking strike action for the first time, spoke to Workers Power**

we are fighting the Labour Party, other trade unions, the banks and the council – and none of them will take responsibility.

We have to make what's happening to us a national issue. We have to increase the pressure on the board, local MPs and the Labour government. The dispute is of national significance. TEL was the model that many councils, like Manchester, used to privatise community care. We have to inform other areas about the attacks. If they can get away with it here, it can happen elsewhere.

**WP: What kind of support have you been getting?**

Elli: In Tameside we've got the public behind us. We've spoken to the residents' families – they support us 100% but are worried about the care their relatives are receiving. They have sent

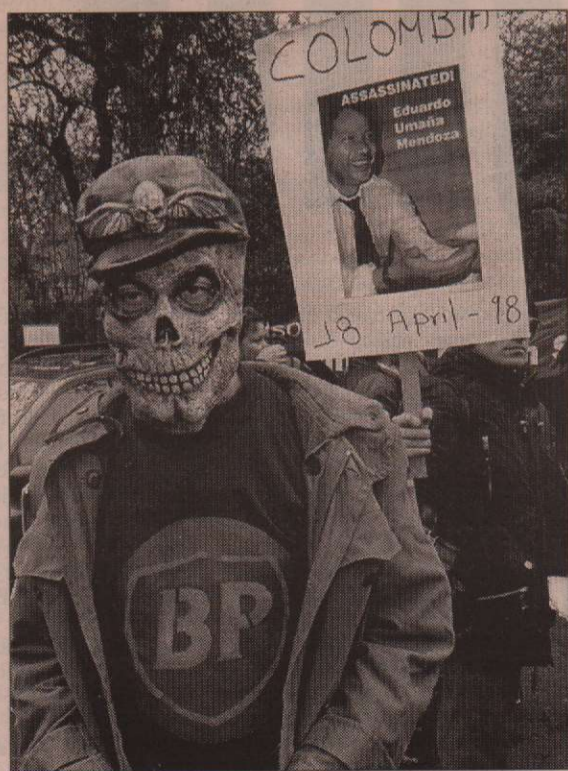
dozens of letters of complaint to Firth about the drop in the standard of care the agency scabs are giving. They only cross the picket lines for the cash – not the old people.

We are organising demonstrations and visiting other trade union branches, and we are appealing for donations to keep the strike going – the strike pay doesn't go very far. And we are asking care workers to boycott APEX and Allied Medicare. We have to use every possible means to increase the pressure on the scabs, on the non-members in work, and on Firth and the Trust board.

**Invite a Tameside Care Group striker to your next meeting and rush donations for the strikers to:**

**Tameside Unison, 29 Booth Street, Ashton-U-Lyne, OL6 7IB  
Tel: Ashton-U-Lyne 308 2452**

## BP cover blown



**SUPPORTERS OF** the Coalition Against BP in Colombia staged a successful – and very noisy – picket of Chatham House in London on 20 April.

British Petroleum (BP) were hypocritically attending a conference to discuss multinationals and human rights. Shell, complicit in human rights abuses in Nigeria, was also present.

BP has been attempting to portray itself in a new light following allegations of collaboration with death squads in Colombia. This conference, with Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch in attendance to discuss human rights with

these companies, would have been a perfect public relations exercise. The Coalition organised the picket to expose BP's continued collaboration with the murderous Colombian army. The Coalition's presence certainly had an impact on the proceedings. Richard Newton of BP was forced to defend their collaboration and funding of the Colombian army. Incredibly, he said that the only alternative was to build their own private army!

The Coalition demands that BP in Colombia stops funding the military, recognises trade unions and compensates peasants for the land they have lost. ■

## Post: Local strikes reveal anger

## Build a national fightback now

**MARGARET BECKETT**, the President of the Board of Trade, has given the green light for the privatisation of the Post Office. She has stated that "minority share sales" is an option being actively considered. Even this partial privatisation, which could raise as much as £2 billion, is far beyond what the Tories would have risked.

The Post Office, of which Royal Mail forms a substantial part, is indeed a lucrative prize for any wheeler-dealer wanting to snap up the 49% share offer. Already it earns over half a billion pounds profit a year; if it succeeds in securing the National Lottery franchise, future shareholders will scoop regular jackpots.

This report should set the alarm bells ringing in the Communication Workers Union (CWU). It comes just as Royal Mail management has stepped up its assaults on postal workers' jobs and conditions of service.

Royal Mail's war of attrition against its workforce involves:

- a drive to increase casualisation
- a plan to concentrate its operations at a handful of out-of-town sites to try and break workplace organisation
- an attack on take home pay rates
- victimisation of individual militants.

The employers know that this risks a major confrontation with the workers, but that is their strategy. Royal Mail want to wear down the CWU through a prolonged guerrilla war, before

launching a full frontal assault – privatisation.

Already, the battleground has been opened up by Royal Mail in a number of areas. In Liverpool there was a walk-out in the main sorting office for one week in March over the suspension of a driver. The underlying factor was the plan to close the sorting office and transfer work to a greenfield site in Warrington.

In Birmingham, a three-day strike by delivery workers has been followed up by a two-day strike in response to Royal Mail's slashing of overtime payments. The strikers did not object to new workers being taken on, but rejected management's attempts to cut their income by approximately £80 a week when basic take home pay is only around £150 a week.

Clearly, management were transferring – not increasing – the amount of money to allow for an expansion of the workforce. At the same time, they hoped to set established workers against new recruits.

In London, the action started in Willesden in the North West. There had been a long-running dispute over the suspension of three CWU members, which sparked an unofficial strike during the night shift on 25 March. This provoked a wave of walk outs at several major sorting offices, including Mount Pleasant, Nine Elms and the Northern District Office at Islington. These strikes carried on for three to four

days. The three victimised workers have been reinstated.

These disputes show that rank and file postal workers still retain a highly combative level of organisation. This enables militants to lead very effective defensive battles – almost, always independently of the CWU bureaucrats, and very often in defiance of the anti-union laws. But, to win big set-piece showdowns, like the battle against privatisation, we need the strength of the whole union brought into play.

Unfortunately, the recent elections in the CWU saw Blairite Derek Hodgson secure the general secretary post. Like his predecessor, Alan Johnson, Hodgson will not lead a national fight to defend jobs, conditions and defeat privatisation.

The high vote for the left candidate Billy Hayes (17,000 votes) shows there is a strong potential within the CWU to wrest control of the union machinery from the right-wing. In the past, the CWU left has been divided between workplace militants who give pride of place to delivering wildcat solidarity strike action and a Broad Left who concentrate on winning elections.

Neither strategy can stop the government and management from continuing their attacks. That is why we need to build a rank and file movement that can transform the CWU from top to bottom and spearhead a national fightback. ■



## RAIL: Private profits – public subsidies

# Labour's track record

**B**EFORE THE election, as a Rail, Maritime and Transport (RMT) union-sponsored MP, John Prescott spoke out forcefully against Tory privatisation and underfunding. The Labour manifesto called for a "publicly owned and accountable rail network".

Despite its dilapidated state, the sell-off of British Rail to over 100 different companies was one of the most unpopular Tory privatisations. The subsequent £1.8 billion a year subsidies to the profiteers deepened that anger, as the cost to the taxpayer doubled.

Now Deputy Prime Minister, Prescott has hesitated, huffed and finally delivered a killer punch to all those who hoped for a decently funded, fully integrated rail system.

At the beginning of this year, LCR, the company which runs Eurostar, demanded an increase in its subsidy to a staggering £3 billion. Prescott gave LCR 30 days to sort it out or, "preparations will be made for an orderly handover of the business to the public sector". Thirty days later, this headline news was followed by a footnote saying that the deadline had been extended – not another whisper about renationalisation.

Now Connex, the rail company which runs (or, more usually, cancels) trains on the highly profitable South East network has put in a claim for an eight-year extension to its franchise and a further £392 million grant.

Connex was emboldened by Prescott's failure to punish LCR. And Connex's bid came just weeks after Prescott announced his "Third Way" plan for London Underground. On closer inspection, Labour's "Third Way" seems remarkably similar to the Tories'

first way.

John Prescott wants to lease the Tube's track, signalling and maintenance systems to private companies for 15 years. This may involve three or four contracts, with the network being split according to the different lines. Prescott calls this "partnership", but its real name is privatisation.

Over 8,000 workers will be automatically transferred into the private sector. Jobs, wages and conditions will be attacked as the companies seek to increase their profits. Subsidies of up to half a billion pounds – over and above the investment costs – will be handed over. The experience of the Central Line modernisation programme and the Jubilee Line extension, both of which were carried out under Private Finance Initiatives, suggest delays and inefficiencies will be rife.

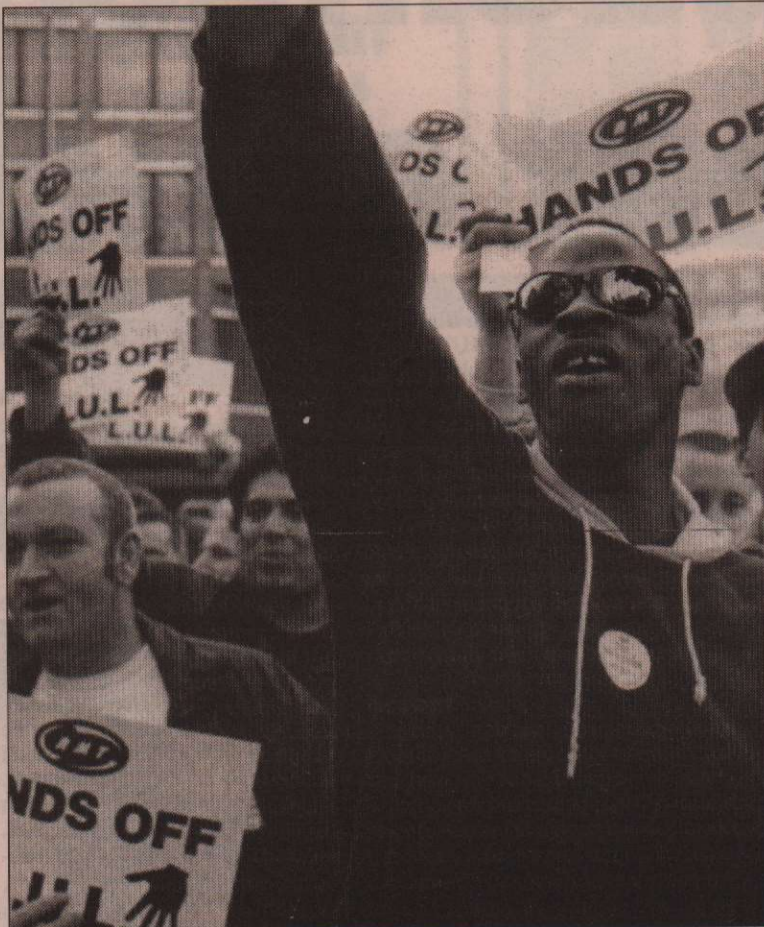
Already, London Transport is gearing up to make sure that railworkers and passengers pay for privatisation. Leaked management documents reveal that derecognition of the rail unions is firmly on the agenda.

How have the Labour left and the unions responded? John McDonnell MP claims, "It is almost certainly better than wholesale privatisation, as proposed by the Tories." His only alternative is to propose changing the Public Sector Borrowing rules to allow Prescott to opt

for public sector investment and to include railworkers' and working class passengers' reps to sit on the management board. The RMT suggests that London Under-

ground could issue bonds and tax parking and cars to raise money for investment.

These "lefts" are whistling in the wind. Labour could fund an overhaul,



Underground workers demonstrate against privatisation threat

extension and modernisation of the tube system tomorrow if it had the political will to do so. There is no need to tax ordinary Londoners or change obscure accountancy rules; they just have to tax the rich.

As for including workers and consumers in management structures, this is not a new idea. The last Labour government used this method in the then nationalised car industry. It ended with shop stewards arguing for speed-ups, cuts and even plant closures, as the only agreed way to "save the company". The same would happen to any union representative who was incor-

porated onto London Underground's top table today.

Revolutionary communists have an alternative solution to the right-wing reformism of John Prescott and the left-wing version of McDonnell, Lew Adams and Jimmy Knapp. We don't start with an attempt to work out how the present, capitalist system can be managed better, but with what the working class needs. We say:

- Renationalise the entire public transport system with no compensation to the profiteers
- For railworkers' and labour movement control of the transport system,

including pricing and timetabling

- For a massively expanded tube and rail network as part of a fully integrated public transport system, subsidised to ensure low fares and discourage unnecessary car use

- Tax the rich!

To fight for these demands we need to link them up with the issues facing rank and file railworkers.

Northern Line guards in the RMT have held two partially successful 24-hour strikes in defence of their jobs, which are threatened later this year. Two more are planned for 30 April and 4 May, but the ballot of Northern Line drivers has been delayed due to management intimidation and ASLEF guards have been instructed to "work as normal". This is nonsense. RMT and ASLEF should work together; rank and file tube workers must ensure an all-out strike on the Northern Line takes place, even if this means breaking the anti-union laws.

At the same time, RMT are balloting 13,000 maintenance engineers on the overground network for a series of 24-hour strikes for higher pay, longer holidays, better sick pay and a shorter working week. According to the union, a "combined profit of £300 million last year" was made by the 14 companies involved. Strikes are expected to start in June.

Sectionalism, which ensures that ASLEF and RMT workers cross each others' picket lines, that overground and underground workers fight separately, that drivers, guards, station and maintenance workers are balloted over different issues at different times, is a dead end. We need unity and the way to get it is to build cross union rank and file committees to co-ordinate and spread the existing action. ■

**Lobby the Parliamentary Labour Party at Central Hall, Westminster**  
2pm, 30 April  
Called by RMT, ASLEF and TSSA

## THE FIGHT FOR RECOGNITION

# Rank and file must organise

**L**ABOUR'S RETREAT on recognition could open up a major conflict between the labour movement and the government: but only if rank and file workers seize the initiative from the bureaucrats and take the fight to Blair.

The TUC is meeting Margaret Beckett to discuss the Green Paper on Employment Rights at Central Hall, Westminster on 6 May. Every trade unionist should support the lobby of this meeting, called by the Morning Star.

All trade unionists – in recognised workplaces or not – should pass motions, calling for a mass national demonstration for union rights and for a special TUC Congress to hammer out our demands and a strategy to win them.

But we cannot rely on the TUC leaders to press for full union rights let alone the repeal of anti-union laws. They want a deal that helps them secure their own perks, privileges and salaries. They want a deal that keeps them cosy with the Labour government. And they want a "campaign" for recognition that they control, the better to strangle it at a moment of their own choosing.

### Protests

They will certainly not be organising the militant action needed to scare Blair and his ministers into keeping Labour's election pledge. Whether or not these leaders call for protests it will have to be rank and file workers that organise the fight, both in our work-

places and in the trade unions. We will have to ensure there is no backsliding over our rights at work and that a militant campaign actually happens.

The leadership of the Socialist Labour Party has initiated a campaign over union rights and against the anti-unions laws, Reclaim Our Rights (ROR). At the ROR meeting held in April it agreed to build a mass demonstration for 1 May 1999. This initiative should be supported by every trade unionist. But the problem is that there is a key struggle between trade unionists and the Labour government happening now.

We cannot let the TUC leadership cave in to the Labour government and the CBI. Nor can we allow the likes of Morris, Bickerstaffe, Adams

and Edmonds to speak fine words but do nothing.

Resolutions should be faxed into every national union's headquarters and the TUC offices condemning the betrayal by the Labour government and the feeble response of the TUC. Labour Party affiliated trade unions should raise this question in their local parties and demand that all sponsored MPs fight to force Blair to honour his election pledge.

### Explain

Meetings should be organised in workplaces to explain Labour's planned attack on trade union members and their rights at work. Trade union activists and militants from different unions should join together to organise town and city

wide meetings and demonstrations to launch the campaign for our rights. Above all, we need to build a campaign of mass action – strikes, demos, mass lobbies and pickets.

The union leaders will say all of this is "old fashioned" and out of place in New Britain. The Australian dockers – who are up against bosses who want to derecognise and smash their union – have given the best reply to such bureaucratic claptrap. Their strikes, their mass pickets, the solidarity action they won from every other section of the union movement all threw the bosses into outright panic in a matter of days.

We need to organise to do the same to win full trade union rights for every worker in Britain. ■

### Manchester Workers Power meetings Towards Freedom or Oppression

**Ireland:** Thursday 30 April, 7.30pm Manchester University, Oxford Road, meeting room 3

**Palestine:** Thursday 7 May, 7.30pm Manchester University, Oxford Road, meeting room 2

### Liverpool Trades Council – 150 years of fighting

Liverpool Trade Union Council is celebrating 150 years in struggle, 1848 to 1998, with: A public debate on the future of the trade unions, 1 May, 7pm Trade Union centre, Hardman Street, with a Liverpool docker and the Deputy General Secretary of the TUC speaking;

A march and rally, 2 May, 12 noon, Myrtle Parade;

A music night, 2 May, 9pm, Upstairs at the Picket, Hardman Street. All welcome.



## NUT CONFERENCE: Blunkett defends EAZs

# Big business – hands off our education!

**D**ELEGATES TO the conference of the National Union of Teachers (NUT) this year may have thought it was taking place in 1984, rather than 1998. George Orwell's vision appeared to become reality in Blackpool for five days over Easter. Big Brother Blunkett was watching us, so we had all better behave. New Labour speak was rife. We were told that:

□ massive attacks on national conditions, including new procedures to allow managers to sack you in four weeks, should be referred to as a "victory" not a defeat

□ calling for the sacking of Chris Woodhead, the much hated Ofsted chief, makes it more difficult to get rid of him

□ private businesses involved in Education Action Zones (EAZs) don't really want to make a profit.

Back to 1998 and it is clear that the NUT leadership is bankrupt. Its strategy, despite a year of attacks on teachers ranging from "naming and shaming" to a pay cut in real terms, remains to cosy up to Labour in the vain hope that Blunkett might listen to General Secretary Doug McAvoy. The lesson that we should learn from Labour's huge election victory, we were told by McAvoy, was that they could not be challenged. No Doug, the lesson is that millions of working class people voted for them, gave them the power to address the real problems facing education in Britain – and yet they have done nothing. They are traitors.

Education Secretary David Blunkett

addressed two conferences in Blackpool on Easter Monday: the NUT and the press conference immediately afterwards. His policy seemed to have changed within minutes. Addressing the NUT delegates he seemed nervous. His speech was full of reassurance and attacks on extremists who might suggest that he would do anything to damage state education. He wanted us to be "partners" in education. Conference was not convinced and his speech received a very lukewarm response.

### Composure

By the time he met the press outside Blunkett had recovered his composure and his true politics, proudly announcing that he planned to ignore the NUT on EAZs and, of course, businesses would be allowed to make profits out of EAZ schools.

At times the conference broke from the Executive's purblind strategy, and we glimpsed a real sense of anger amongst rank and file teachers. The conference began and ended with important victories for the left. On the question of action over conditions in sixth form colleges and for a national contract to cover all teachers, conference voted for action. No surprise that the leadership attempted to amend both motions to remove any commitment to actually fighting for our demands, but their amendments were defeated.

Overall, however, conference was characterised by a failure to agree vir-

### BY AN NUT DELEGATE

tually anything. Numerous motions ran out of time and fell automatically. The leadership showed a totally dismissive attitude towards union democracy and the rights of delegates by cutting debates, needlessly prolonging their own speeches and bureaucratically manipulating the agenda.

The key issue at conference was the government's plan to set up EAZs. And on this issue the Executive succeeded in carrying through their strategy of piecemeal resistance after the EAZs have been set up. An amendment to the leadership's motion demanding total opposition to EAZs was defeated. Instead, the union now has a position that, if certain guarantees are in place, EAZs will not seriously damage education.

This ignores the reality that EAZs, once they are established, will clearly have the power to vary national pay and conditions. Separate funding, removal of local control and power to vary the curriculum within EAZ schools will be a fundamental threat to the entire comprehensive education system.

EAZs are the means by which Labour will begin a thorough-going attack on the teachers' trade unions. They will also allow the government to continue its systematic underfunding of schools and its policy of divide and rule.

Most importantly, the EAZs will hand over the running of groups of up

to 20 schools to big business, who will not only squeeze profits from the schools but also ensure that working class students receive an education which reflects their values: numeracy, literacy and obedience. EAZs mean the privatisation of education.

### Dominated

The issue of the EAZs dominated the fringe meetings of the left. The Socialist Teachers' Alliance (STA) and the SWP had strikingly similar strategies for fighting the attack: for a national demonstration in defence of the status quo and support for local strikes against attacks on wages and conditions.

When Workers Power supporters, however, raised the need for a pre-emptive national strike to stop any EAZs from being established and called for a united front to fight for teachers', parents' and students' control of education – our arguments were well received. About 40 delegates bought our Socialist Education Action Programme as a result.

These discussions amongst the left must be continued – and, crucially, turned into action. The unofficial conference, called by the STA and Liverpool and Croydon NUT Associations on 9 May, must hammer out a strategy and decide on action. With the first wave of EAZs coming in September, we have no time to lose.

The task for militants in the NUT following conference is to heed the words of the Australian teachers' union, whose guest speaker gave a rousing

speech about workplace organisation, and the example of the Australian dockers.

We must ensure that the Executive is forced to act. They have a long history of ignoring any conference motion which entails organising strike action. In sixth form colleges, in the fight for a national contract and particularly in the battle to stop the EAZs, we will need rank and file organisation to build for strike action.

It will be a difficult job. Action around the question of workload – refusing to attend more than one meeting after work each week, not working during lunchtimes and not doing pointless paperwork – should be used as the first step towards building national action on EAZs. ■

### A socialist education action programme for militant teachers, parents and school students

Available from Workers Power, BCM Box 7750, London WC1 3XX. Price £1 including p&p.

For copies of our action programme and details of the 9 May conference, phone 0171-357 0388.

## NUS CONFERENCE: No democracy please we're Blairites

# Strikes and occupations can stop the fees

**T**HE APRIL conference of the National Union of Students (NUS) left the Blairite bureaucracy in control, but gains for the left in the executive elections were a reflection of the real and growing anger at New Labour's introduction of tuition fees and abolition of grants.

The conference itself was run with the usual contempt for democracy that is characteristic of the aspiring MPs who staff the Blairite leadership. There were only four resolutions discussed over the four days! Conveniently, this leaves the NUS with only a few extended policies, so the National Executive (NEC) have few mandates.

On most issues conference was divided between two camps. Those who were defending the Labour government's attacks on education and those opposed to the cuts and fees. In the most crucial votes, the right-wing won – but only just. They are increasingly out of step with the mass of students they fraudulently claim to represent.

The most important debate – on education policy and funding – was curtailed to make room for a long session on sports! However, conference did find the time to vote to end the NUS' support for demonstrations, strikes and occupations in defence of free education.

The main, organised opposition to the Labour whips at conference was the



Campaign for Free Education (CFE) and the Socialist Worker Student Societies (SWSS). The two tendencies had a united slate for some, though not all of the elections. With four NEC members elected from the two tendencies, there will at least be some opposition within the formal structures of the NUS.

Despite this, both of these organisations leave a lot to be desired. Fighting the fees and the abolition of grants will take a mass campaign, united in action. To build that campaign the central thing we need are action committees in every college, every course and every hall. We need to unite those committees in a fighting, national united front.

The NUS, even with lefts on the

executive, is not the fighting leadership we need for such a campaign. The NUS must be transformed from top to bottom, with its officers stripped of their perks and privileges and paid the average income of the students they represent. They must be made accountable to those same students through recallability.

But we cannot wait for this to happen before building a national leadership in the fight against fees. That fight needs to be spearheaded by a wave of college occupations. In Manchester, an occupation last term, led by supporters of Workers Power and members of Revolution, the socialist youth movement, was highly successful in mobilising students and putting the

frighteners on the college authorities. This is the kind of fighting unity students need – not just an electoral pact, but joint action.

An occupation – either this term or next, by one or more colleges – could take this a stage further by issuing a call for a national conference of student activists, student unions and committees of action against the fees, to forge such a national leadership and take the fight to the time servers in the NUS bureaucracy, as well as the college authorities and the government.

This is the alternative to the CFE's strategy of gradually building up enough strength to capture the NUS by electoral means – a kind of student broad left. And it is the alternative to the SWP's inability to offer a strategy to students who don't simply want to join SWSS.

Of course we should challenge the NUS bureaucrats in elections – the fact that the unity slate presidential candidate lost by just 15 votes, out of 1,100 – shows that such a tactic can be useful. But the tactic needs to serve the campaign of action, otherwise it won't be relevant to the mass of students.

The CFE's next step is to put in place a "Can't Pay Won't Pay" campaign, aimed at getting 100,000 new students to indicate their refusal to pay their tuition fees by the end of May. This could be a useful tactic in winning over Further Education (FE) and Sixth Form students now. An especially encourag-

ing sign at the conference was the overwhelming support of the FE students for free education.

However, non-payment might be difficult or even impossible to implement, if fees are taken out from the Student Loan Company at source, for example.

That is why, in the coming months, we will be stressing the importance of student strike action, occupations and linking up with campus workers. We will fight to get mass collective action which will hit the college authorities more quickly and get them putting pressure on the Labour government over fees and grants.

If we begin to organise this action now then we can scupper Labour's plans to turn Higher Education, once again, into a privilege for the few and defend it as a right for the many. ■

### Action Diary

**2pm, 13 May**

Lobby in parliament against the introduction of the Higher Education Bill; organised by Student Broad Left and the Socialist Campaign Group of MPs

**4pm, 30 May**

Demonstration to hand in 100,000 non-payment pledges, outside Downing Street; organised by the CFE (telephone 0958 556 756 for further details)





Singing to Republican fighters in Spain

## Paul Robeson centenary

# A voice of inspiration

**L**AST MONTH was the centenary of Paul Robeson's birth. The son of a former slave, Robeson was a man of astonishing artistic talent. In the 1930s he became the world's most popular concert vocalist and a major theatrical star on both sides of the Atlantic. Arguably, he was also the most important African-American political activist of his generation.

In Britain, the National Film Theatre marked Robeson's centenary with screenings of his movies, while the University of London's School of Oriental and African Studies hosted a two-day conference on his life and work. Even in the USA, where he died in obscurity and relative poverty in 1976, the record industry conferred a posthumous Grammy award this spring and new CDs of Robeson recordings are now widely available.

But in a calculated snub, the United States Postal Service declined to issue a commemorative Robeson stamp, opting instead to honour the towering cultural contribution of the Warner cartoon characters, Tweety Pie and Sylvester the Cat.

The decision by the Postal Service committee, in spite of a petition with 90,000 signatures and the support of 60 members of Congress for a Robeson stamp, was not simply an act of crude racism. Robeson's image remains absent from US postage not just because of his skin colour, but because of the colour of his politics: decidedly red.

For over 30 years Robeson was an open sympathiser of the US Communist Party (CP). During much of that time he was most probably also a member. He certainly appeared to accept its adoration of Stalinist tyranny in the USSR as "actually existing socialism" and never publicly criticised the Moscow-dominated Comintern's betrayal of so many anti-fascist and anti-colonial struggles.

But Robeson cannot be reduced to a star apologist for Stalinism. He was also a selfless and inspiring fighter for black civil rights long before the advent of a "civil rights movement" and a champion of many working class struggles.

In the 1930s Robeson had fame and fortune. He could have chosen to live in Britain permanently. He and Peggy Ashcroft had become lovers after co-starring in a 1930 London production of *Othello*, which was effectively banned from Broadway for fear that New York audiences would be scandalised by a black man and white woman kissing on stage.

In 1939 Robeson chose to return to the USA and devote an ever increasing share of his time and money to the battle for civil rights for his fellow African-Americans, a fight which became inextricably linked with what he understood to be the struggle for socialism in the United States.

Robeson's commitment to a life of political struggle sprang from his own bitter personal experience of racism

**"Paul Robeson . . . took his profession, his fame, his money and everything and he committed it completely to the Communist Party. That ruined him. But he wasn't alone, there were many who were ruined by it" - CLR James 1969**

BY G R McCOLL

at every level of US society. After years of racist abuse at college, the level of prejudice he encountered in his first job in a New York law firm persuaded him to abandon legal practice for the concert hall and stage.

With the exception of Eugene O'Neill, however, white American playwrights in the 1920s did not write serious roles for black performers, while mainstream cinema only allowed black actors to appear as crude caricatures - contented simpletons or, in Robeson's own words, "plantation hallelujah shouters". Robeson later disowned such film appearances as the screen adaptation of the musical *Showboat* and the Korda brothers' *Sanders of the River*.

Some liberal journalists have dismissed Robeson's politics, especially his support for the USSR, as "naive". His politics were wrong, but the liberals' patronising view of Robeson ignores the fact that the Soviet Union was widely regarded as a beacon of inspiration by many left-liberal intellectuals and artists throughout the West. It also neglects the key role CP members played in the industrial class struggle and in combatting racism in the US during the 1930s.

The CP was the key factor in the campaign to save the lives of the so-called "Scottsboro Boys" from legal lynching in connection with trumped-up rape charges in the "Jim Crow" South. It was also central to a number of other campaigns to free victims of racist injustice and gained a significant hearing in the African-American intelligentsia associated with the Harlem "renaissance" of the 1920s.

The CP wielded an influence that belied its comparatively small membership and was a real factor in a wide range of historic events. For this reason, its decision to support Roosevelt and the "New Deal" Democrats, in line with the Comintern's conception of the popular front, was all the more debilitating for the political development of the US working class.

Robeson followed a familiar path for many left-leaning artists and performers in the mid-1930s, singing at benefit concerts for the Republican cause in the Spanish Civil War and visiting members of the International Brigade on the battlefields. He loyally followed the zig-zags of Comintern foreign policy through the Second World War.

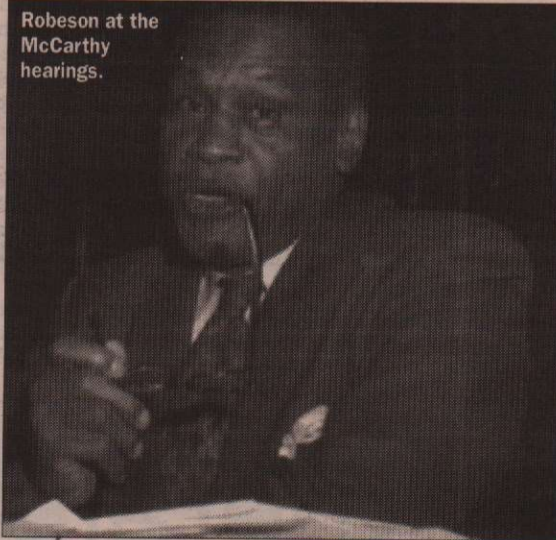
He allowed a thorough rewrite of the ending of the film *Proud Valley*, in

which he featured as a coal miner in Wales, so that its message reinforced the CP's eventual policy of whole-hearted support for the war effort against Germany, which translated into ruthless opposition to all strikes in the so-called "democratic" imperialisms.

To his credit Robeson never embraced the murderous sectarianism of the Stalinists towards their political opponents on the left. In private, at least, he was keen to debate in a fraternal way with the likes of CLR James, even though James was a Trotskyist.

In 1944, the mainstream civil rights organisation, the National Association for the Advancement of Colored Peo-

Robeson at the McCarthy hearings.



ple (NAACP), bestowed its highest honour on Robeson for his example in the fight for "freedom for all men". Less than five years later the NAACP and most of black America's established leadership distanced itself from Robeson, offering him no support during the nightmarish decade ahead. The dawn of the Cold War and the parallel rise of McCarthyite witch-hunting soon fractured the decade-old alliance between US liberals and the CP.

In addition to thousands of victimised trade union militants, many leading figures in the arts and in Hollywood saw their careers irreparably damaged by the anti-communist hysteria unleashed by Senator Joe McCarthy and the members of the House Un-American Activities Committee. Robeson was repeatedly dragged before such Congressional witch-hunting panels from 1946 onwards, consistently standing his ground.

Remarks made to journalists in Paris in April 1949 at a CP-inspired "peace conference" sealed Robeson's fate with the US media. He said:

"It is unthinkable that American Negroes could go to war on behalf of those who have oppressed them for generations against the Soviet Union which in one generation has raised our people to full human dignity."

Robeson's statement gained sensational coverage in the American press and provided the ideal pretext at the height of McCarthyism for a decisive clampdown by the US government, in particular J Edgar Hoover's FBI, which had kept Robeson under regular surveillance for several years prior to 1949. FBI archives contain unpublished photos of Robeson on picket lines supporting striking members of the United Packinghouse Workers of America in 1948.

Ironically, less than two months after sparking controversy in Paris, Robeson offended his Stalinist hosts in Moscow at the end of a brief concert tour of the Soviet Union. Robeson arrived amid the regime's so-called campaign against "Cosmopolitanism and Zionism", which was a thin disguise for vile anti-Semitism in the context of a wider party purge in Moscow and Leningrad.

During his stay in Moscow, Robeson finally gained access, after repeated requests, to an old friend, the Jewish poet Itzik Feffer, who had been imprisoned in the hellish Lubyanka. Feffer informed Robeson that their mutual friend, actor and director Solomon Mikhoels, had been murdered by the KGB. Feffer himself died three years later at the hands of the Stalinist state.

The next evening Robeson gave a farewell performance in Moscow. He courageously chose as his concluding number the Yiddish song "Zog Nit Keynmol" (song of the Warsaw Ghetto Rebellion) which he had learned only a few weeks before. He dedicated the performance to Mikhoels, before explaining the background to the song that had rallied the Ghetto fighters in heroic resistance to their Nazi oppressors. A tape of this concert was finally unearthed in early 1995, with the song intact, but Robeson's introduction and the Moscow audience's reaction erased.

After his return to the US in the summer of 1949, life became increasingly difficult for Robeson, his wife Eslan-

da Goode and their family. Concert promoters in the US refused to touch him. There was a de facto ban on any broadcast of his recordings, which continued for most of the 1950s. His annual income of \$100,000 slumped by 95%. Combined with death threats, this forced Robeson to abandon his house.

Late in the summer of 1949, Robeson was due to perform an outdoor benefit concert in Peekskill, New York, then a holiday retreat for working class Jews from New York City. In the event, hundreds of members of the American Legion and other white reactionaries launched a bloody attack on concertgoers. They failed to reach Robeson - their intended target - only due to the brave resistance mounted by labour movement stewards, whilst the New York State Police turned a blind eye to the violence of the racist mob.

Early in 1950 the US State Department withdrew Robeson's passport. Forced out of American theatres, this internationally renowned performer was stripped of his right to travel for nearly nine years. The State Department ban on overseas travel only ended after an international campaign in several countries, including Britain.

Within months of regaining his passport Robeson returned to Britain, aged 61, performing the role of *Othello* for the third and final time. His performance won wide critical acclaim, not least for an incandescent rage which had been missing from his earlier interpretations.

Though he continued to perform regularly in both Western and Eastern Europe until 1963, the decade of isolation and persecution had taken a heavy toll on him.

His physical and psychological health had become precarious. His wife was terminally ill, eventually dying of cancer in 1965. Though Robeson issued occasional statements to the press in support of the Civil Rights Movement, these were increasingly infrequent. Robeson, seriously ill for most of the last decade of his life, died in February 1976.

Robeson was, politically, a Stalinist but he was no simple dupe of the Kremlin regime. His June 1949 performance in Moscow proved he was prepared to take risks in making a personal protest against the Stalinist machine. Tragically, however, Robeson never moved beyond this heroic gesture to a serious re-examination of the political line he had followed since the mid-1930s. He was a noble champion of horribly rotten politics.

Socialists, working class militants and all fighters for black liberation should honour Paul Robeson's memory. He was an inspiring artist who sacrificed his career for his political principles; he was a man who fought stubbornly for the democratic rights of African-Americans, of oppressed peoples in the West's former colonies and in defence of trade union struggles internationally. ■





# CLASS WAR ON

April 1998 proved to be a "defining" month in Australian political history. Premier John Howard committed himself to an early general election after suffering a defeat in the Senate in the so-called "Wik" debate over his right wing coalition's attempts to claw back the Labor Party's concessions on Aboriginal land rights. At the same time, the government's big business friends at Patrick Stevedoring had declared war on the country's dockers (wharfies), organised in its most powerful trade union, the Maritime Union of Australia (MUA). Their attack unleashed a wave of working class anger. **Lloyd Cox** of Workers Power (Australia) reports on an extraordinary month of class struggle.

**T**HE PAST month has seen a real war being waged in and around Australia's ports. Millions of Australian workers have been inspired by the wharfies' resistance to the mass sackings and the fundamental threat to trade union organisation posed by the Howard government, in conjunction with Patrick Stevedoring and the National Farmers' Federation.

Thousands of union members have swelled the ranks of mass pickets on the waterfront, many of them openly defying the Workplace Relations Act's ban on solidarity action by striking.

The struggle has rapidly gained an international dimension, with dockers' unions in the USA, South Africa, Japan and the Philippines all announcing their support for the solidarity. The wharfies' slogan, "MUA is here to stay", has become a rallying cry for working class militants from Manila to Tokyo.

The International Transport Federation, an umbrella group of dockers' unions, issued a call for the "maximum possible" solidarity action, with its general secretary, David Cockcroft, pledging a global boycott of freight to and

from Australia.

The war on the docks had a swift impact on other sections of the bosses. Just 10 days after Patrick Stevedoring locked out the wharfies, Toyota announced that a shortage of parts would force it to suspend production at a plant with a 2,500-strong workforce. General Motors also announced that it would airlift materials into its Australian factories.

## Voiced

Many commentators in the bosses' media had voiced the fear that solidarity action was spiralling out of control, with strikes springing up daily from the CFMEU building workers to Franklin warehouses and Stonington Council's refuse collectors. The power of the working class - which days before the struggle erupted from being branded as a quaint relic from a bygone age by the idiot propagandists of the bosses' press - was there for all to see. And it made the bosses tremble.

The Howard government's election strategy appeared to be in tatters by late April as it looked unlikely that

the prime minister could go to the country on the back of a resounding triumph over the MUA. The coalition has failed abysmally to deliver on one of its key pledges to Australian bosses: "waterfront reform". With the prospect of a sharp economic downturn looming large in the wake of the general crisis of the former "tiger" economies, Howard's room for manoeuvre has become very narrow indeed.

Against the background of mounting disquiet among important sections of the ruling class, the full bench of the Federal Court upheld an earlier ruling instructing Patrick to reinstate the sacked MUA members. Jubilant wharfies and their supporters celebrated this victory, though a High Court judge later granted yet another injunction to Patrick pending a final appeal.

This victory has been won by mass action. Contrary to the claim made by Australian Congress of Trade Unions' (ACTU) president Jennie George that the Federal Court decision demonstrated "the rule of law can protect the interests of ordinary people", the experience of April highlighted the cru-

cial importance of working class militancy, rather than legal niceties, in winning concessions from the bosses.

We need to build on the victory that action has delivered to stop the "rule of law" - the rule of the bosses - snatching it from us as soon as they feel strong enough. We need to step up our action to win back every job and to push forward towards the repeal of all anti-union legislation. The war is still on and we need to press home our advantage, not demobilise.

After all, Patrick's chief executive, Chris Corrigan, had announced that, whatever the eventual outcome of the current round of legal wrangles, his firm intended to close seven of its regional ports from Newcastle to Port Kembla. The closure of these smaller docks would cost an estimated 280 of the 2,000 or so jobs immediately at stake.

Predictably, the reformist bureaucrats of the MUA and ACTU - who were as terrified of the rank and file explosion as many of the bosses themselves - want to get things back to normal and re-establish cosy relations with the bosses. They are prepared to offer

Patrick absolutely scandalous concessions in exchange for a reinstatement deal.

The MUA leadership has seriously discussed the prospect of members working for free for an unspecified period for an employer which has been engaged in a complex and prolonged conspiracy to dismiss them. (For details of the mounting attack on the MUA see *Workers Power* 218 and 219). There is also discussion of a self-imposed ban on industrial action and tens of millions of dollars in interest-free loans to enable Patrick to revive its supposedly bankrupt, wholly-owned subsidiaries.

## Accept

MUA general secretary John Coombs has frequently been all too ready to accept the port bosses' demands for increased productivity and has presided over a dramatic decline in the docks' workforce, but now he looks determined to snatch defeat from the jaws of victory by actually rewarding a ruthless class enemy determined to bust the union. This outfit's bosses have spent millions preparing for war with

## Reformist leaders run for cover

LAST YEAR Bill Kelty, ACTU secretary, pledged the "biggest picket this country has ever seen" in the event of an attack on the MUA. Nearly three weeks after the mass sackings by Patrick Stevedoring and three months after the National Farmers' Federation's move to set up a scab operation at Melbourne's Webb dock, Kelty failed to issue the call for such a picket.

The response of the trade union bureaucrats to April's remarkable developments has provided a textbook illustration of the contradictory role that the union bureaucracy plays in society. On the one hand, the level of rank and file anger and spontaneous militancy has forced the bureaucrats to actually appear on picket lines and make occasionally fiery speeches. They

also recognise that the union busting operation poses a serious threat to the very basis of their affluent and privileged position.

In practice, however, the bureaucracy's determination to maintain their privileged positions as power brokers within capitalist society also ensures that their horizons do not usually extend beyond modest reforms of the profit system. Leigh Hubbard of the Victoria Trades Hall expressed the modesty of the bureaucracy's aspirations when he insisted that he was not categorically opposed to Peter Reith's anti-union "reforms", but they would have to be introduced "in a consultative manner".

The leadership of the Australian Labor Party (ALP) has shifted dramatically over the course of April. After

first seeking to distance itself entirely from the MUA in late January when it appeared to have the support of only 15% of the population questioned in opinion polls, ALP leader Kim Beazley and other frontbenchers have recently appeared on picket lines as the determination of the wharfies led to a sea change in public opinion and the union bureaucracy leaned on its historic party for a measure of public support.

But the ALP is not opposed in principle to the Howard government's restructuring programme for the docks. The so-called "waterfront reform" package promoted by Howard and Reith would mean huge job losses, wage cuts and speed-ups for those still employed. The ALP's primary objection is to the way the government and Patrick have gone

about their business.

The ALP also wishes to maintain a considerable distance between itself and the militant class struggle methods witnessed over the past three weeks. Asked point blank by a Melbourne wharfie as to whether the party backed solidarity strikes to win reinstatement, Labor frontbencher John Brumby could only reply, "I might, it just depends".

The experience of the past month has given ample proof of the continuing ties between the ALP and the mass of organised industrial workers in Australia. On the one hand, the ALP stands exposed as thoroughly inadequate to the test posed by the docks war. On the other hand, its leadership still has to respond to pressure from within the working class.

For revolutionary socialists it is vital to relate to class conscious workers' continued identification with the ALP through ruthless criticism of its performance, combined with key demands on its leaders - not just to deliver support to the MUA but to scrap the whole of the Reith anti-union legislation and to nationalise the docks industry, without a penny in compensation to the Chris Corrigan of this world, and under the wharfies' day-to-day control.

At the same time, Workers Power (Australia) links this tactic to the fight to build an altogether different kind of workers' party from the ALP, a combat party based on a revolutionary programme and committed to the revolutionary overthrow of the capitalist state.

## Workers Power Australia

# Fighting for a general strike



COMRADES FROM Workers Power (Australia) were right at the heart of the action around Melbourne's East Swanson dock on the weekend of 17-19 April. Our members got stuck into the building of barricades to obstruct the police and resist the expected charges by the riot cops and mounted police. We had taken part in a turning point in a decisive class battle for a whole generation of workers.

Crucial as the fight on the picket line is, revolutionaries also have a duty to give this docks' war a political lead and state clearly what is necessary to win the most decisive victory possible. The response of the Australian far left has included the abstract sectarianism of both the Spartacists, with their ritual calls for a break from the ALP and the

founding of a new Bolshevik Party, and of the Socialist Equality Party, which has written off the unions as a lost cause.

## Accommodated

Larger currents on the far left such as Democratic Socialist Party (DSP), the International Socialists (ISO - DSP) organisation of the British SWP and Militant have all accommodated, to varying degrees, to the prevailing arguments put forward by much of the trade union bureaucracy. Comrades from all of these organisations moved resolutions at a 16 April mass meeting of union delegates at Dallas Brooks Hall.

The ISO's position was all but indistinguishable from that of the Trades Hall leadership, calling on the execu-

tive of the ACTU "to co-ordinate sustained and determined national industrial action to win the reinstatement of Patrick MUA members", without specifying anything about what form such action should take. While suggesting the need to defy the Workplace Relations Act, the ISO remained vague as to what action it actually advocated.

The DSP and Militant combined forces to promote the call for a "24-hour stoppage and rally", but only if union members faced fines or imprisonment for violating the anti-union laws. Though the closing sentence of their resolution referred to "the first steps in a campaign that will continue until all Patrick members are fully and rightfully reinstated in their jobs with no loss of wages or entitlements", the

DSP and Militant comrades failed to seize the opportunity for strike action in the here and now, with the explicit aims of winning back the MUA members' jobs and forcing the scrapping of Reith's Workplace Relations Act and all other anti-union legislation.

## Recognise

Thousands of ordinary trade union members recognise that the sackings by Patrick mark an attack on Australian unions as a whole. A clear, unambiguous call for an indefinite general strike across the country would strike a resonant chord with many workers. This is not a demand that a union bureaucrat could easily wriggle out of. It is also, however, the best response to what, in essence, is a class-wide attack.

Workers Power has been unique on the Australian left in consistently putting the case for an indefinite general strike as the decisive weapon in the current fight. At the 16 April meeting we distributed hundreds of leaflets making the argument for such a class-wide response, as well as putting forward this revolutionary answer during the crucial lulls on the picket line.

While not everyone agreed with us at this stage of the struggle, one thing was clear. Workers no longer thought the call for a general strike was abstract pie-in-the-sky stuff.

The militancy, the level of solidarity and the recognition that action could deliver victory all made our slogan a lot more relevant and a lot more immediate to many workers. ■



# THE WATERFRONT

the MUA, training scabs in a not-so-secret programme in Dubai and ordering private security to frogmarch and manhandle MUA members about to be sacked.

A return-to-work on the basis of such a deal would also leave the MUA and several other unions open to further court cases. Those unions whose members have taken solidarity action with the wharfies could face legal sanctions under Peter Reith's 1996 Workplace Relations Act.

Militants in the MUA and other unions must ensure that the union bureaucrats do not give the Howard government the time and space to regroup and renew its union-busting offensive, or show any mercy to Patrick Stevedoring's bosses. The union bureaucracy must not be allowed to squander the opportunity for a major victory through demobilising the armies of class fighters who have gathered around the docks. The militants can, however, point with confidence to the impact of the resistance to date in defending jobs, union organisation and the closed shop on the waterfront.

But rank and file activists also need to forge a real alternative to the existing bureaucratic leadership. The strategy of the MUA and ACTU unions should emerge from democratic debate at mass meetings, not from closed-door sessions between full-time officials and \$400 an hour lawyers.

Solidarity from other trade union-



ists has been a crucial feature of the April battles, but the links between workers need to be maintained and strengthened through the creation of delegate-based councils of action which would have responsibility for co-ordinating strikes and other activity, and for

building from below for the kind of indefinite general strike which is the most appropriate response to the bosses' and government's attacks on the MUA and on trade unionism itself.

The intensity of the battle to date exposed important differences over tac-

tics within the Australian state apparatus. The government had clearly not prepared the ground for the full frontal assault by riot police that would have been necessary to smash the pickets at Melbourne's East Swanson and Sydney's Port Botany in particular. As a

result, police commanders found themselves negotiating and then extending a series of truces with union officials.

But the police are by no means neutral in this dispute. While Leigh Hubbard, leading light of the Victoria Trades Hall, declared that the police were "workers in uniform" before the demonstrators assembled at East Swanson, the reality of pickets' experience that same weekend showed we were up against well-equipped, uniformed thugs, who will again be called upon to physically crush workers' resistance.

A key task for action councils over the coming period will be the organisation of systematic picket line defence - the only way of consistently defeating the police and the Neanderthals hired as Patrick's "private security". When the pickets built barricades and fought the police and scabs, they proved they were ready for such organisation. Turning picket line defence into the organised defence of the workers' organisations can take this militancy a vital step forward.

The battles on the streets and the picket lines, not the well-mannered jousting between barristers, will ultimately prove decisive.

The organisation of such self-defence also points the way towards a very different society, where state power does not rely on elite bodies of armed men and women, but rests with an armed and self-disciplined working class.

## Build Solidarity in Britain



*THE AUSTRALIAN dockers' fight has huge international significance, both in the context of an increasingly globalised capitalist economy and the developing crisis in the economies of the Pacific Rim.*

*At the time of going to press, we are still awaiting news of the latest legal developments in the dispute, but the victory that has been won by the action so far could be built on, halting the Australian government's anti-working class offensive and shifting the balance of forces in the international working class' favour.*

*Here in Britain, trade unionists have long owed a particular debt of gratitude and solidarity to the Aus-*

*tralian wharfies, who have been unstinting in their support for workers in struggle in this country from the 1889 "dockers' tanner" strike to the recent fight by the Liverpool dockers. Workers Power encourages all its readers to raise the question of solidarity with the wharfies and the MUA in their workplaces and union branches with the model resolution below.*

### **This branch notes:**

1. The sacking of 2,000 Australian dockworkers - virtually all members of the Maritime Union of Australia (MUA) - by Patrick Stevedoring and their replacement by scabs.

2. Clear evidence of the involve-

ment of John Howard's right-wing coalition government in a long-running campaign to smash the MUA, drive trade unionism out of the docks and introduce widespread casualisation, using this dispute as the prelude to a much broader attack on trade unionism in Australia.

3. The widespread and growing support among Australian workers for the MUA members, reflected both in opinion polls and in the presence of thousands of workers from other unions on mass pickets at the docks.

### **This branch believes:**

1. The fight to win back the MUA members' jobs and defend union rights in the docks is a crucial one for the

labour movement in Australia and internationally.

2. MUA members must receive support from British trade unionists not least because of the solidarity given by MUA members to British workers' struggles, most notably in the recent strike by the Liverpool dockers.

### **This branch resolves to:**

1. Send a message of support and donation to the MUA at:

MUA National Office  
Level 2, 365-375 Sussex Street  
Sydney, New South Wales 2000  
Australia

Fax: 0061 2 9261 3481.

2. Support any protest and demos called in Britain in support of the dock-

ers e.g. pickets of Australia House in London or at other relevant Australian/official institutions (tourist offices, etc.) and of the offices of any businesses connected to Patrick Stevedoring.

3. Send resolutions to our national union office and the TUC calling on all TUC-affiliated union to:

a) give financial support to the MUA;

b) fund a speaking tour of union branches/conferences etc. by MUA representatives in Britain;

c) implement in full the International Transport Federation's call for a boycott of all freight going to or coming from Australian ports/airports etc. ■

## Victims of Colombian death squads

**THE COLOMBIAN** state has more blood on its hands.

On Saturday 18 April, Colombia's leading human rights lawyer, Eduardo Umaña Mendoza, was assassinated in Bogotá by a paramilitary death squad. Two men and a woman entered his home and gunned him down.

The same three killed a leading member of the Communist Party two days earlier. She had just returned to the country after ten years of exile. The next day they nearly succeeded in murdering another opponent of the government, who fled the country immediately.

Umaña was one of Colombia's most prominent fighters for human rights. He famously defended the leaders of a telecom workers' strike in 1992, and was central to the activity of the José Alvear Restrepo lawyers' collective for many years. When he died he was defending 28 members of the leadership of the USO, Colombia's petrochemical workers' union.

Thousands of people filed past Umaña's body on Monday at the National University while students pelted the police with stones in the surrounding streets. Meanwhile telecom workers mounted a national one day strike in protest at the killing, totally shutting down the coun-



Eduardo Umaña Mendoza

try's telephone system.

**USO workers joined the strike action which was supported by the CUT and many other sections of workers. In London Colombian refugees, many of whom owed their freedom to Umaña, held a vigil outside the Colombian embassy.**

Umaña had received death threats in the past, but recent phone calls had told him he would die as a direct consequence of his defence of the USO leaders. Days before his death he circulated a 21 page document to close friends to be published in the event of his murder. It detailed these threats along with facts about the cases he was currently defending and information about the use of multiple testimonies under different

false names used against trade unionists.

These death squads carry out their actions with impunity. They operate on the fringes of the state, but with its full complicity, as a tool of Colombia's military intelligence. It was because Umaña was helping to prove this that he is now dead.

Umaña, and all other victims of the death squads, will always be remembered by those workers and democrats who continue the struggle against Colombia's state terrorism.

## Iraqi Communists murdered

ON 18 April, Shapoor Abdul-Kadir and Kabil Adil, two leaders of the Worker-Communist Party of Iraq (WCPI), were murdered as they visited an unemployed union office in Erbil, Kurdistan, by a group of unknown killers. The Worker-Communist Party say that responsibility for this assassination lies with the city rulers.

Erbil is controlled by Barzani and his party the Kurdish Democratic Party (KDP) who claim there is freedom for political activity in the city. But this is not the only attack that has occurred against the left and other political movements.

Following the organisation of demonstrations on International Women's Day this year various Islamic groups declared war on the left. A fatwa was issued against left organisations by clerical leaders. The headquarters of a women's organisation was bombed in another town, Sulyamen, also controlled by the KDP. The Islamic groups are able to function without restriction within the KDP controlled zones.

Barzani's KDP has long been an

opponent of the left. The KDP is a key part of the opposition to the Iraqi regime in the Kurdish regions. But it has always sought to negotiate with the Iraqi regime to secure a limited political autonomy for the Kurdish regions within Iraq. As part of its power struggle within Kurdistan it has collaborated with the Turkish government in its attacks on the Kurdish Workers' Party (PKK).

We must oppose any military action taken by US and British imperialism against Iraq and campaign for an immediate end to economic sanctions. And we must demonstrate that it is the workers and peasants of Iraq that have to overthrow the hated Iraqi regime. It is vital that the international working class comes to the defence of those workers' organisations that are building opposition to the Iraqi regime.

Send messages of support and solidarity to:

WCPI  
PO Box 7926  
London SE1 2ZG



# Workers power

Socialism, Internationalism, Revolution

British Section of the League for a Revolutionary Communist International

No 222 May 1998 ★ 50p

## INSIDE:

- Tameside strike page 2
- Full report on Australian dockers pages 6 and 7
- Robeson centenary page 5

## Australia: workers' action forces bosses' retreat

# SOLIDARITY FOREVER

**T**HE SACKING of nearly 2,000 "wharfies" (dockers) on 7 April by Patrick Stevedoring has triggered the sharpest class battle seen in Australia for nearly 50 years. "War on the Waterfront", proclaimed the banner headline in the Sydney Morning Herald. This was no exaggeration.

After several court orders to reinstate the sacked wharfies, countered by injunctions blocking the implementation of the earlier orders, the state of play in this crucial fight remains uncertain. But the Australian working class has been giving some clear lessons to the world working class on how to fight and win. Militant class struggle is alive and kicking.

Mass pickets, solidarity walk-outs and angry marches through the streets of Sydney, Melbourne and several other cities have been the order of the day since Patrick bosses – enthusiastically backed by John Howard's right-wing coalition government – tried to replace unionised wharfies with 400 scabs. Howard, his workplace relations minister Peter Reith and Patrick's top brass have found out that they have bitten off far more than they could chew.

### Assault

Tens of thousands of trade unionists across Australia have rightly seen the ham-fisted attack on the Maritime Union of

Australia (MUA) as an assault on the whole labour movement.

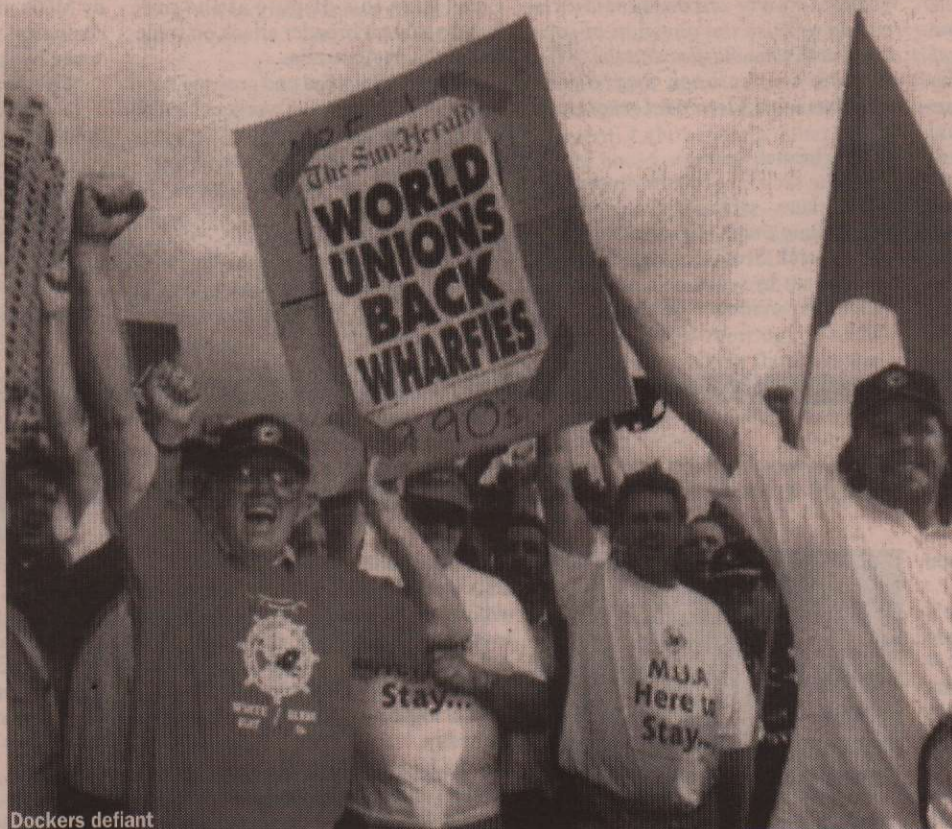
As news of the sackings spread, building and factory workers along with nurses and teachers poured onto the streets. Even though the Australian Congress of Trade Unions has so far failed to call for further strikes in support of the wharfies, workers have repeatedly walked off the job and come out to reinforce the picket lines at Sydney's Port Botany and Melbourne's East Swanson docks.

On 17 April several thousand workers, youth and even some stars of Australian rules football heeded the MUA's call to bolster the picket at East Swanson. Demonstrators made barricades from railway tracks, concrete pillars and overturned articulated lorries. Wharfies at P&O docks (Patrick's main competitor which has yet to unleash an attack on the MUA) walked off the job to fill a breach in one of the picket lines.

### Eyewitness

Lloyd Cox of Workers Power (Australia) gave this eyewitness account of the East Swanson "war zone" as pickets found themselves pitted against 800 riot police and dozens of horses:

"At around 7.30 am the cops prepared for their final assault. We linked arms and braced ourselves for the worst. As we did,



Dockers defiant

2,000 building workers, who had walked off sites in the central business district, came round the corner behind the cops. A roar went up. People were choked up with emotion.

The cops were surrounded and had to leave. We had won a hell of a victory."

The co-conspirators: the Howard government, the notoriously reactionary leadership of

the National Farmers' Federation and Patrick's bosses have made some serious miscalculations in mounting their union-busting operation in the docks. Crucially, they underestimated

the willingness of Australian workers to confront the anti-union laws introduced since 1996. Despite court injunctions against MUA pickets, the actions by union members from a wide range of sectors has rendered the government's anti-working class legislation totally unworkable.

### Mobilisation

On 20 April over 2,000 members of the National Union of Workers (NUW) walked away from Safeway supermarket warehouses and Sigma food processing plants to join the MUA's East Swanson mobilisation. As Denis Lennen, the NUW's president stated, "If it gets to the stage where a law's a bad law, people have to defy it." Without such defiance of the law, there can be little doubt that the courts would not have accepted the polished arguments for the wharfies' reinstatement of the MUA's barrister.

Australia's anti-union laws are not so far-reaching as those in Britain, but the recent examples of wholly illegal solidarity action in support of the wharfies must inspire British workers to recognise that it is both necessary and possible to break class laws which are the major obstacles in the way of staging an effective fight-back against the attacks of the bosses and New Labour in government. ■

**LONDON 23 MAY**  
**Smash the**  
**National Front**

**THE FASCIST National Front (NF) is planning to march in central London on Saturday 23 May.**

The fascists have called a "March Against the IRA" accusing the government of "betraying the loyal people of Ulster". They plan to assemble at 1pm near to Westminster Abbey and

march to Downing Street to hand in a petition.

This follows their filthy racist campaign in Dover against the Roma refugees and will aim to build on their quest for votes in the local elections in early May. The NF is trying to establish itself as the leading fascist outfit

in Britain in the hope that it can repeat its successes of the 1970s, the last time there was a Labour government.

Anti-fascists must ensure that this doesn't happen. The NF must be smashed now. This means stopping them marching, meeting, selling and organising.

Searchlight and the Anti-Nazi

League have called a counter demonstration in London on 23 May (phone 0171 924 0333 for details).

All anti-fascists should mobilise for this, and organise themselves effectively on the day, to ensure that the NF are stopped from spreading their vile, racist poison.



Published jointly by the Irish Workers Group and Workers Power (Britain)

Eight page pull-out section May 1998 ■ 30p if sold separately



**Anatomy of the peace process** page 2



**Republican movement in crisis?** page 3



**Will the 'Celtic tiger' survive** page 6

# No justice – no peace!

# VOTE NO to the Irish peace deal

**EVERY VOTER** who wants to see peace with justice in Northern Ireland should reject the Stormont Peace Agreement on 22 May and vote "No".

The peace deal confirms and strengthens the injustice of partition of the island.

The deal upholds the sovereignty of Britain over the Six Counties and entrenches a sectarian political system in the North where constitutional rights will now be based on a religious head count.

The deal commits all who sign up to it to abandon the struggle for a united Ireland by revolutionary methods and instead to pursue exclusively peaceful and constitutional means.

The deal is undemocratic: it limits the choices before the people of Ireland. The referendum will not allow a vote on the option of a united Ireland here and now—the clear and repeated choice of a majority of the anti-unionist population in the North since they were forcibly cut off from their brothers and sisters in 1921.

This agreement copperfastens partition. The deal is not, as Sinn Fein have portrayed it, a "transitional arrangement" leading towards a united Ireland. The agreement legitimises partition as never before:

● A united Ireland can only be



Blair and Ahern underwrite partition with Stormont agreement

"achieved and exercised subject to the agreement and consent of a majority of the people of Northern Ireland". And yet this majority is formed by a minority of the people of Ireland who in 1921 carved out a statelet against the express wishes of the majority, who voted in 1918 for independence from Britain. And yet Sinn Fein and the Irish government now accept that the wish of the Protestants in the North to remain part of Britain is "freely exercised and legitimate".

● The Irish government has agreed to amend Articles 2 and 3 of its consti-

tution so as to remove its territorial claim over the whole island of Ireland.

British sovereignty over the devolved Assembly in Northern Ireland is affirmed and "Northern Ireland in its entirety remains part of the United Kingdom". The British Secretary of State will continue to represent Northern Ireland in the Cabinet and she or he alone can determine whether and when to call a poll to determine whether the people of Northern Ireland want to leave the United Kingdom. Moreover, this poll can be held no more frequently than every seven

- **Reject the peace deal!**
- **Immediate and unconditional release of all anti-imperialist prisoners!**
- **Withdrawal of all British troops from the Six Counties!**
- **Disband and disarm the RUC and the Royal Irish Regiment!**
- **Total renunciation of British claims to the Six Counties and the end of British administration!**
- **For an all-Ireland Constituent Assembly!**
- **For a 32-county workers' republic!**

years. That is a gross denial of the Irish people's right to self-determination.

As for Westminster, its "power to make legislation for Northern Ireland remains unaffected" by the agreement. All powers devolved to the Assembly in the Six Counties could be taken back.

The claim that the agreement is a step on the road to a united Ireland is a cynical ploy to deceive the nationalist masses. In glaring contrast to the statements unequivocally affirming partition and British sovereignty, those on the role of the proposed North/South bodies are

vague in the extreme. The agreement states that such bodies will seek "to develop consultation, co-operation and action" on matters of mutual interest.

The North/South Ministerial Council will only have those powers that the Northern Ireland Assembly is prepared to surrender to it – and the inevitable Unionist majority has made it clear that, as usual, they are not prepared to surrender anything.

Sinn Fein is happy to let voters believe that, in a decade or two, demographic changes may lead to elections to the Assembly resulting in a majority of nationalists who would be willing to seek more authority for the cross border institutions. However the agreement insists on a weighted majority in the Assembly (60% or more) for any such decisions.

The 108-member Assembly itself is to be elected on a confessional basis. The deal insists that at the first meeting of the Assembly "members will register a designation of identity – nationalist, unionist or other" upon which the voting strengths and the hand out of ministerial posts will be decided. Thus the proposed devolution does not aim to remove sectarianism from Northern Ireland – rooted as this is in Protes-

continued page 8

# For a 32-county workers' republic!



1993-1998: Republican strategy fails, Britain manoeuvres

# Anatomy of the peace process

Colin Lloyd looks at five years of double-speak that concluded with peace on British imperialism's terms

**THE EASTER 1998** Agreement comes after nearly five years of peace talks. Christmas 1993 saw the Downing Street Declaration between the British and Irish governments which set the scene for the first IRA and Loyalist paramilitary ceasefire in 1994.

The joint aim of the British and Irish governments, during this first phase of the process, was to capitalise on the dead end reached by the Republican military campaign and the war weariness of the anti-unionist masses. Their strategic goal was nothing less than a counter-revolutionary settlement of the Northern Ireland conflict. The recipe for this settlement – completely contained in the first Framework Document – involved political concessions from Unionism and the British government on reform of the Northern Ireland state in return for recognition by Republicanism that its strategic goal of a united Ireland would no longer be pursued by a revolutionary nationalist guerrilla struggle but rather through constitutional means and only with the consent of northern Unionists.

There were several reasons behind the Republican leadership's decision to enter talks. Censorship and restrictive bans were ended. Sinn Fein was promised full integration into the peace talks and the Dublin government would be given an unprecedented ability to influence policy in the Six Counties and thereby act as protector of the Northern anti-unionists.

At the same time, the guerrilla campaign was at an impasse; the middle class nationalist programme of economic self-sufficiency for a united Ireland was being proved utopian by developments in world capitalism and especially in the Irish Republic; and, despite occasional use of class struggle rhetoric, Republicanism had proved incapable of breaking the grip of Union-

ism over the Protestant working class.

Whatever positive gloss the Adams-McGuinness leadership of Sinn Fein put on the proposed reforms, and on their new found acceptance in the corridors of power in the USA and the Irish Republic, their decision to enter the peace process really flowed from the failure of petit bourgeois nationalism as a strategy. It was that failure that opened up for British imperialism the possibility of a counter-revolutionary settlement by which it could demobilise the Northern anti-unionist struggle without having to make any really fundamental political concessions within the Six county statelet.

The first IRA ceasefire and Sinn Fein's entry into the peace process reflected not just a tactical turn by Sinn Fein but the beginning of its transformation from a petit-bourgeois nationalist party into a reformist constitutional nationalist party. This process will be completed if and when Sinn Fein implements the terms of the Easter 1998 Agreement, especially in regard to IRA decommissioning and taking up seats in the Assembly and Executive.

In the Downing Street Declaration, Britain confirmed that it had no "strategic or selfish" interest in the continued occupation of Northern Ireland. Did this mean a renunciation of its right to occupy Ireland? No – it merely involved a clar-

ification by the British ruling class as to its primary reason for keeping between 11,000 and 21,000 troops stationed there: to ensure the defeat, containment and repression of the revolutionary anti-unionist struggle and force Sinn Fein/IRA onto the constitutional road. The strategic economic reasons for creating the Frankenstein's monster of Protestant ascendancy between 1912 and 1922 had by now disappeared, along with Britain's colonial Empire, naval supremacy and inter-imperialist war in Europe.

Thus, the Downing Street Declaration transferred Britain's unilateral commitment to the partition of Ireland into a commitment to abiding by the wishes of the Protestant majority – itself artificially created by partition. At no stage in the process did British imperialism seriously consider uniting Ireland from above. Its aim throughout has been to defuse a revolutionary war raging inside the United Kingdom.

However, the impasse of the Republican struggle opened up two choices for Britain – or rather a range of options lying between two extremes:

- they could use the peace process to demobilise the anti-unionist struggle, bringing the Sinn Fein/IRA leadership on board a new constitutional settlement, at the maximum cost of some political reforms to the Northern statelet; or
- they could use the peace process to erode the bargaining position of the Republican movement, effectively forcing them to surrender before any concessions were made.

While at times the peace process has been sold to Unionism as the latter, and while sections of the Tory party have consciously embraced the latter goal to the exclusion of the former, the main strategy of the British ruling class – under both Major and Blair – has been the former.

However, during the first phase of the peace process Major's government proved incapable of making progress towards this strategic goal because of its short term political reliance on the right-wing Tories and later, even more vitally, Unionist support for a minority Tory government in Westminster. That is what precipitated the IRA's return to violence in February 1996: the effective insistence that it surrender before inclusive peace talks could begin. Conversely, the breaking of the political logjam at Westminster with the election of a Blair government in May 1997 allowed the process to be unfrozen and progress to its Easter 1998 denouement.

If the blind alley of Republican guerrillaism opened up the possibility of a "democratic" counter-revolutionary settlement, it has also been aided by changes within the cross-class alliance that once constituted hegemonic Protestant ascendancy. The Northern Irish ruling class supported the existence of a sectarian state from the outset because it was the only conceivable way of ensuring its own economic well being as a class.

That is no longer the case. In a globalised world market and with both

parts of Ireland inside the EU there is nothing to be gained economically from partition. Indeed, in 1992 per capita income in the South surpassed that in the North for the first time. The advantages of keeping the Northern Irish working class as a pool of divided cheap labour are minimal compared with the opportunities for foreign investment afforded by a peace settlement and cross-border economic collaboration on terms acceptable to Unionist business.

The UUP, the main party of the Protestant capitalists, is not opposed to a settlement that involves an element of power sharing (so long as it is with constitutional nationalists) and even some limited "interference" by Dublin. It is prepared to see certain economic and social reforms in the Six County state. The rhetoric of "a Protestant state for a Protestant people" will be left to the DUP who oppose integration and power-sharing in the name of Protestant supremacy.

At the same time, the Protestant working class, which led the reactionary struggle that brought down the last power sharing agreement (Sunningdale) in 1974, has suffered a major decline in its political strength. The Protestant industrial working class has declined by more than half since 1974; it is, arguably, incapable of mounting a repeat of the Ulster Workers' Council strike of 1974 which British Army counter-insurgency experts judged as "unbeatable".

The emergence of legal fronts for the Protestant paramilitaries (the UDP for the UDA, the PUP for the UVF) has also led to the decline of working class support for Paisley's DUP. The transfer of allegiance from DUP to the open paramilitary parties in the Loyalist ghettos has both contributed to the fragmentation of the cross-class Unionist alliance and, paradoxically, brought that section of the Protestant working class closer to the peace process. Unlike the DUP, the working class supporters of the UDP and PUP are prepared to consider some kind of "equality agenda" for Catholics on condition that a united Ireland is ruled out by the agreement and that the IRA decommissions its weapons.

A further factor that has spurred both the peace process itself and the fragmentation of Unionism has been the progressive removal – from above – of some of the most explosive aspects of inequality that existed at the height of the anti-unionist mass struggle: using EU funds and in collaboration with Dublin and the SDLP, the Northern Irish Housing Association has removed housing allocation as a social grievance (even while increasing geographical segregation of Catholics and Protestants). And, while unemployment continues to hit Catholics harder, measures have been taken that have mitigated discriminatory employment practices. In recent years, the treatment of prisoners and the continued harassment and murder by the RUC have been the main focus of anti-unionist anger, and hence at the heart of suggested outline concessions in the agreement.

None of these factors means that the Six County state can now be reformed out of existence. They do mean that a political process within the Northern state can provide reforms sufficient for Sinn Fein to sell to the anti-unionist masses as a "first stage", one which they will argue will see a series of checks and balances, restraining the Loyalists and eroding discriminatory practices.

However, if this is the tangible result of 50 years of struggle it is minimal, com-



pared to the strategic goal that socialists share with Republicans: the right of self-determination for the whole Irish people and the removal of the British presence in Ireland.

From the very beginning of the peace process, revolutionaries have been guided by the following perspectives:

- that Republicanism's strategy was at an impasse;

- that the impasse would lead it to make a counter-revolutionary peace with imperialism and in the process transform itself into a constitutional nationalist force;

- that Northern Ireland cannot be reformed out of existence: our aim is to smash the sectarian statelet by mass struggle, north and south, not just to hold sectarianism in check;

- that the weakening of the Protestant working class, the new position of Ireland within the global economy and the fragmentation of Unionism all combined to allow the Unionist bourgeoisie to contemplate reforms that would allow Dublin and London to bring Sinn Fein to the negotiating table;

- that, despite the wishes of sections of Unionism and sections of the British ruling class, the peace process was never just a sham aimed at stalling for time as a prelude to military victory: it was a serious attempt to convince Republicanism to play its part in foisting a counter-revolutionary settlement on the masses.

Every one of these predictions and perspectives has been borne out by the agreement concocted on Good Friday 1998. ■

## Timeline:

- October 1993: Secret negotiations on a peace proposal revealed between SDLP and Sinn Fein, and welcomed by IRA.

- December 1993: Downing Street Declaration by John Major and Albert Reynolds.

- August 1994: IRA ceasefire called. Loyalist paramilitary ceasefire follows.

- February 1995: Framework Document drawn up between London and Dublin affirms Britain has "no strategic interest" in Northern Ireland. But talks are postponed as Unionists force Tories to make "decommissioning" of IRA arms a precondition of Sinn Fein entry.

- February 1996: Canary Wharf bombing announces end of IRA ceasefire.

- March 1996: Elections to "peace forum" held. Sinn Fein gets highest share ever of popular vote, despite renewal of warfare. Forum never meets due to Unionist walk-outs and the ban on Sinn Fein.

- May 1997: Labour election victory in Britain sets scene for renewed talks.

- July 1997: Second IRA ceasefire called.

- September 1997: Inclusive peace talks begin. Sinn Fein signs up to the "Mitchell Principles" of non-violence and unification of Ireland by "consent". Only DUP (of the main parties) refuses to attend.

- April 1998: Peace Agreement finalised.



The pan-nationalist road to nowhere: Adams, Reynolds and Hume

## Who's who?

**SDLP:** Social Democratic Labour Party. Leader John Hume. Constitutional nationalist party made up of middle class politicians and affiliated to the socialist international.

**Sinn Fein:** Leader Gerry Adams. Main revolutionary nationalist party allied to Provisional IRA.

**UUP:** Ulster Unionist Party. Leader David Trimble. Main party of Protestant business class.

**DUP:** Democratic Unionist Party.

**Leader Ian Paisley.** Rabid Protestant sectarian party, formed in 1971. Formerly the main outlet for working class loyalism but now in crisis as the only constitutional party to boycott the peace talks.

**UDP:** Ulster Democratic Party. Political wing of the loyalist paramilitary UDA/UFF.

**PUP:** Progressive Unionist Party. Political wing of the loyalist paramilitary UVF.



IRA: From bombs to bourgeois diplomacy

# Guerrillaism disarmed

Mark Harrison explains how the failure of the Provisional IRA's armed struggle led them to a reliance upon Bill Clinton

**IN AUGUST 1969** loyalist mobs in Belfast, Derry and other towns in the Six Counties savagely attacked the nationalist ghettos accompanied and aided by the paramilitary police and the part-time B-Specials. They burnt thousands of nationalists out of their homes and beat up and killed many.

This was the Loyalist response to the civil rights movement launched by students and housing activists three years previously. They had hoped, like Martin Luther King's movement on which it was consciously modelled, to use non-violent direct action.

The nationalist communities defended their areas heroically, but they did so, largely, without arms. The organisation that claimed to be the historic and legitimate defender of these communities, the Irish Republican Army (IRA) was, with the exception of a handful of dissident members, nowhere to be seen during the fighting. One slogan was soon appearing all over the nationalist areas – IRA: I Ran Away.

These events led to a split in the republican movement in December 1969, finally consummated at the Sinn Fein Ard Fheis in January 1970. A group of "traditionalist" IRA members led by Sean MacStiofain, set up the Provisional IRA and Provisional Sinn Fein.

The Provisionals believed that the IRA's failure to defend the nationalists in August 1969 was a betrayal and that betrayal was prompted by its "politicisation", its transformation under the leadership of Cathal Goulding into a socialist (in fact deeply Stalinist) organisation.

The men who formed the early leadership of the Provisionals, such as MacStiofain and O'Bradaigh, were mainly based in the rural south. Their Catholic nationalism was hostile to any form of socialism, not just the treacherous Stalinism of the Officials.

As well as Catholic nationalism their defining feature was their militarism. Their commitment to armed struggle, as against political struggle, was absolute. They had not drawn any lessons from the doomed campaigns of the 1940s and 1950s. Instead they maintained a view of armed struggle that bordered on the spiritual – sacrifice and martyrdom were frequently valued more than the efficacy and politi-

cal value of particular military actions.

Despite these glaring political weaknesses the Provisionals rapidly grew in the urban centres in the North. The reason for this was that they energetically committed themselves to the struggle against the loyalist gangs, their police protectors and, in 1971, the British army.

MacStiofain's strategy was based on securing the support of the nationalist masses by defending them, then, with this support secure, directing the armed struggle towards an offensive campaign aimed at bringing down Stormont. Once this was achieved the final struggle – with the British state – could commence.

After British troops began openly siding with the unionists and especially after January 1972 when 13 unarmed nationalist demonstrators were murdered by the Paras on Bloody Sunday the Provisionals were flooded with young nationalist workers volunteering to fight. They became a movement with mass support. As early as February 1971 *The Observer* had concluded that the Provisional IRA:

"... enjoys almost total support from ordinary people and is not as isolated as the Government believes."

The second part of MacStiofain's plan was fulfilled when the British government, facing a near insurrectionary struggle in the Six Counties, abolished the bastion of Unionist rule, the Stormont parliament, on 24 March 1972 and direct rule from Westminster was established. The way was clear for the final conflict between the Provisionals and Britain.

Twenty six years on, however, the third part of MacStiofain's plan, to get Britain out of Northern Ireland, has failed. Why?

Neither mass support nor a prolonged guerrilla war were capable of bringing about a victory for the IRA and the current peace process and settlement are an expression of the stalemate that ensued from the years of war. The IRA and Sinn Fein lacked the political strategy that alone could have

secured such a victory.

Instead they pursued a strategy which was initially based on a purely military campaign, which later evolved into a military campaign combined with a reformist political campaign. Finally, in the 1990s this campaign culminated in a strategy of replacing bourgeois diplomacy for the military campaign and for mass politics.

Guerrilla war alone, even according to its most loyal exponents, cannot defeat the enemy. In 1974 a Derry republican bulletin, *The Volunteer*, stressed that "the object of the guerrilla is not to win battles, but to avoid defeat, not to end the war but to prolong it, until political victory, more important than any battlefield victory, has been won."

This formulation marked a shift in IRA strategy from all out offensive to

## The consequence of this view of guerrilla war is to substitute the waging of it by a minority of volunteers for the activity of the masses

long war – a shift necessitated by the counter-insurgency successes the British state gained after 1972. MacStiofain realised that an outright military victory for the IRA was impossible. His aim was, as *An Phoblacht* put it in 1971, to wage a guerrilla campaign "until Britain is forced to sit at the conference table".

The consequence of this view of guerrilla war is to substitute the waging of it by a minority of volunteers for the activity of the masses. The end point is not the victory of the masses but the acceptance by the enemy of the right of the guerrillas' political representatives to negotiate a settlement. The necessary exclusion of the masses both from the conduct of the war and from its resolution in a settlement inevitably opens the door to compromise with the enemy.

Once the combined forces of Loyalism and the British state regained the initiative in the 1970s and 1980s it also became transparent that the IRA could not even defend the nationalists from assassination and intimidation. Their military struggle was geared to occasional secret offensives against property, the RUC or the Crown forces. There was no structure of organised armed self-defence and vigilance on the nationalist estates that could deter or counter loyalist death squads. Retribution and retaliation was the best the clandestine cell structure of IRA guerrillaism could do.

Thus guerrillaism, turned into a strategy, leads in the end, whatever the revolutionary intentions of its originators, to a deal with imperialism that sells out even the democratic aspirations of the nationalist masses. In contrast to this a genuine revolutionary Marxist view sees armed struggle as a tactical adjunct to a mass working class political struggle, protecting it against repression and culminating in a general strike and mass insurrection against

British rule. Such a strategy – that of Trotsky's Permanent Revolution – must be based from the outset on a working class programme that combines anti-imperialism with socialist objectives and is capable of fracturing the Orange bloc along class lines.

The long war perspective of the second part of the 1970s was also accompanied by major changes in the leading personnel of the IRA and Sinn Fein. The Provisionals were born as a coalition of old traditionalists and newly radicalised young Northerners, like Gerry Adams and Martin McGuinness. The leadership was in the hands of the traditionalists, but the likes of Adams did not share their conservative, rural outlook. Nor were they as committed to the old Republican fetish of strict abstention from elections – though Adams never went so far as to advocate

using seats won as tribunes from which to denounce the British and the Loyalists and mobilise the masses. During the Hunger Strikes of 1981, when ten republican prisoners were allowed to die by a British state determined to oppose their elementary democratic demand for political prisoner status, the Adams wing of Sinn Fein utilised an election campaign that resulted in Bobby Sands, the first hunger striker to die, becoming an MP. This was followed up in 1983 with Adams himself getting elected as an MP in the general election and at the same time securing the presidency of Sinn Fein.

These experiences pushed Adams in the direction of politics. However, it was the politics of reformism and electoralism, not the politics of self-organisation and mass struggle for socialism and national liberation, that Adams believed would reinvigorate the Provisionals' campaign. Guerrillaism revealed itself as reformism armed with a rifle – the armalite and ballot box perspective, as Sinn Fein leader Danny Morrison put it.

Building Sinn Fein as an electoral force was an important new bargaining chip for the republican movement. And like guerrillaism, it surrendered the initiative to the elite, albeit this time the elite was the political leadership rather than the volunteers.

The political consequence of the turn towards electoralism was twofold. At a grass roots level it transformed Sinn Fein into an outright reformist party. Its councillors became righters of wrongs at a local level – and did much good case work – but also, like all reformist councillors they became managers of the local state, a state they formally regarded as illegitimate, but in whose name they became respected public servants obliged to work within its budgets. The Sinn Fein born in an insurrection against the Orange State found itself voting for budget cuts!

At a national, and international level the turn to elections, and the search for legitimacy that election victories conferred, pushed Adams towards both the constitutional nationalists of the SDLP, the representatives of the Catholic middle class, and via them the bourgeois

nationalist politicians of Dublin, principally Fianna Fail, and their allies in the United States. Sinn Fein was going respectable with a vengeance.

This led to the final phase of the Provisionals' evolution towards the sell out which is the Stormont Agreement – the construction of a pan-nationalist alliance with the SDLP, the semi-colonial bourgeoisie of the south and the supposed friends of Ireland in the US imperialist bourgeoisie. It was the embracing of this alliance with the bourgeoisie by Adams which led inevitably to the abandonment of the armed struggle and to a commitment to pursue a strictly peaceful and constitutional road to a united Ireland.

The basis of this strategy was explained in the so called TUAS document (which is interpreted as either the "Totally Unarmed Strategy" or the "Tactical Use of Arms Strategy" depending on your interpretation of Sinn Fein's evolution). The document was a confession that republicanism could not win the war and could not unite Ireland and that therefore sights should be lowered and a bargaining position of strength established through the creation of a pan-nationalist alliance.

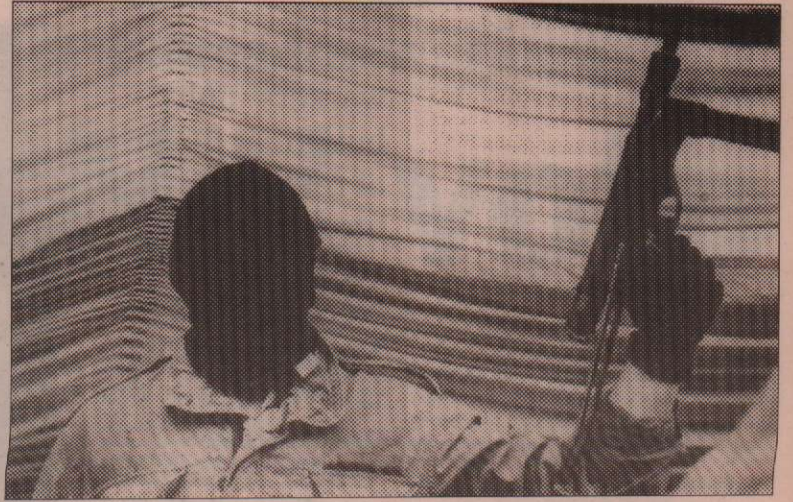
Circulated among the leadership in 1994 the document fundamentally accepted the Downing Street declaration of John Major and Albert Reynolds, that partition would not be removed in the foreseeable future but that the door was open to a new arrangement for the nationalists under which Dublin would play some role in the North via North-South executive bodies.

This approach was adopted by the leadership of the Provisionals. It resulted in the two cease-fires and the peace process. Its end result is the Stormont settlement. It is proof positive that despite the heroism, ingenuity and sacrifice of generations of republicans, the strategy of the leadership is and always has been bankrupt. For what it represents is the abandonment of the goal of a united Ireland as an immediate objective. It has been relegated to the maximum programme of the republican movement, wheeled out to pepper up Sunday speeches.

Sadly this is the inevitable outcome of the republicans entire strategy. For while they were forged as a revolutionary nationalist force fighting imperialism and its agents in the Six Counties, their politics and their methods of struggle were never based on the working class.

Only the combined social force of the working class throughout the 32 Counties – deployed in mass demonstrations, general strikes and finally an insurrectionary movement – could ever be sufficient to drive the British out of the North. But to mobilise such a class force requires a clear programme of political independence from the southern Irish bourgeoisie (and their imperialist backers) who would never tolerate such a perspective.

Moreover, to split and weaken the attachment of working class Loyalism to Britain such a programme would have needed to have embraced anti-clerical and anti-capitalist demands which Sinn Fein could never consistently do for fear of fatally damaging its strategic alliance with its backers in the US and Dublin. ■



President Clinton presses Sinn Fein leaders for more concessions at the White House



Socialists stand for workers' unity – but not at the price of refusing to fight for democratic rights. If the working class in Northern Ireland is divided, it is due to the efforts of a totally reactionary pro-imperialist movement: Loyalism



# A class apart

**THE MODERN** Irish working class was created in the nineteenth century, which saw Belfast mushroom from a population of 20,000 to 350,000.

In the North East, Catholics were mainly confined to the less skilled, less well-paid grades. Where they worked alongside Protestants in the same grades, the latter frequently resorted to sectarian violence to oust their competitors. Participants in the anti-catholic pogroms were often the unskilled workers living in areas of Belfast like the Shankill and Sandy Row.

From the 1880s to the 1980s one section of workers stands out as the regular vanguard of these attacks – the shipyard workers. The report on the riots of 1887 described the workers of Harland and Wolf as “the strongest, healthiest and most intelligent and highly paid body of men in the whole of Belfast”. As a labour aristocracy they had a direct share, however modest, in the super-profits of the British Empire – made visible to them through the fact that the order books of the shipyards were kept full by building the battleships for the protection and extension of it.

Such conditions applied on Clydeside and Merseyside as well as Northern Ireland. So why has it proved impossible to permanently win the Northern Irish workers away from playing such a reactionary role—one so at variance with their historic class interests? The simple answer is lack of leadership.

The working class does not become aware of itself as a class with interests opposed to all its exploiters purely spontaneously. Or rather its spontaneous ten-

dency to do so has to become a conscious goal through political organisation. Without organisations which promote a consistent class outlook then it will tend to regress into sectionalism, a skill or trade consciousness, into localism, regionalism, nationalism and even, in certain objective conditions, racism. This is precisely what happened in Northern Ireland.

As long as the Northern Irish labour movement was dominated by this aristocracy of labour, sectarianism would never be confronted let alone overcome leaving the hold of the existing bourgeois parties unchallenged. When socialism and militant trade unionism emerged in Ireland, led by figures such as James Connolly and Jim Larkin, it was unable to gain a permanent hold on the Protestant workers in the North.

Whilst Connolly and Larkin are heroic figures in the history of the working class they did not fully understand the problem of the Protestant workers seeing them simply as duped Irishmen and women and believing that trade union struggle or the achievement of Home Rule or independence over their heads would eradicate their Orange false consciousness. No revolutionary party was built, capable of fighting and overcoming this false consciousness.

Irish nationalism, which was by now predominantly Catholic in its mass support and sought Home Rule, was anathema to the Protestant workers and bosses alike. It served as the ever-present threat that would bind the Orange bloc together. Virulent anti-Catholicism was, from 1857 onwards, periodically

used to bludgeon the persecuted Catholic minority into submission with triumphalist marches, pogroms and forced evacuations.

Inside the partitioned state this persecution reached new heights, backed by state power (see page 5). The pinnacle of Loyalist working class reactionary action was in May 1974 during the Ulster Workers' Council general strike, which brought the Sunningdale power-sharing accord crashing down. Again, it was the shipyard workers and the power workers who took the lead. Loyalism used working class methods of struggle to preserve its sectarian privileges.

Episodically, in trade union struggles, Loyalist workers have been won to a struggle against the common enemy. The engineering strikes during the second world war threatened to paralyse an important part of the British war machine. Yet, even the most militant trade unionism never challenged Loyalism directly, always striving to “keep politics out of the unions” in order to preserve working class unity on the picket line. Predictably, once the picket line has gone, the questions of national oppression and discrimination shatters the fragile working class unity.

Clearly, neither conceding to nor ignoring the Protestant population can work as a strategy for either national liberation or the emancipation of the working class. Neither defining it as a nation – nor regarding it as simply a duped or wayward part of the Irish nation – helps. Militant class struggle by the workers of the Republic and the North will certainly have an effect on the Protestant workers,

the more so if it is a politically independent struggle, independent of petit bourgeois and bourgeois nationalism and clericalism.

The more the great mass of ordinary Protestant workers see a powerful social force emerge in the Republic and the Six Counties, identical in its class needs and goals to themselves but also determined to end all anti-democratic practices and to break the hold of imperialism throughout the island, the more of them will rally to it. There is no need whatsoever to demand of Protestant workers a declaration of Irish national identity. A determination to break with Orangeism because it is a counter-revolutionary anti-working class movement to its roots is, however, essential.

A Workers' Republic in Ireland would be completely secular. The power of all churches to interfere in political life would be broken. Moreover a Workers' Republic would meet any and every democratic aspiration of those workers who still considered themselves to be British in nationality, including the right to autonomy or secession for those areas where they are a majority.

The territorial unity of Ireland is no fetish, providing the national oppression of the majority is first ended. Providing imperialism and its Orange stooges are defeated, it is secondary if the Protestant workers wish to be part of an Irish or a British workers' state – or for that matter a separate component of the Socialist United States of Europe.

But these consistently democratic solutions will only become possible as a result of a victorious workers' revolution. ■

## Orangeism's role: divide and rule

**THE “PEACE PROCESS”** has led many, including the leaders of Sinn Féin, to talk about the “two traditions of Ulster”, about the need for a mutual recognition and reconciliation between them.

This pious hope deliberately ignores one thing: the arch-reactionary nature of Orangeism and Loyalism in dividing the working class – the only social force which can resolve the national question in a progressive fashion.

The Orange Order was founded in 1795 to wreck the plans of the United Irishmen. The latter originated in Belfast amongst radical Presbyterian manufacturers, merchants and lawyers. Founded as a national organisation in 1791, it was pledged to “to unite the whole people of Ireland, to abolish the memory of all past dissension, and to substitute the common name of Irishman in place of the denominations of Protestant, Catholic and Dissenter”. With 23,000 members in Antrim alone and an alliance with the organisations of the Catholic peasantry it posed a serious threat to the Anglican landlords.

The landlords responded by combining their (Anglican) tenants' societies into the Orange Society. Their activities were to drive out Catholic tenants and

weavers from their homes. Indeed Orangeism was born with a pogrom in Armagh. It was to provide a mass base against the United Irishmen during the great rising of 1798.

But by the 1830s the aristocratic leadership realised they had to win over the Presbyterian population of eastern Ulster. Before the Reform Act of 1832 only 200,000 of the seven million inhabitants of Ireland had the vote. The Reform Act, and the pressure of Daniel O'Connell's movement for the restoration of the Irish parliament threatened the landlords and forced them to seek mass support for landlordism.

Presbyterian Protestants, concentrated in the north-east counties of Ulster, were admitted to the Order in 1835. They rapidly became the predominant force within it. The general growth of the Irish population was leading to land hunger and rivalry. Protestant tenants, who occupied the best land and had more favourable tenancies, feared that a land reform or a rising of the Catholic peasants would not stop at expropriating the landlords.

In the linen producing districts of the Lagan valley and in Belfast, industrialisation was driving the largely Presbyterian artisan weavers out of business.

Catholics were entering the new mills and factories. Sectarian riots began to break out with greater frequency. The industrial revolution created a largely Protestant industrial bourgeoisie and a predominantly Protestant proletariat who supported continued integration in the strongest capitalist power in the world.

The Protestant landlords and bourgeoisie set out to foster, via the Orange Order, a mass consciousness in the Protestant population in favour of preserving the Union. This had to look back to the seventeenth century plantations of Protestant settlers and the risings by the “native Irish” as the justification for Protestant Ascendancy in the whole of Ireland. It had to suppress the history of the last quarter of the eighteenth century when Ulster Presbyterians played a dominant role in the Irish Volunteer movement and United Irishmen.

There were major outbreaks of rioting, burning of Catholic homes and driving out of Catholic workers in 1857, 1864 and 1886. A cross class bloc within the framework of the Orange Order, uniting landlords and capitalists with the Protestant tenants and then industrial workers was possible to the extent that the latter feared the rivalry of a Catholic population which they knew had a three

to one majority in Ireland.

But why was the phenomenon of Orangeism necessary? Because the “Ulster” bourgeoisie and landowners could not create a distinct and exclusive national identity or ideology. That would lead either to a split with Imperial Britain, of whose ruling class they were an integral part, or with the rest of Ireland which they wished to preserve their ascendancy over. To assert, as they increasingly did, British nationality did not solve the problem.

British nationality was an eighteenth century creation, erected on top of pre-existing national identities (English, Scottish and Welsh). It could not be an exclusive nationality like, for example, that of the French Republic (“one and indivisible”).

Nor could it claim great antiquity or linguistic, cultural or “racial” homogeneity. To aspire to be British implied the political subordination but not the obliteration of other national identities. What it involved above all was the renunciation of a separate state for these other nationalities.

Many Protestant workers and petit bourgeois too saw themselves as Irish and British in the same way as the Welsh, Scots and English possessed a two-tier

national consciousness. A number of further permutations were tried; emphasis on the Scottish origins of the Ulster settlers or the idea that an Ulster nationality existed.

As late as 1968 a survey of Northern Ireland Protestants' national self-definition (using exclusive categories) revealed that 39% saw themselves as British, 32% as Ulster, and 20% as Irish. Unsurprisingly, the effects of nearly twenty five years of conflict have increased those considering themselves British to 71% and decreased those considering themselves Irish to 3%! A period of armed truce or even the abandonment of a revolutionary nationalist struggle for a united Ireland could well induce further shifts in Protestant “national” consciousness, including increasing their sense of “Irishness”.

To date no stable national identity or culture separable from religious sectarianism has proven possible. But the Orange Order is not as strong as it once was and its influence within Unionism is weaker. Since its purpose has been to preserve the bloc of Protestant classes against anti-unionist claims its demise and open rejection by a majority of Protestant workers is something all democrats and socialists must work for. ■



INTERVIEW: Irish Workers Group spells out the issues for workers

# Fighting for a 'No' vote

The British and Irish media are working overtime to sell this rotten deal. Here members of the Irish Workers Group spell out the details of the socialist case against the Agreement

## Irish Workers Group

### James Connolly Memorial Seminar

The Peace process 1994-98  
Solving the Irish national question

Saturday 9 May 2pm- 5pm  
The Hillgrove Hotel  
Old Armagh Road  
Monaghan

#### WP: What are the key new factors in the Stormont deal as opposed to the 1973 Sunningdale agreement?

IWG: This agreement is a development from Sunningdale. It builds on it and has greater counter-revolutionary shrewdness. It is unlike Sunningdale in the following ways. The Provos are in ceasefire. The main party of the Unionists are on board. It contains an Irish council and a commitment to open-ended North-South bodies, which will be a key to the Provos selling it. The main Loyalist paramilitaries are on board and the Protestant industrial working class is both divided and half the size it was in 1974. Finally, it is to be given powerful bourgeois democratic counter-revolutionary backing from referenda, North and South. These latter are meant to destroy any democratic claims that Republicans might still make for a popular mandate for the revolutionary nationalist struggle.

#### WP: What is the attitude of Southern workers to the peace deal?

IWG: The Southern working class is not the direct recipient of daily British army repression and RUC repression and sectarianism, as anti-unionist workers in the North are. They have seventy years experience of the "glories" of national independence, experienced as semi-colonial enslavement.

Twice in the last thirty years they have shown active support – mass demos and strikes – for the anti-unionist rebellion: at Bloody Sunday 1972, and more prolonged active support throughout the nine months of the hunger strikes 1980-81. Apart from this, their active support has been sporadic

and restricted.

The growing war-weariness of the anti-unionists in the North, an expression of the cul-de-sac that the struggle under Provo leadership has been driven into, has meant a downswing of mass activity and a turn towards electoralism since the defeat of the hunger strikes. Especially the bombing campaign of civilian and economic targets, which was a key part of the Provos' guerrillaism, enabled the Southern ruling class to increasingly isolate the Northern rebellion from active Southern support: not least by the draconian censorship it succeeded in imposing. The scale of economic growth in Celtic Tiger Ireland has tended to make it easier to tie the mass of workers to the idea of peace at all costs, so as not to endanger the bonanza. Above all, there was the general crisis of leadership in terms of the absence of a revolutionary socialist vanguard party.

#### WP: What is the attitude of the official labour movement leadership in the South to the Stormont agreement?

IWG: All the top politicians in the Labour Party and Democratic Left, the ICTU, and the key officials in all its affiliated unions, along with the Northern Ireland Committee of the ICTU (Irish Confederation of Trade Unions), have been firmly behind the peace process since the late 1980s and are now 100% behind the Stormont agreement. Though they have adopted this position without any real democratic consultation of the rank and file, nevertheless, the peace offensive is so intense and so unchal-

lenged by any mass forces that there is no rank and file revolt against the agreement; nor is there likely to be.

#### WP: What is the IWG's attitude to the repeal of Articles 2 & 3?

IWG: The Irish Workers Group's position is that these amendments underwrite bourgeois law at the highest level – the constitution. They underwrite:

- British imperialism's territorial right to the 6 counties
- the unionist veto on the democratic right to self-determination. We critically defend these articles, as part of our support for the right of the people of Ireland as a whole to self-determination.

We see this right as achievable under the strategy of permanent revolution and the Workers' Republic.

#### WP: What other forces are against repeal of Articles 2 & 3?

IWG: The main people against the repeal of Articles 2 & 3 among Nationalists are Republican Sinn Fein, the 32 County Sovereignty Committee and the IRSP (Irish Republican Socialist Party). RSF and the IRSP are centred on a guerrillaist strategy, which places the focus on the military action of tiny elitist bands cut off from the masses. They will mobilise no serious mass forces to stop the repeal. As they see it, the bomb and the bullet alone will deliver the goods. The 32 County Sovereignty Committee are against an end to the ceasefire, and potentially open to mass struggle. At the moment, however, they are in a state of embryonic confusion, with no programme that differentiates them from the Provos. The IWG

believes that all those Republican and socialist forces that reject the deal should sponsor a grass roots conference before the referenda to organise mass opposition to the sell-out.

#### WP: What is the Provos' attitude to repeal of Articles 2 & 3?

IWG: The Provos would like to 'cherry-pick' the agreement, accepting it in the North, but opposing the repeal of Articles 2 & 3 in the South. The main reason they would like this is to minimise the chances of splits. However, we can be sure that the southern government will be alert to this, and will insist on one single vote for the whole referendum.

#### WP: What do the Socialist Workers Party, the Socialist Party and others have to say about repeal?

IWG: The SWP, who effectively backed the peace process, are vague about the North but they are against the repeal of Articles 2 & 3 because it will institutionalise sectarianism. We believe, however, that they will not mobilise their own members or their wider periphery to oppose the replacements of Articles 2 & 3. Socialist Democracy take a hard and principled position against the whole agreement and call for a mass struggle to defeat the repeal of Articles 2 & 3.

The Socialist Party, the Irish section of the CWI, funks the issue, as one would expect. The do so in the following weasel sentence: "The task of socialists is to adopt an independent position, neither giving support to the claims of the Irish bosses' state, or being drawn in as cheer-leaders for nationalism." (Voice April 1998 p7). ■

PARTITION: Born out of pogroms

# What is the Orange state?

The Peace Agreement wants the Irish people to vote to recognise partition. But the Orange state was brought into being to deny the right of self determination to Ireland and ensure decades of poverty and oppression

**THE IRISH WAR** of independence which raged during the years 1918-21 hardly touched Ulster, where the Unionists had won a small minority in the 1918 elections. But the ruling class did not waste their time and prepared for a bloody partition of the country, should the nationalists win. After some debate, the Unionists decided to push for a Six County entity which would give them a comfortable two-thirds majority over the Catholic minority. Even this would include two counties, Fermanagh and Tyrone, where the Catholics formed over fifty percent of the population.

What spurred the northern Unionists into action was probably the powerful and militant Belfast shipyard strike of 1919. The strike had united Protestant and Catholic workers in a year when, across Europe, revolutionary upheavals were marking the post-war period. There was a clear danger that workers might become not only politicised but revolutionised. Once again, the Orange Lodges moved decisively on the side of counter-revolution. Catholics, nationalists and socialists were violently expelled from the shipyards and then from the engineering factories.

Over the next four years, riots, expulsions, pogroms and burning of homes were used to terrorise the Catholic minority. At the end of 1920, the Unionists took the decisive steps to secure their goal, partition: a Six County Orange statelet within the United Kingdom. A thirty percent minority in Ireland as a whole had undemocratically prevented the unification of Ireland and in so doing created a statelet, in which there was a thirty percent minority totally hostile to inclusion in that state.



1968: Paisley's thugs block route of civil rights march

This population was regarded by the Unionists as inherently disloyal and therefore to be excluded from equal citizenship in every way possible. In December the paramilitary Special Constabulary was formed directly from the ranks of the Ulster Volunteer Force. For the next fifty years, the Specials, forged from what was effectively the private army of the Orange Order, would form a terror organisation of around 10,000-30,000 heavily armed and easily mobilised Protestant paramilitaries.

In May 1921, the Unionists won elections in the Six Counties with wide-

spread intimidation and formed the first Parliament of Northern Ireland. By June 1922, the Orange state had been established and the IRA split over the question of cross-border patrols into the Six Counties. Although repression in the form of curfews and internment continued until 1924, the nationalists had been defeated. In all, 11,000 Catholics had been expelled from work, 23,000 were homeless, 500 were interned, 1,000 had been wounded and 300 killed.

Gerrymandering was of crucial importance to maintaining this regime. Derry, Northern Ireland's second city, had a nationalist council in the early 1920s. It was and is a predominantly Catholic city. The Unionists responded by constantly redrawing electoral boundaries to ensure huge nationalist majorities were swallowed up by small Unionist majorities. As a result virtually every council, small or large, became controlled by the Unionist Party.

The councils in turn controlled the issuing of contracts and allocation of public sector jobs. Even in counties Fermanagh and Tyrone, where Catholics formed over half the population, Protestants enjoyed 90% of the council jobs. Councils also allocated housing, ensuring that Protestants not only got the lion's share but also that the electoral consequences returned even greater Unionist majorities.

Ministers and MPs also toured the Orange Lodges urging employers to do their duty and employ only "loyal" men and women. Many of them boasted of having never employed a Catholic, some even claiming that every Catholic was a "traitor". As a result, Catholics bore the brunt of unemployment, with rates twice as high as their Protestant

class brothers and sisters, as well as being trapped in the lowest paid occupations and grades. Emigration was rife, 60% of it from the minority community. Undoubtedly, this too aided the electoral supremacy.

Finally, standing above all of this, stood the huge paramilitary apparatus and the battery of repressive legislation. The notorious Special Powers Act was later supplemented by the Public Order Act and the Flags and Emblems Act. Northern Ireland has throughout its history lived in a constant state of emergency.

Furthermore, all these powers have been used by a thoroughly Protestant and Loyalist police force and Specials, ensuring that Orange excesses are overlooked whilst the most minor nationalist – or even Catholic – public expressions are banned. Catholic sports days would be banned and the next day an Orange parade through a Catholic town allowed.

Even strikes – like the famous Outdoor Relief strike of 1932 – which united unemployed workers from the Catholic Falls Road with the Protestant Shankill were followed up by a bout of sectarian rioting in Belfast, Larne, Portadown and Ballymena. In 1935 12 people were killed and 6,000 injured in further Orange pogroms. The emergence of the Civil Rights Movement in 1967-69 led to the re-emergence of Orange pogroms. In 1969, in Belfast alone, 3,570 families were driven from their homes. Whole streets were burned down and the segregation which exists today brutally enforced.

It was this history of reaction that led to the last thirty years of open and often armed resistance by anti-unionists to bring down this state. ■



## 26 COUNTIES: Economic boom masks unemployment and low wages

# The 'Celtic tiger' - an endangered species?

The Republic's growth rates have been hailed as an economic miracle. *Maureen Hartwell* warns of the potential crash that lies ahead, and explains its power to derail the imperialist peace

**THE ECONOMY** of the Republic of Ireland has been hailed as the "Celtic tiger" - a west European version of the booming economies of South East Asia. Growth this year is expected to reach 7% - the highest in Europe. The government expects Ireland to be in the first wave of countries entering European monetary union next year.

The success of Ireland's economy has had two effects on the current peace process.

□ It has strengthened the Fianna Fail government's hand in negotiations with Britain, with Ireland's diplomatic prestige boosted by its growth rates.

□ It has strengthened bourgeois nationalism's leverage over Sinn Fein. Adams and co have been impressed by a model of economic development based on opening Ireland up to massive investment from foreign multinationals. Traditionally, petit-bourgeois nationalism clung to forms of protectionism and "import substitution", combined in Sinn Fein's case with a belief in the sanctity of the small agricultural producer.

However, behind the impressive facade of the 26 counties' economy lies a more mundane edifice. The actual economic structure that supports this growth is, in reality, weaker than most of the other EU states. It is much weaker than that of the handful of major industrial nations.

## Unemployment at a peak

Despite the eye-catching growth figures, Ireland still has an unemployment rate among the worst in the EU and OECD; unemployment is still more than 10% at the peak of a six year long international economic recovery. And this high rate persists despite the fact that all through the 1980s and early 1990s tens of thousands a year emigrated. Almost uniquely among the world's nations, Ireland's population today is smaller than at the turn of the century.

The Republic's economy is now characterised by the rapid growth of exports, by an ever accelerating domination of these exports by manufactured exports, and by a move away from Britain as the traditional trading partner and towards the rest of the EU. Some 45% of all manufacturing in Ireland is done by foreign owned (mainly US) multinational corporations (MNCs).

From the late 1950s until the late 1960s, new foreign investment was mainly in "old" labour intensive industries such as clothing, footwear, textiles, plastics and light engineering. But from about the mid-1960s, poorer, less-developed semi-colonies with even lower labour costs became more attractive as sites for these industries. In response, foreign investment in Ireland was increasingly directed at newer, more

technologically advanced sectors - such as computers, machinery, pharmaceuticals and medical instruments and equipment.

By the 1990s, foreign MNCs accounted for 75% of gross exports. And export earnings per person in the overseas firms were over twice that of Irish owned firms in 1987. The multinationals can earn high profits primarily due to the very high productivity that is rooted in capital intensive technique combined with relatively low wages for skilled and semi-skilled labour by international standards. In the early 1990s profit repatriation from Ireland to the MNCs' home bases was running at £3bn per year.

The south remained, despite the breakneck development of computer factories, a semi-colony: fundamentally dependent on the big imperialist economies and a key source of super-profits for foreign owned multinationals.

To some degree, the flow of capital out of the country was offset in the past by various grants and subsidies from the EU. The £8bn or so received during the 1990s indicates the relatively privileged character of Ireland as a semi-colony. Ireland enjoys grants for agricultural price support and infrastructure development.

However, while these grants are important in mitigating and alleviating aspects of Ireland's social condition, they are also a symptom of Ireland's dependency upon imperialist capital, they merely mask Ireland's semi-colonial condition to a certain extent. The key decisions on the nature and scale of the handouts are made by the cabinets and boardrooms of the EU members of the G7. These grants are conditional on continued EU expansion and the success of the Euro. By the mid-1980s, net profit repatriation from Ireland to the G7 countries was outstripping revenue received from the EU by two to three times.

Around the same time, the flow of foreign private investment began to taper off. Meanwhile, domestic capital outflows have increased. If this continues, it will be a problem for the southern Irish capitalists and could lead to serious balance of payments problems, impeding the ability to sustain grants to the MNCs and the commitment to provide a degree of social stability to the working class through welfare.

The looming balance of payments crisis is not the only thing that the Celtic tiger has in common with its Asian relatives. A mountain of foreign-held debt casts a shadow over the economy. Between 1973 and 1990, foreign debt rose from £2.5 billion to £30.2 billion. The main causes of this have been:

- the increasing cost of attracting foreign capital;
- the sponsoring and growth of

semi-state owned firms;

□ the scale of subsidies to the South's relatively backward native industry (not least commercial farming);

□ the growing cost of moving southern pay, pensions and health and education expenditure towards EU standards; and

□ the need to borrow more to meet the debt servicing obligations of previous borrowing.

The crucial issue, from the viewpoint of expanding productive investment in the South, is that the scale of the debt servicing incurred by the southern ruling class severely restricts its freedom of movement. Well in advance of any crisis arising out of the Republic's inability to pay back the interest and capital on this debt, the state is being restricted in its ability to go on bribing foreign capital into the country. It is also unable to finance the promotion of the hundred indigenous companies which the government's national plan claims can be developed to levels where they can "take off" - i.e. compete openly and successfully in the world market.

In addition to the national debt, the semi-state commercial companies are indebted more and more to banks and finance houses. This debt, too, has important consequences. It is one of the most important motives for the new wave of attacks on the jobs and conditions in these companies. The foreign component of the debt of semi-state firms is an Achilles heel for the theory that such firms can simply grow to compete with the imperialist giants. Foreign creditors frequently reduce debt by swapping it for shares. In effect, this is a creeping privatisation that will hand over the semi-state firms to the real masters of the Irish economy: the G7 multinationals.

## Will Ireland go the way of South Korea?

Membership of the EU has been the single most important advantage for the Irish bourgeoisie. Without it, subsidised markets for its agricultural goods and access to funds for state directed investments and regional grants would have not been forthcoming. But to get these required removing barriers to the penetration of MNC capital, especially from the USA.

Naturally, the loser in this development has been the Irish working class, whose sacrifices in terms of lower wages and lower than necessary job creation, have brought greater levels of emigration and a falling share of wages in national income.

However it is easy for the southern Irish semi-colony to survive and prosper in the context of a long upward cycle of development and especially of inward investment dominated by the most

dynamic sectors of the most dynamic imperialist country (the USA). But a country's status in the world economy is revealed by how it reacts to an economic contraction. When the already saturated computer and semiconductor industries retrench or withdraw to cheaper locations, the Celtic tiger will become a threatened species along with the Asian variety.

The sobering truth is that Ireland remains a semi-colony. It is a country whose economy is fundamentally at the mercy of patterns of investment, finance and trade, the shape and direction of which are determined by the small group of countries that monopolise the world's reserves of capital and are home to the dominant multinational companies.

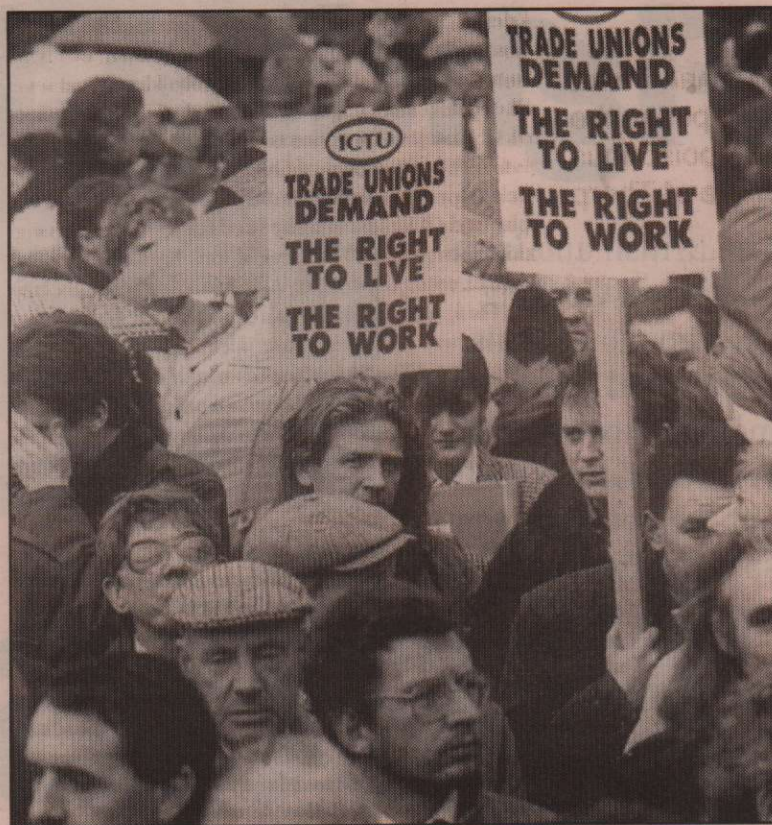
The collapse of the Asian tigers last year proved that feverish investment can be, and often is, a prelude to a crash and economic slump. If a major economic contraction visits Ireland, then one of the pillars of the peace deal - a strong and modernising Ireland capable of bolstering Northern Ireland's economy and exerting powerful reformist ideological pressure upon Northern nationalists - will crumble.

This will have powerful ideological effects, north and south of the border. In the south, when the economy has boomed, many workers have been content to remain passive on the sidelines of the northern anti-unionist struggle. Even workers engaged in strikes against multinational-owned firms do not spontaneously make the link between this and the anti-imperialist struggle in the North.

Any sharp recession, however, will immediately lay bare the link between imperialist oppression in the north and economic domination in the south. Ultimately, the bail-out packages will - as in South East Asia - demand the Irish working class be made to pay for the crisis, in the form of benefit cuts and job losses. Anything which divides the working class and saps its strength becomes a weapon for the imperialist banks and multinationals: and the current Peace Agreement is just such a weapon.

Faced with renewed crisis it is possible that Irish nationalism - of both bourgeois and petit bourgeois stripes - will turn again to the protectionism of the 1950s and the utopianism of Eire Nua. But, in modern capitalism, the protectionist model is just the same kind of dead end as is the current neo-liberal free-for-all.

The answer lies in a workers' government of the whole of Ireland, with a democratic plan of production and public ownership to ensure that the benefits of Ireland's natural resources and economic growth are enjoyed by its people, not the shareholders of the foreign multinationals. ■





# The historic roots of national oppression

*Dave Stockton traces a Marxist history of the Irish national question*

**IRELAND, AS** the saying goes, is Britain's oldest colony. However if this is taken to mean "830 years of national oppression" then it is an anachronistic term.

Marxists realise that nations are historically formed entities belonging to the period between the emergence of mercantile capitalism, around 1500, and the achievement of the socialist transformation of society. Nationalists, on the other hand, need to present their nation as an age-old community with a glorious past. They construct a national myth out of real and even fictional historical events.

From 1169 onwards Ireland, with its small patchwork of early feudal kingdoms, was the target for invasion by bands of Norman nobles, knights and their retainers. Their aim was to conquer and dispossess the island's native ruling classes, much as their predecessors had done to the Saxon kingdom of England a hundred years previously. They did not seek to displace its peasant population. They simply sought to exploit them.

They were not ultimately successful in completely displacing the Gaelic speaking rulers. Rather, they merged with the Irish ruling classes into a new Anglo-Irish feudal ruling class, seeking the greatest possible independence from the English kings' "Lordship of Ireland".

But, by last decades of the sixteenth century, the rise of the English mercantile bourgeoisie and capitalistic gentry gave rise to a new project in Ireland, that of "planting" Ireland, much as the American colonies were later to be settled. The English government and its companies of merchant adventurers, throughout the seventeenth century, carried out the seizure of most of the landed wealth of Ireland. In key areas they envisaged its settlement with Scottish and English small farmers and the driving out, by economic hardship as well as political repression, of the original inhabitants.

But the project of displacing the native population was only permanently successful in two or three counties in the north-east of the island. In the rest, the native landowners were displaced by English landlords, who exploited a native Irish peasantry.

The ideology of the English bourgeois revolution was Protestantism and so was the colonial extension of it to Ireland which had a vital strategic importance. Ireland could become the bastion of counter-revolution against the English Revolution, which was why Cromwell, immediately after the execution of Charles I, "pacified" Ireland (1649-52) and dispossessed the vast majority of Catholic landowners. He destroyed the organisation of the Catholic church and attempted the conversion of the native population. Ireland was to be a huge source of primitive accumulation of capital for England.

But the idea of nations as the basis of states was already gaining ground — though still subordinated to religious ideology. After the near total destruction of the Catholic landowner class and its ideologists, the embryonic idea of Irish nationhood passed to those sections of the Protestant possessing classes and their ideologists, who had grievances against the way England subordinated and discriminated against Ireland.

In the second half of the eighteenth century, a revolt against Britain's colonial policy gave birth to the modern Irish national question. Led, initially, by Protes-



Hero of Irish nationalism, Eamon De Valera takes the salutes of an anti-Treaty IRA column during the Civil War in Ireland, 1921.

tant merchants, and sections of the more modern Anglo-Irish landowners and the petit bourgeoisie, it was inspired by constitutional, secular, and finally republican ideals drawn from the English, North American and French Revolutions. Since most of its leaders were Protestants, this national struggle did not have a predominantly religious character.

The Irish Parliament, with its own House of Commons and House of Lords was legislatively subordinate to the London Parliament. Moreover it had no control whatsoever over the executive power in Ireland. Utilising the American War of Independence to wring concessions from London, in 1778, the complete legal exclusion of Catholics was breached. And in 1782 the Acts of the English parliament which subordinated the Irish legislature were amended or repealed.

But the "Patriots" were in the main Protestant merchants, gentry and even large landlords. They could hardly claim to represent a nation that was three quarters Catholic and overwhelmingly peasant. The French Revolution and first the threat and then example of the expropriation of the great landed proprietors by the peasantry and the bourgeoisie quenched their radicalism.

Leadership of the "national cause" passed to the radical Presbyterian manufacturers and lawyers such as Wolfe Tone. The United Irishmen broke with the limitations of the Patriots and proclaimed themselves for complete Catholic emancipation, for complete independence from Britain and for a Republic on the French model.

The more radical amongst them were prepared for an alliance with "the men of no property", i.e. the peasantry. But savage British repression, the failure of the promised French assistance, and the

retreat into the arms of the British by the bulk of the Irish "men of property" doomed the 1798 uprising of the United Irishmen to heroic failure.

The reactionary repression and the desertion of the Protestant "men of property" increasingly gave the Irish question its religious dimension. This was confirmed by the Act of Union (1801). The British, with the connivance of the Protestant landowners and merchants, deprived Ireland of its own parliament, lest it should become again the focus for demands for autonomy, even independence, as it had done under Grattan in the 1770s and 1780s.

The uneven economic development of Ireland in the nineteenth century turned this split in the embryonic Irish nation into a chasm. Landlordism in the greater part of Ireland hampered the development of modern capitalism and a modern bourgeoisie. The Great Famine killed millions and drove millions more across the Atlantic or the Irish sea to slave in the factories of Britain and the United States.

In the decades just before and after the famine, a small urban and landowning bourgeoisie and an intelligentsia developed, largely Catholic, who saw, in Home Rule (autonomy) or complete independence, the only remedy for the economic prostration of the majority of Ireland.

The experience of religious discrimination and the fight against it under Daniel O'Connell, led to the creation of a mass movement, first for Catholic emancipation (successful in 1829) and then, in the 1840s, for the repeal of the Act of Union, which culminated in the "monster meeting" of Clontarf in 1843. O'Connell's mastery of brinkmanship, hinting at insurrection, failed the second time because at this point no section of the British ruling class was willing to make

this concession and because O'Connell was no revolutionary.

The movement disappeared in the horrors of the great famine (1845-49). At least 800,000 people died of famine and disease. By 1847, a quarter of a million peasants were emigrating annually. This was to reduce Ireland from a country of 8.5 million in 1841 to one of 6.5 million by 1851 and around four million by the end of the century.

In the decades that followed, revolutionary nationalist forces emerged in Ireland; the Young Irelanders in 1848 and the Fenians in 1858-67. Both attempted insurrections against British rule. The Fenians became an international organisation of Irish republicans with a mass following in North America. This was to help create an unbroken tradition from Fenianism in the 1860s to the Irish Republican Brotherhood and Sinn Fein in the new century.

It was the "land war" of 1879-82, led by Michael Davitt, which for the first time since the 1840s mobilised the Irish peasantry against the Anglo-Irish landlords. In an alliance with the Irish parliamentary party led by Charles Stuart Parnell, a mass movement for Irish autonomy (Home Rule) emerged, which pressured a section of the British ruling class led by Gladstone and the Liberals to attempt to tie Ireland to the British Empire, by the kind of dominion status that had worked with Canada and Australia.

Thus, modern Irish national consciousness was embodied in movements both militantly reformist and revolutionary. But the Protestants of north-east Ulster excluded themselves from it. As industrialisation proceeded, mainly in the Belfast area, Catholics were drawn into the city and competition for jobs took on a sectarian character (see page 4).

With Gladstone's first Home Rule Bill (1886) the industrial bourgeoisie (formerly Liberals), as well as the Tory gentry, turned to Orangeism as a way of providing a mass base to successfully resist Home Rule between 1886 and 1918. As members of the ruling class of a great empire, they had no wish to find themselves either sharing their privileges and power, let alone subordinate to the much weaker southern bourgeoisie.

This first wave of struggle culminated in the Easter Rising of 1916, led by the socialist James Connolly and the petit-bourgeois nationalist Padraig Pearse. Though itself abortive and greeted with indifference if not outright hostility by the Dublin masses, the execution of its leaders immediately after the rising created massive revulsion against the British. It led to a truly mass nationalist war of independence after the First World War ended. In 1918 the Irish people, by means of a British general election, voted overwhelmingly for the party — Sinn Fein — that advocated independence. The majority of Irish MPs elected to the Westminster Parliament assembled as a constituent Dail in Dublin and proclaimed an independent Irish Republic.

The great majority of the Irish People thus unmistakably exercised its self-determination and this was for total state independence from Britain. But Britain adamantly refused to recognise this democratic decision, using the pretext of the votes of the Protestant minority in the north east. That was the last time that the Irish people as a whole were able to express their will. Britain's answer was to unleash the hired thugs of the black-and-tans to crush the independence movement. In 1921, after the war of independence had reached a stalemate, Britain enforced the partition of Ireland. The majority of the Irish nationalist leaders capitulated to this pressure and signed a treaty agreeing to this.

The Six County statelet did not represent the self-determination of the Unionist population, a democratic secession by a national minority because it involved a massive act of national oppression. A national minority, made itself into a majority by force, both its own and that of its British patrons. Nearly forty per cent of the new statelet's population were adamantly opposed to its formation — as was of the population of the rest of the island. "Northern Ireland" was thus, from the beginning, an artificial creation with but one purpose — to ensure a pro-British Protestant majority in the most industrialised part of the island.

North-east Ulster, closely tied to Clyde-side, was central to the economic and military defence of the British Empire; shipyards for its fleet, armaments, a major recruiting area etc. The great estates of the Protestant gentry and small farmers had to be included. There was thus no real pretence that the border of the new state represented the wishes of the population on either side of it. The British and the Unionists knew then as they know now that partition along "national lines" would make the statelet unviable.

The fear of the nationalist minority ever becoming a majority was thus a perpetual neurosis. That was why the "natural" economic forces of imperialist domination had to be given a helping hand. Catholic workers had to be driven by unemployment to emigrate.

Thus, the Irish national question acquired the fundamental features which have predominated throughout the twentieth century. In the 26 counties, a semi-colonial state emerged, formally independent but in reality tied economically to British imperialism. The Six Counties was neither an integral part of Britain nor a homogeneous "Ulster" but a "Protestant State for a Protestant People" that could only be made viable by oppressing the narrowly minoritised nationalist population, who had to be subjected to repression whenever they resisted. ■



# Why we say reject the deal

continued from page 1

tant privileges and the Unionists' determination to defend and justify them with supremacist ideologies. Instead, the deal institutionalises sectarianism, legitimises it but seeks to control it through a system of checks and balances.

It is true that the British and the Unionists have had to make concessions to Sinn Fein – on British troop operations, reform of the RUC and prisoner release – in order to gain their assent to this fundamentally reactionary peace. But these concessions are all conditional and Britain retains full control of when to implement them throughout the process.

Britain has undertaken to "make progress towards the objective of as early a return as possible to normal security arrangements in the Six Counties" which may involve unspecified troop reductions, the removal of security installations and the removal of emergency powers in Northern Ireland.

But all this will only be done if and when the IRA surrenders its weapons. As for the release of the prisoners, some 239 Republicans are already due for release by the year 2000 and the remaining prisoners will only be released on licence if progress is made with decommissioning Republican arms. Meanwhile the overwhelmingly Protestant RUC will remain in place, fully armed and licensed to intimidate anti-unionists and collude with the Orange Order in their plans for the marching season. The only commitment here is for a commission to study possible reforms.

A massive co-ordinated propaganda effort will be in force before the referendum to deliver a Yes vote, North and South. Labour and the Tories will jointly campaign in Northern Ireland, Gordon Brown will try to buy votes with an injection of cash. Concerts and showbiz celebrities will be deployed with military precision to win hearts and minds.

The voice of progressive rejection will be small at first and most will hear the

reactionary No campaign from Paisleyites and disaffected UUP MPs. These hard bitten sectarians want nothing to do with integration or "an accommodation between two traditions". They want to be allowed to lord it over the Catholics as before, jealously guarding Protestant privileges in the process.

Revolutionary socialists reject this deal from a completely different standpoint. We want a democratic solution which recognises the right of self-determination for the whole Irish people. The only genuine way this can be achieved is not by controlled referendums with a pre-set and limited option on constitutional change but through a 32-county Constituent Assembly in which democratically elected representatives from the whole of Ireland can deliberate and debate a range of solutions.

Protestant workers should vote against the deal, not to preserve their political and economic privileges, which are in any case being eroded under the changes in capitalism in the Six Counties. They should do so to fight the real

scourges of unemployment, factory closures and rationalisation, to prevent the bosses, Orange and Green, from pocketing all the incoming aid. Protestant workers need to break with sectarianism and link up with the nationalist section of the working class in a common struggle. But this requires a conscious and clear break from Orangeism and the championing of the democratic rights and social equality of the nationalist population.

Northern anti-unionists and the mass of working class people in the south must be mobilised around an alternative set of demands that can bring peace with justice. Protestant workers must reject all options on offer from Unionism: from Trimble's self-satisfied Yes campaign to the reactionary No campaign of the DUP. All must join in an anti-unionist No vote.

In rejecting this imperialist peace, socialists do not call for a return to the guerrilla struggle by the Republican movement: this strategy failed, even when carried out by a united movement.

To attempt to repeat it now with massively depleted forces and without popular support would be a disaster.

Brave Republican fighters can do other and more effective things to undermine imperialism's rule in Ireland. They can help build a revolutionary working class leadership. We are, however, absolutely opposed to surrendering arms to the British or Irish governments, arms that are still needed to defend the anti-unionist community against Loyalist death squads, the army and the RUC. What is needed now is to train a mass militia to defend the communities against all these threats.

We say to all the dedicated activists of the fight against British rule: your leadership has sold you out. Not only have they brought the movement to the brink of signing the counter-revolutionary peace: they are hiding in their inner circles and policy forums as the days and weeks tick away, refusing to give leadership to the anti-unionist masses because they have been wrong footed by Britain and the UUP. ■

## Reforming the Orange state...

# Making partition work?

**THE DEAL** is signed and due to be sealed with a big "yes" vote on 22 May. But it is a long way from being delivered. Sinn Fein's hopes for powerful North-South bodies, not subject to veto by a Unionist-dominated Assembly, have come to nothing. Adams set out Sinn Fein's negotiating goals in an article entitled "A Bridge to the Future" on 1 March. Adams demanded:

- executive cross-border bodies;
- no surrender of the Irish government's constitutional claim to the six counties without a parallel renunciation by Britain of its sovereignty over the North;
- a positive espousal of the goal of a united Ireland;
- social and cultural equality in the North for Catholics;
- disbandment of the RUC and its replacement by a new police force acceptable to the anti-unionist community.

The first three of these have been completely rejected by the deal. The Irish government capitulating on the first of these under British and Unionist pressure in the last weeks.

Still, Gerry Adams' speech to the 20 April Sinn Fein conference suggested that the leadership sees enough in the Easter agreement to recommend a vote for it in the North. On what grounds?

Essentially, Sinn Fein hopes that "rights to equality of opportunity in employment, to a fair and just policing system and recognition and respect for cultural identity" can be advanced within the new constitutional framework of the Six Counties.

Their original belief that the deal could be presented as "transitional" to a united Ireland was based on naive hopes that the Irish government would act as guarantor of the rights of the anti-unionist community in the North exercised through powerful cross-border bodies.

Now it is plain that implementation of the "equality agenda" is subject to the Unionist veto. Is it likely that they will agree to substantive changes?

Since the imposition of direct rule in 1972, the British have tried to defuse the revolutionary democratic potential of some of the worst grievances of the anti-unionist population. The very abolition of the grossly sectarian and gerrymandered Stormont was a response to the mass mobilisations of 1969-72.

With the aid of large EU funds, London, Dublin and the SDLP have removed some of the most explosive discrimina-



tory factors (e.g. access to housing) and mitigated others (e.g. public sector employment). These were the grievances in the forefront of the 1967-72 revolutionary democratic movement. The subsequent growth of the Catholic middle class has also broadened the social base of reformist nationalists like the SDLP.

Limited reforms can no doubt be achieved in the area of desegregation of schools, which are at present almost completely split along religious lines. Indeed, there is even growing support from Protestants for reform.

As the opening of the new college in Belfast immediately following the peace deal shows, government money will be used on cross-community infrastructural projects and private sector investment will increase.

When it is elected, the new 108-member Assembly and the appointed confessional executive bodies will be the focus of the hopes of all those who believe that "parity of esteem" and "respect for each others' tradition" will prevail in the new political system.

Will the Unionists turn the Assembly into a bear pit of sectarian abuse once more? Will they exclude Sinn Fein from any meaningful role while embracing the SDLP, as they do in Belfast City Council?

Or will they rather take the route of Unionists in other local councils where pragmatic co-operation between Sinn Fein and the UUP prevails?

Given the electoral constituencies and the system of weighted majorities needed for important decisions within the Assembly, it is highly unlikely that Unionism can use the Assembly as it did the old Stormont – i.e. as a weapon for naked and unbridled discrimination against the nationalist population. On the other hand, Sinn Fein will have to win not only SDLP support, but sections of the Unionist parties if it is to realise its radical equality agenda through the Assembly.

While serious steps in this direction cannot be excluded in certain areas – such as employment rights, a bill of rights or education reform – the biggest obstacle it will face to its project of desectarianisation of the Northern state will be the RUC.

The RUC has 12,500 officers, less than a thousand of them Catholic. This is three times the "normal" size for a police force given the population. The bulk of this monstrous apparatus exists for the sole purpose of repressing the resistance and protests of the anti-unionists. It has the worst human rights record of any police force within the EU, and was castigated last month by the UN for systematic intimidation of the lawyers

of anti-unionist detainees. Castlereagh, its headquarters, has been condemned time and again over the last 20 years by Amnesty International and other human rights groups for the torture of nationalists detained there.

Every day this heavily armed loyalist force harasses Catholic youth on the estates, hurling racist abuse at Catholic residents. Every year it colludes and collaborates with the Orange Order, as they carve their way through Catholic streets with their triumphalist marches. Meanwhile, the RUC investigates complaints against itself and unsurprisingly finds itself blameless.

Of over 2,500 complaints in 1996, only 10 led to any disciplinary proceedings and only one resulted in a guilty verdict. In April, an internal RUC report revealed that, of the 5% of Catholics in the RUC one-third complained of discrimination in promotion and operational duties as well as regular sectarian abuse.

Sinn Fein are right to insist that the RUC is completely unacceptable to anti-unionists and to call for its disbandment. Yet opinion poll after opinion poll show big majorities of the Protestants in the North against any serious reform of the RUC, including cosmetic ones such as a change of name and uniform.

Trimble made it clear to the UUP

Council when he gained endorsement for the deal, that he was "drawing a line in the sand" over RUC reform. He did this ahead of the findings of the commission, which is still to be set up and which will make recommendations on the future of the RUC next year.

Of course, Sinn Fein will settle for a lot less than a full disbandment of the RUC. Their immediate demands are for a 40% reduction in its size, mass recruitment of Catholics, its disarming in routine operations, immediate reform of the command structure/control over policing strategy and some kind of 'community policing' system, which would allow Catholic officers to patrol Catholic estates.

The Unionists will minimise any concessions and will blackmail Blair to water down or abandon any radical proposals that emerge from the commission. Above all, the Unionists will make it a condition of any changes that there is full disarming of the IRA. In turn, the IRA will not disarm without full-scale desectarianisation of the bodies of armed men and women that prop up the sectarian state.

The peace deal has far from said the final word on the struggle to overthrow the sectarian Six County state; it merely focuses attention on the core issues that will be subject to fierce struggle in the coming years. ■