

Down with racist Fortress Europe!

All US/British troops out of Iraq now! UN stay out!



Brutal occupation of Iraq under British imperialist troops in Basra (left) and US soldier taking Shi'ite prisoners near Najaf.

The photographs of US and British troops sadistically torturing Iraqi prisoners provoked cries of outrage as they flashed on television broadcasts around the globe. But these scenes of horror and degradation are no aberration. They are the all too real face of colonial imperialism past and present — from Algeria to Vietnam to Northern Ireland.

Untold (and uncounted) numbers of Iraqi civilians have been killed. Uprisings in Falluja, the slums of Baghdad, and in Kut, Najaf and other cities in the Shi'ite south of Iraq in April have been savagely dealt with by the US occupiers: AC-130 gunships and attack helicopters fired on heavily populated urban areas; mosques were bombed during afternoon prayers; tanks mowed down unarmed civilians; bodies littered the streets as Marines rampaged house to house. As for British-occupied territory, an eyewitness account in the *Times* (1 April) began: "Forget all that smug stuff in the British media about the way our troops (unlike the arrogant and out-of-touch Yanks) know how to get on with the natives — every soldier a diplomat, etc — and have turned their southern Iraq zone around Basra into a haven of peaceful reconstruction.... The place is a stinking mess and the townsfolk are unemployed and desperate."

The colonial carnage in Iraq will not end as long as the US/British imperialist-led forces, from all the "coalition" allies to the estimated 15,000 mercenaries and CIA agents, are there. They must get out, now! But Bush & Co have no plan, and have never had any plan, to militarily vacate Iraq. As liberal journalist Robert Fisk noted in an interview on Australian television, the supposed "handover" of power on 30 June is a manifest fraud:

"The governing council, which is appointed by the Americans, and which is the Iraqi Government at the moment

would merely be handing over to another group of American-picked Iraqis.... Even if there was a democratically elected government to hand over sovereignty to, which there is not, the sovereignty doesn't mean anything because under the laws that Paul Bremer, the US consul in Baghdad has already enacted for post June 30, all the Iraqi security forces will be commanded by United States officers."

Construction has begun on 14 "enduring" bases for the 110,000 US soldiers scheduled to remain in Iraq for "years".

What is necessary to break the imperialists' domination of the region is working-class struggle, both at home in the imperialist centres and in the Near East. Such is far from the perspective of the reformists who head the Stop the War Coalition. Complaining that Blair's Labour government violated "our democracy" by throwing its lot in with the US in Iraq, they look to the European imperialists to bring "peace" to the besieged masses of Iraq. In the lead up to the war, the Socialist Workers Party (SWP) and right-wing centrists of Workers Power joined with other putative "socialist" groups in Europe in signing a statement calling "on all the European heads of state to publicly stand against this war". Now, various of these organisations herald the example of Spain, where following the 11 March criminal bombing in Madrid, the government of José Maria Aznar was ousted and the Socialists were swept into office. Upon assuming office, Prime Minister José Zapatero immediately announced the withdrawal of Spanish troops from Iraq. This prompted the SWP to advise Blair that he faces the following alternative: "He could stick with his fellow war criminal George Bush and slide deeper into the blood and horror of Iraq. Or he could follow the Spanish government and withdraw troops as quickly as possible."

The first crack in the so-called "coalition of the willing", the withdrawal of Spanish troops, sent shock waves throughout Europe not to mention the Bush White House and Downing Street. Yet while striking a pose against the occupation of Iraq, Zapatero is merely voicing the interests of America's imperialist rivals in Europe. Declaring himself "a faithful ally of the Franco-German axis", according to the *Guardian* (1 May) Zapatero is "talking about co-ordinating with France and Germany attempts to get a faster handover of power to Iraqis agreed by the United Nations". An imperialist occupation under UN "peacekeepers" would be just as brutal and repressive. For France and Germany, a UN-administered occupation is seen as the road to enhancing their own interests in the region as well as getting their share of the colonial booty. Meanwhile all the European bourgeoisies seized on the Madrid bombing to bolster their own apparatus of state repression against the working class and oppressed, particularly immigrants, at home. No illusions in the UN! Down with the "war on terror"!

Revolted diplomats

The imperial arrogance of the deranged neo-cons in the Bush White House, backed by Blair's Labour government and allied with the fanatical Zionist rulers of Israel, is provoking concern that they are igniting the entire Near East against Western imperialism. Even the ultra-conservative, normally pro-US *Spectator* (17 April) ran articles headlined: "Things were better under Saddam" and "Iraq is a disaster in the making". The eyewitness account in the *Times* article ran under the impolitic headline: "Basra: What the f*** are we doing here?" A public letter to Blair issued by 52 former governors, ambassadors and diplomats decried "the poli-

cies that you have followed on the Arab-Israeli problem and Iraq, in close cooperation with the United States" as "doomed to failure". Doubtless expressing the fears of present-day diplomats, they reminded Blair that "rightly or wrongly" Britain is "portrayed throughout the Arab and Muslim world as partners in an illegal and brutal occupation in Iraq".

Visions of the creation of thousands more potential suicide bombers from among the desperate and savagely oppressed Palestinian masses were particularly prompted by Blair's backing for the new "peace" plan by Bush and Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon. Ripping up the cynical "road map for peace" — promising the creation of a ghettoised Palestinian "state" in parts of the Occupied Territories — the new deal gives *carte blanche* for the continued Zionist occupation of the West Bank and murderous onslaught against the Palestinians. A "copycat" letter to Bush by former US diplomats decried the flouting of UN resolutions promising the Palestinians the right of return and demanding Israel's withdrawal from the Occupied Territories.

For all the expressed "dismay" of these former representatives of US and British imperialism, the present bloody mess in the Near East is the legacy of the carnage, savagery and "diplomatic" machinations of the former British Empire and after them, the Americans. With the 1917 Balfour Declaration, Britain opened the door for the creation of the state of Israel, which was literally carved out of the living body of the Palestinians driven off their lands by Zionist terror gangs, at the time the US was moving in to replace the British. Iraq itself is the artificial creation of

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British colonial occupation at the end of World War I, the first in history in which aerial bombardment was used against civilians to brutally suppress revolts by their colonial "subjects".

Emerging from World War II with their empire in disintegration and their economy largely bankrupt, the British imperialists passed on the "white man's burden" to their American cousins. Just as the League of Nations was a useful vehicle for British imperialist ambitions, for decades the United Nations has served to provide a "democratic" and "humanitarian" fig-leaf for US imperialism, from the 1950-53 Korean War to the starvation blockade of Iraq. But with US imperialism riding high in the saddle as the world's only superpower following the counterrevolutionary destruction of the Soviet Union, such diplomatic niceties involving rival imperialist powers are increasingly being dispensed with. The war on Iraq was not only about establishing American predominance over this oil-rich country. It was also meant to "shock and awe" its imperialist rivals. The French and German imperialists refused to sign on to the war against Iraq — while the Germans together with Spain have both maintained and supplemented their commitment of troops to

the occupation of Afghanistan.

For his part, Blair promised that allying with US imperialism in its one-sided slaughter and savage occupation of Iraq was the ticket to British influence over US foreign policy in the Near East. The Israel-Palestine "road map to peace" announced on the eve of the war was presented by Blair as evidence of his stature with the Republican White House. Little more than a year later, this cynical deal was ripped up only days before Blair's arrival in Washington. The man Bush reportedly praised for having "cojones" (balls) for committing British troops to the war despite US fears that his government was potentially in peril in the face of massive antiwar opposition, found himself exposed as the utterly impotent representative of senile and decaying British imperialism.

The sanctimonious complaints coming from British army commanders that they "would have done things differently if we had been in charge" are little more than the bleatings of those whose ruling class can today barely even supply the necessary body armour for its troops. The US can throw its weight around because it has such weight as the unchallenged military power on the face of the planet. But now that the Bush administration finds itself in some trouble, both in Iraq and in polls at home, lesser imperialist powers like France and Germany hope to assert their own right to a stake in the spoils of

the Near East behind the cover of that den of imperialist thieves and its victims, the UN. Bringing up their rear is the Stop the War Coalition whose website urges people to add their signatures to the British diplomats' letter to Blair.

For proletarian revolutionary internationalism!

In an article titled "Turning Point in Iraq" Socialist Party leader Peter Taaffe boasts that his party's prediction that the US would face "another Vietnam" in Iraq is now coming true. But Iraq is not Vietnam, where resistance to imperialist domination combined with an uprising of workers and peasants in a social revolution. Not only was US imperialism militarily defeated but capitalism was overthrown. We called for victory to the NLF, declaring "All Indochina Must Go Communist!" Today in Iraq we take a side, against US, British and "allied" occupying forces. However, predictably the occupation has unleashed a host of reactionary forces in Iraq, including Islamic fundamentalists and former Ba'athist elements that are often as vehemently hostile to each other as to the imperialist occupiers. From the standpoint of the interests of the working class, in so far as forces on the ground in Iraq direct their blows against the imperialist forces, we welcome these as blows against the class enemy of workers and oppressed all over the world. But we give no political support to the reactionary clerics who appear to be leading much of the resistance and we oppose indiscriminate attacks on Shi'ites, Sunnis, Kurds and any other form of communalism as crimes against the interests of the proletariat.

For its part, Workers Power calls for the "defeat of the occupying forces" and goes on to advocate: "Victory to the Iraqi resistance". WP offers its solidarity "with all those resisting the occupation: from trade unions and women's organisations to armed resistance fighters" (*Workers Power*, May 2004). But they breathe not a word about the involvement of reactionary Islamic forces, who are sworn enemies of any working-class organisation, not to mention dedicated to the enslavement of women. The idea that the victory of one or the other of these elements could result in anything other than further bloodshed and repression is not only a deadly illusion, but diametrically opposed to a revolutionary perspective.

Marxists fight to mobilise the power of the proletariat, in the Near East and particularly in the imperialist centres, *in struggle* against the imperialist occupiers, using workers mobilisations (strikes, hot-cargoing of military goods and troop transports) in the service of a revolutionary perspective. A revolutionary party in Iraq would fight against clerical reaction, fundamentalism and all manner of bourgeois nationalism. Indeed, victorious proletarian revolution throughout the Near East requires a struggle to defeat religious fundamentalism of all stripes as well as the overthrow of the monarchs, generals, Zionist butchers and other capitalist rulers.

Islamic reactionaries were yesterday's allies of the US and other imperialist powers in their "war against godless Communism" during Cold War II. When the Soviet Army intervened against the imperialist-sponsored mullahs, khans and tribal chiefs in Afghanistan in 1979 we declared: "Hail Red Army in Afghanistan! Extend the Gains of October to Afghan Peoples!" This was part of our fight to defend the gains for the international working class that remained embodied in the former Soviet Union despite its Stalinist degeneration. The rest

of the left, virtually to a man, stood on the other side of the barricades. Following the Kremlin's traitorous withdrawal of Soviet troops in 1989, the SWP enthused: "Just as socialists welcomed the defeat of the US in Vietnam, we welcome the defeat of the Russians in Afghanistan. It will give heart to all those inside the USSR and in Eastern Europe who want to break the rule of Stalin's heirs" (*Socialist Worker* [US] May 1988). It certainly did give heart to the forces of capitalist counterrevolution that devastated the former workers states in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union more than a decade ago.

This set the stage for throwing back the conditions of life for the populations of these countries by decades; the bloody nationalist fratricide in the Balkans "subdued" by NATO bombers; heightened rivalries among imperialist powers being taken out of the hides of the proletariat and oppressed; the waves of desperate jobless and poor, refugees and asylum seekers caught in the cross-hairs of the imperialists' war on immigrants, and now the so-called "war on terror".

The bitter fruits of capitalist counterrevolution

On 1 May, the European imperialist leaders indulged in a hypocritical welcome to the former "captive nations" that joined the European Union. The *Tory Daily Telegraph* (1 May) rhapsodised: "The accession of Poland, Hungary, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Slovenia, Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia restores the once captive nations of the Soviet empire to their place as full members of Europe's political family after half a century of exclusion.... All are free-market democracies, fulfilling the dream of the founding fathers of the European Union." Appropriately the *Telegraph* used the occasion to exhume the political corpse of Margaret Thatcher declaring it to be the fulfillment of her "prophetic" ambitions.

Indeed, the "Iron Lady", whose hatred for the working class was brought home when the full force of state power was deployed to defeat the miners, is a fitting monument to the "magic of the marketplace" that has ravaged the former deformed workers states of Eastern Europe. Today the supposed "European political family" will not even allow citizens of these countries in the door, denying them rights accorded to other members of the EU. One media pundit opined that they might consider reconstructing the Berlin Wall. As for escaping "totalitarianism", they will now be subject to the *diktats* of the imperialist police state as the EU seizes on the criminal bombing in Madrid to mandate the compulsory fingerprinting of nearly everyone in Europe for biometric passports, visas and other identifications. As the editor of the civil liberties journal *Statewatch* noted, such measures did not even make it into the "draconian US Homeland Security package".

Blair's Labour government has long been in the lead of the Bush administration in the "war against terror", enacting legislation devastating civil liberties even before September 11 (taken from previous laws mainly targeting Irish Catholics). Taking first aim at people of Muslim origin, these laws resurrect "Star Chamber" secret trials without jury; allow for indefinite detention of "terror suspects" with no presumption of innocence or right to trial; and give the government the right to do virtually anything in a situation it deems to be an "emergency", defined to include "any serious disruption to the political,

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TROTSKY

Marxism and materialism
Marxists seek to understand the world in order to change it, to overthrow the capitalist profit system through proletarian revolution. From our historical materialist worldview, we defend Charles Darwin's theory of evolution against religious bigots. Writing only two decades after Darwin's work was published, Friedrich Engels explained how the theory of evolution was fundamental to a materialist understanding of nature.



LENIN

Nature is the proof of dialectics, and it must be said for modern science that it has furnished this proof with very rich materials increasing daily, and thus has shown that, in the last resort, Nature works dialectically and not metaphysically; that she does not move in the eternal oneness of a perpetually recurring circle, but goes through a real historical evolution. In this connection Darwin must be named before all others. He dealt the metaphysical conception of Nature the heaviest blow by his proof that all organic beings, plants, animals, and man himself, are the products of a process of evolution going on through millions of years. But the naturalists who have learned to think dialectically are few and far between, and this conflict of the results of discovery with preconceived modes of thinking explains the endless confusion now reigning in theoretical natural science, the despair of teachers as well as learners, of authors and readers alike.

An exact representation of the universe, of its evolution, of the development of mankind, and of the reflection of this evolution in the minds of men, can therefore only be obtained by the methods of dialectics with its constant regard to the innumerable actions and reactions of life and death, of progressive or retrogressive changes....

A system of natural and historical knowledge, embracing everything, and final for all time, is a contradiction to the fundamental law of dialectic reasoning. This law, indeed, by no means excludes, but, on the contrary, includes the idea that the systematic knowledge of the external universe can make giant strides from age to age.

—Friedrich Engels, *Socialism: Utopian and Scientific* (1892)

WORKERS HAMMER

Marxist newspaper of the Spartacist League/Britain

For a federation of workers republics in the British Isles!
For a Socialist United States of Europe!

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No to racist expulsions of schoolgirls!

Racism and the Islamic headscarf in France

The March 2004 regional and cantonal elections in France marked a defeat for the viciously racist, anti-worker Chirac government. The Socialist Party—which is still hated for the attacks carried out by the 1997-2002 government of Jospin-Gayssot—won every region except Alsace and Corsica. The election came in the context of heightened attacks against workers and minorities in France, and in the rest of Europe. The government was quick to seize on the criminal bombings in Madrid on 11 March to increase the “anti-terrorism” measures known as Vigipirate to “red alert”, introducing more measures than after September 11. Such hysteria is an attempt to rally the population behind the government, not least through waging a racist vendetta against France’s ethnic minorities—most of whom are descendants of Muslim immigrants from North Africa—today are being criminalised and branded as potential terrorists. First introduced during the 1991 Gulf War, Vigipirate was re-introduced by the Jospin government that included the Socialist Party (PS) and Communist Party (PCF) and has now been stepped up by Chirac. It amounts to daily terror by police against non-white people in railway and Metro stations, raids on dark-skinned workers (followed by deportations) and virtual occupation of the ghettos by armed police. Our comrades in the Ligue trotskyste de France, French section of the International Communist League, have consistently demanded: *Down with Vigipirate! No to the deportations! Full citizenship rights for all immigrants!*

In an escalation of this racist campaign, the Chirac government passed a law banning the Islamic headscarf in secondary schools, and justified this anti-Muslim bigotry by claiming that they are defending “secularism”. This is a gross distortion of the principle of secularism. In so far as “secular” education exists in France today, it derives from the French Revolution and its struggle to tear society out of the clutches of the Catholic church, for separation of church and state and for freedom of expression. But the French government’s claim to uphold secularism is a cynical cover for its persecution of Islam, which in France, as in Britain and elsewhere in Western Europe, is the religion of the poorest and most oppressed. While we oppose the headscarf as a symbol of women’s oppression, we are unambiguously against the new law banning the veil from schools and any attempts to expel young veiled women from schools or exclude them from jobs. Among other things, this will reinforce the isolation and segregation of minority women from society.

Right-wing politicians are not the only ones fighting for the racist expulsion of girls who wear the Islamic headscarf. Lutte ouvrière (LO) and the Ligue communiste révolutionnaire (LCR), two of the largest ostensibly revolutionary organisations in France, have played a truly despicable role cementing “national unity” behind the government. Although the

LCR nominally opposes the ban on the headscarf, members of both groups teaching in Aubervilliers, Paris, spearheaded a racist campaign to expel two girls wearing the headscarf from school last October, thus paving the way for Chirac’s law. The LCR openly called for a vote to Chirac in the 2002 presidential elections. Later the same year the LCR and its youth group, the JCR, joined the French Socialist and Communist parties in signing a call for a 14 December 2002 demonstration against the Iraq war, which promoted unity with Chirac against Bush: “All together, we can prevent this war! The French authorities and the parliament must use all the means available to prevent a war against Iraq.” This political support from representatives of the workers movement strengthened the government’s hand and was later used to attack the pension system despite a wave of strikes in the spring of 2003.

The LCR and LO ran a joint slate of candidates in the recent elections. Neither group saw fit to mention, much less protest, the racist Vigipirate measures in their press. This, together with their role in the banning of the headscarf precluded us from giving them critical support in the recent elections. However, one group that stood out was Gauche révolutionnaire [GR—French section of the Committee for a Workers’ International (CWI), centred around the Socialist Party in Britain]. GR took a clear position against the law banning the headscarf and campaigned on demands that addressed the felt needs of the working class. Our comrades called for a vote to GR in the cantonal elections, where they were standing independently of LO and the LCR, and welcomed their result, which totalled over four per cent of votes cast. Our comrades offered to hand out GR’s electoral leaflet and to give them a contribution of 50 Euros. However, GR

Lila and Alma Lévy, expelled from college for wearing headscarves, targets of anti-Muslim witch hunt in France.



refused our support. Despite this, our comrades handed out hundreds of our own leaflets calling for a vote to their candidate Leïla Messaoudi in the 5th Canton of Rouen both on campus and during the 20 March Rouen anti-war demonstration. We did not give critical support to GR in the regional elections (which took place at the same time as the cantonal elections) because their candidates were running jointly with LO and the LCR.

While giving critical support, our comrades sought to clarify our programmatic differences with GR. In response to the fact that the traditional organisations of the working class—the Socialist Party and the Communist Party—are widely discredited, GR calls for a “new mass workers party” which they explicitly say would not be revolutionary. GR would participate in this “workers party” in order to “defend the need for a clear orientation and to finish with this system” (*L’Egalité*, March-April 2004), ie it would join such a party as a faction to try to push it to the left. This was the rationale their forebears in the British “Militant tendency” used to justify their decades-long existence as an integral part of Old Labour. In Britain today, the Socialist Party likewise calls for a “new mass workers party” to replace New Labour. But they leave open the question of whether such a party should even be nominally committed to socialism. In a letter to the SWP about the new “Respect coalition”—which disavows any pretence of being socialist—the Socialist Party recommends that Respect ought to have an “explicitly socialist programme”...but goes on to say they “do not preclude” that the coalition may decide to make “a compromise on the socialist content of its programme” (*The Socialist*, 17 December 2003).

The political perspective of GR and

the Socialist Party is profoundly reformist, as can be explicitly seen on the question of the cops whom they consider as workers in uniform, or on the question of Northern Ireland, where they have made overtures to Ulster Loyalist bigots like Billy Hutchinson and refuse to call for the withdrawal of British troops. Their avowed commitment to building “new workers parties” in Europe should be taken with a pinch of salt, given that in the US they are calling for a vote to capitalist politician Ralph Nader in this year’s presidential elections, as they did in 2000. In any case, the political character of the workers party the SP and GR call for flows from their reformist politics, and is based on the assumption that such a party must be tailored to the present level of consciousness of the working class.

Revolutionaries start from the fact that it is necessary to build a Leninist party based on a revolutionary internationalist programme. We fight to build a *vanguard* party that seeks to *change consciousness*, to win to its banner the most politically advanced workers, and to rally behind it all the oppressed around a programme that can get rid of this rotten capitalist system through workers revolution.

We reprint below the leaflet our comrades in France distributed during the elections.

LE BOLCHEVIK

**No vote to LO/LCR in the regional elections!
Fifth Canton of Rouen: Vote for Leïla Messaoudi of Gauche révolutionnaire!**

ROUEN, 11 March—In the cantonal elections of the Fifth Canton of Rouen, the Ligue trotskyste de France (LTF) calls for a vote to Leïla Messaoudi, the Gauche révolutionnaire (GR) candidate. The issues GR is campaigning on address the felt needs and problems of the workers: “real jobs, decent housing and quality public services!” Racist terror, poverty and massive unemployment which affect in particular the ghettos like those in Hauts-de-Rouen are the results of attacks by the Chirac/Raffarin/Sarkozy government, which is itself continuing the dirty work carried out by the last PS/PCF/Green capitalist government. A vote for GR represents, in a crude way, a vote for class independence since they are standing independently in opposition to the PS and PCF who, for the last 20 years, have formed class-collaborationist alliances with bourgeois parties like the Greens or the “Chevènementistes”. Furthermore, GR has a correct line of opposing the racist expulsions of young women wearing the headscarf, even if they don’t mention it in their electoral leaflet.

However, we call for censuring LO and the LCR (including their slate in Haute-Normandie, which includes two

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administrative and economic stability of the country". The government's self-styled fuhrer of "security", David Blunkett, already has biometric compulsory identification cards in the works, which will be linked to a national database enabling the government to track and snoop on the entire adult population.

The "war against terrorism" is a fiction, not a military reality. It is nothing more than a political crusade to increase the state's police powers and repressive apparatus, constricting the democratic rights of the population. The Blair government manufactures "terror" scares to rally the population against the brown-skinned "enemy within". Yet at the same time, some areas of the economy are desperately reliant on immigrant labour to do the dirtiest and most dangerous jobs, like cockle picking, which claimed the lives of 20 Chinese workers who drowned in a high tide in Morecambe Bay last February. And, in this viciously class-divided society where those who "work with their hands" are reviled by the rulers and paid accordingly, there is also a real shortage of skilled labour such as electricians, plumbers and in the construction trades more generally.

Thus the Labour government was initially willing to admit citizens of the new member countries with the same rights as existing EU citizens. Faced with an outburst of xenophobic racism by the tabloid press with headlines reading: "Millions of Migrants to Flood In — and there's *nothing* we can do to stop them", the government announced that such workers would be denied benefits. On the eve of the celebrations over the expansion of the EU, the Home Office ordered 2500 people, mainly Roma from the Czech Republic, Hungary, Slovakia and Poland to immediately vacate their state-provided housing and fend for themselves, since they now become eligible to look for work. So the bosses get the best of both worlds — the ability to bring in these workers as they need them, employing them for even less money and benefits while using them as a club against the unions.

A number of these immigrant workers are already working in unionised

No vote to Respect!

Created by the Socialist Workers Party (SWP) and expelled Labour MP George Galloway, the purpose of the "Respect Unity Coalition" is to turn opposition to the imperialist occupation of Iraq into "protest" votes against Blair. But Respect doesn't remotely claim to represent the interests of the working class and oppressed. Even making lip service to "socialism" was declared *verboten* by the SWP in launching this coalition; calls to include opposition to the monarchy in Respect's manifesto were also voted down by the SWP. Respect's manifesto says not a word in opposition to the racist "war on terror", the domestic face of British imperialist repression from Northern Ireland to Iraq. Yet Galloway's Christian fundamentalist opposition to abortion rights for women has been welcomed by the Muslim Association of Britain.

The Respect coalition is the SWP's way of reinforcing the bourgeois ideology that "communism is dead". Our job as revolutionaries is to combat such lies as part of fighting to build the revolutionary workers party that will lead the revolutionary eradication of this system of exploitation, racism, poverty and war. To militant workers, radical youth, oppressed minorities and others we say: Respect yourself — No vote to Respect!

shops yet with no union rights, thanks to the treacherous policies of the trade union bureaucracy. This is criminal not only from the vantage point of the immediate defence of the unions but for the prospects of future working-class struggle. The unions must take up the fight to organise the unorganised and for **full citizenship rights for all immigrants!** This is not simply a matter of defending "victims" of brutal exploitation and racist terror, but of the very integrity of the proletariat as a whole, to whom these workers bring a wealth of international experience.

For a Socialist United States of Europe!

We oppose the European Union, an imperialist trade bloc which aims to rival the US and which by definition is a vehicle for capitalist co-operation against the working class of Europe. Its precursor, the Common Market, was established as an economic adjunct of NATO, as US imperialism sought to strengthen Western Europe against the Soviet Union. Today's EU is the product of heightened interimperialist rivalries unleashed by the counterrevolutionary destruction of the Soviet Union and the deformed workers states in Eastern Europe, and now also driven by the imperialists' ambition to recapture China for capitalist exploitation.

Blair came to power promising both to "take Britain to the heart of Europe" and to serve as the bridge between Europe and

America. As noted in an editorial in *New Left Review* (January/February 2004):

"In its essentials, New Labour's diplomatic policy has been a continuation of the UK's standard post-Suez stance: no longer a power, Britain could still be an 'influence' on Washington, most effectively by brokering interests between Europe and the US. But the post-Cold War global context has added a new twist, a ratcheting up of American demands. Under New Labour, London has pledged both to fight for neoliberal deregulation throughout the EU and to keep Europe rallied behind the US, militarily and diplomatically, even with the Soviet threat gone.... City and multinational interests had every reason to support a superpower that carried a big stick, if it was used to reinforce the unfettered freedom of finance capital and the marketisation of public assets around the globe."

Having cheered the "end of communism" the reformist left now bewails the consequences. Yet so accustomed are they to serving the interests of "democratic" imperialism, they can see no alternative to challenging American predominance than to back their imperialist rivals in the EU. In its "Manifesto for the European elections" the Respect coalition declares that it is campaigning for a "different Europe, a Europe based on need not profit. A Europe which is a clear alternative to global capital, which opposes militarism and war, is open to needs of the countries of the South, which defends human rights and human dignity." Such a Europe is also to provide, among other good things, free health care and education, jobs, pensions, free transportation ...

you name it. Left unsaid is how such a Europe is to be achieved.

A lot of problems could be solved if the working people and oppressed could get their hands on the money to do so. What the reformists don't tell you is that none of this can be legislated under capitalism. You need a revolution to break the power of the bourgeoisie which has its hands on the wealth produced by the labour of the working class. We communists intend to build a revolutionary internationalist workers party to do just that. To be sure, in a political climate conditioned by the "death of communism" the idea that the proletariat has the social power and historic interest to act as the force for the liberation of humanity is often considered utopian, if not some expression of "totalitarianism". This is due not only to the imperialist ideological offensive that Marxism has proven to be a "failed experiment", but to those purported "Marxists" who have been at the game of parliamentary reformism so long that the mask has become the face. Today outfits like the Socialist Party and the SWP refuse to oppose the British Army in Northern Ireland. We demand: British troops out now!

We fight for a voluntary federation of workers republics in the British Isles, part of a Socialist United States of Europe. This task requires the revolutionary overthrow of British capitalism, resting on the archaic United Kingdom, which is dominated by English chauvinism based on finance capital centred in the southeast of England. As we wrote in our article "Respect' coalition: bowing and scraping to Queen and parliament" (*Workers Hammer* no 186, Winter 2003-2004):

"The British working class has been weakened by defeats in struggle, particularly the devastating defeat of the miners strike, which was betrayed by Labourite union bureaucrats, including the 'lefts' of the day. Nevertheless the working class is vital to the system of capitalism and has the power to bring it down; what it presently lacks is socialist consciousness and a genuinely revolutionary party. From among the mass anti-war mobilisations many will be won to authentic Marxism. Our task is to educate and train Marxist cadre for the future, drawing the lessons of past struggles and in the course of new ones, to build the nucleus of a vanguard party. For a multiethnic revolutionary workers party! For a reformed Fourth International!" ■

France...

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GR representatives) by refusing to vote for their slates in the regional elections because of their support to the expulsions of veiled young women. Despite their stated opposition to Jospin's former "Gauche plurielle" government of the Greens and the PCF, LO and the LCR effectively spearheaded the campaign of racist expulsions of young women wearing the headscarf (even though the LCR opposes the law): in Aubervilliers last October, teachers who were members of LO and the LCR actively campaigned to expel Alma and Lila Lévy! We in the LTF are opposed to Chirac's racist law banning the veil and we defend the right of Alma, Lila and all girls wearing the headscarf to attend state schools. At the same time, as communists, we oppose the Islamic headscarf and the veil which represent a reactionary social programme of confining women to the family, the home and a position of subservience. As our banner at the 14 February demonstration said: "No to the racist law against girls wearing the headscarf! Full citizenship rights for all immigrants! For women's liberation through socialist

revolution!"

This campaign against veiled girls is particularly crucial in order to direct workers' anger away from this government, because it pushes the racist lie that the real problem in this country is not the racist capitalist system but young women wearing the headscarf, and more generally, minority youth. One cannot claim to oppose the racist, capitalist government without opposing the campaign it is waging against veiled girls. This is a campaign by the bourgeoisie to divide and rule, attacking the rights of the most vulnerable layers of society in order to better prepare attacks against the whole of the working class. It is necessary to oppose racist terror and to break with the reformist traitors of the PS, PCF, LCR and LO who have tied workers to Chirac and the French bourgeoisie in one way or another in recent years. The LCR criminally called for a vote to Chirac against Le Pen in the 2002 presidential elections! And LO tails the government on the question of the veil to such an extent that on 6 March, Arlette Laguiller was seen marching arm-in-arm with Fadela Amara (of "Ni putes ni soumises") ["Neither whores nor submissive women": a reference to the perceived alternatives of accepting seclusion or being considered "whores"!] and Nicole Guedj (Secretary of State for the building of prisons)!

Far from having a perspective of leading the workers to break with the opportunists in the workers movement the GR, on the contrary, seeks unity with them and explicitly puts their participation in the LO/LCR slates in the regional elections in that framework, saying "one must not stop at an electoral alliance" (electoral leaflet, March 2004). In *L'Egalité* (January-February 2004), they express this in a polemic against LO:

"LO remains firmly wedded to its programme, refusing to conceive of the future workers party as anything other than a 'revolutionary communist party'. Of course if such a party were formed we would fight for its programme to be revolutionary. But we wouldn't make this a pre-condition for our participation in a workers party providing we could agree on a platform based on an anti-capitalist orientation and defence of workers' demands."

It is with this conception of the party that the GR's British comrades spent several decades inside the Labour Party. This conception, contrary to Lenin's, shows that they are actually reformist. The experience under a Chirac government over the last two years powerfully

shows how an alliance with the opportunists of the PCF, LO or the LCR leads not to the revolutionary unity of the proletariat, but to the division of the working class and its subordination to the bourgeoisie. Lenin understood the necessity of a revolutionary party, separate from the reformists and opportunists in the workers movement, ie, separate from those who want to tie the workers and oppressed to the capitalist system. We fight to finish the task begun by Lenin and Trotsky when they led the working class to power in Russia in October 1917: to lead the class struggle to its victorious conclusion with state power in the hands of workers councils worldwide. Only socialist revolution can sweep away this capitalist system of racism, unemployment and war.

While we do have fundamental political differences with the GR, their candidacy represents a vote for class independence and we call for critical support to them in the elections of the Fifth Canton of Rouen. On 21 March, vote Leïla Messaoudi of GR! ■

Notice

This issue of *Workers Hammer* is dated Spring-Summer 2004; however subscribers will still receive four issues of the paper.

From the SWP and the "peace movement" to revolutionary Marxism

We print below the re-application letter of Comrade Paul A to the Spartacus Youth Group, edited for publication.

I was raised in the northern England town of Doncaster in a single parent family which meant that for most of the time we didn't have much money, and I learned what it is like to "have not". It was in Doncaster that I first experienced racism towards me, as I am of mixed race origin because my father is Indian. Doncaster is an ex-mining town, and I was somewhat aware of the mood of people there during the strike and now.

From these experiences of the capitalist system, my eye was caught by the Socialist Workers Party (SWP) in their opposition to the war on Serbia. I had known about the SWP for some time, but it was not until the summer of 2001 that I got seriously interested in anti-capitalism, when I saw an advert for a Globalise Resistance (GR) meeting in Sheffield and encountered the SWP motivating it the same day. I found the conference/activists' day to be exciting and I thought it had a coherent and thought-out opposition to the system. I attended meetings in Sheffield for some time, until the SWP-dominated GR thought it pertinent to direct me to the Doncaster branch of the SWP.



Workers Hammer

Unlike idealist reformists we Marxists fight to build world party of socialist revolution.

My introduction to Doncaster SWP occurred at the same time as the attack on the World Trade Center. I attended SWP branch meetings for several months until I actually decided to join. It appeared to me that the SWP had a very exciting, accessible side in the form of GR and a rather boring side in the form of the Socialist Alliance. The

demonstrations against the war in Afghanistan were in part responsible for my radicalisation as I found the spectre of youth shouting slogans against imperialism and capitalism to be a very effective way to vent anger against the system. I was a committed member doing weekly paper sales with themes such as a criticism of the Labour government, "Don't vote Nazi", and "Asylum seekers are welcome here".

In the following summer of 2002 I attended a demonstration in defence of the Palestinians with a group of Green and Labour Party members: hardly any of the SWPers who had organised the coach to London bothered to turn up. I wandered around on my own until a Spartacist League (SL) member tried to sell me a paper. I was very taken with the opinions he put forward to me; we talked for the entire length of the demonstration, and one of the initial thoughts I had was that the defence of deformed workers states seemed a concrete political footing to hold as a socialist. I also vividly remember pointing to a group of demonstrators chanting "stop imperialism now" and saying that that was a great thing, and the comrade pointed out to me the difference between an empty and a concrete action against the war (eg, the refusal to move military supplies). I was pulled away from the SL table at the rallying point as Jo Cardwell (of the SWP) informed me that I was fraternising with "CIA agents", as she grabbed me by the arm and ordered me to recruit youth. It was then, after my discussions with the SL member about the nature of revolutionary recruitment, that I felt a contradiction between what I wanted and what I was doing. I read some papers on the coach on the way home that the SL comrade had sold to me, and one of the SWP members who had scabbed at a steel plant during the miners strike informed me of the need to spread politics even though it may be as a scab.

I wrestled with the contradictions between Trotskyism and Labourism from that day forward. One of the most significant debates I had with the SL was over the Anti Nazi League's campaign against the BNP in Doncaster and Oldham. Contained in these debates was my slow realisation that the BNP, and capitalism in general, could not be stopped by appealing to "democratic" capitalism. I found it a difficult pill to swallow that reformism is an obstacle to revolution. At Marxism 2002, I bought a copy of *Revolution Betrayed* by Trotsky. Before I had had a chance to read it, I met with SL comrades. We discussed the Soviet Union, among other things. The next morning I read the section on "state capitalism" in *Revolution Betrayed*, and attended meetings on fascism and the history of the SWP. I finally saw in the meeting on fascism that the left had helped to elect Chirac, in opposition to Le Pen, and I found this to be deeply unprincipled. In the meeting on the history of the SWP I seriously considered quitting there and then because it was dripping with Labourite reformism, and I could recognise it. After completing *Revolution Betrayed*, I felt I had no choice but to quit the SWP. Though I did not understand in a thought-out way what defence of the deformed workers states meant, except

that I now had an appreciation of a concrete way to oppose capitalism, I found the glaring contradiction between the SWP's appeal to Trotskyism and their programmatic repudiation of it to be despicable. I lapsed from attending meetings and sales, and I wrote a resignation letter stating that I thought that Trotsky's analysis lays bare the true nature of the Soviet Union. I also wrote about a profoundly undemocratic SWP national convention I had attended which showed me the bureaucratic nature of the organisation.

I joined the Spartacus Youth Group (SYG) a couple of weeks after I had left the SWP. In my application I wrote about a general hatred of capitalism, but also a scepticism of communism among the working class that needed to be reversed. In many ways my application letter reflected my level of consciousness—hatred of capitalism, racism and imperialism—but I was theoretically and practically unsure of the new ideas I had acquired. Also, the fact that I was in Doncaster and then Colchester meant I only made it to two meetings the whole time I was an SYG member, and also meant that I was isolated from the party in London.

I went to Essex University as a new member of the SYG and the party put a lot of work into organising sales and a class on campus. I developed politically, and also became better at motivating the paper on sales. At that time I felt that I was a member of a group with very powerful ideas, and that I and they were committed to socialism. But, isolated as I was and living outside London, I came under a lot of pressure from the ideas I encountered at Essex—mainly idealist philosophy and the student anti-war group, the Peace Campaign, which were to be my ostensible and actual reasons respectively for subsequently quitting the SYG.

I understand now that philosophy was only one expression of the core component of my misunderstanding: the relationship of social democracy to the revolutionaries. My isolation from the party was one reason I started to share my ideas with members of the Peace Campaign, and eventually I went on to march in a demonstration with them. Their political make up was student, lumpen and petty bourgeois—a little anarchistic and slightly to the left of the Stop the War Coalition. They were nothing special but I think a comrade said it best when he told me he thought I had problems seeing how we could fight social democracy. That really hit the nail on the head: I was isolated from the party and I didn't see the possibility of a fight against social democracy. This was covered up in a more abstract way by the ideological justification I gave for it—idealist philosophy. I had renewed interests in "new leftists" like Althusser (and others too embarrassing to mention!). As it was, I had an idealist understanding of society, so I had an idealist understanding of philosophy. I think I quoted Sartre (!) when I handed in my resignation letter.

But a massive contradiction soon developed, which came to its apex at the start of the Iraq war and the height of the fire fighters strike. I was becoming re-politicised by seriously meeting with comrades. This, coupled with the

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SWP scraps "socialism" for "Respect"

At the SL/B dayschool on the great miners strike, Spartacus Youth Group members greatly appreciated the chance to hear in person comrades who intervened with our programme and, in particular, militant miners who had rallied to our perspective during this great class battle. The following is an edited contribution by SYG comrade Vanessa, emphasising the gulf between the pathetic classless appeals of the SWP and class-struggle consciousness.

I was born in 1984 so this has been really informative. I wanted to make some points about what comrades have said and what we're dealing with today. The SWP was busy scabbing during the miners strike, crossing steel workers picket lines, and now they're putting forth more lying filth like the Respect coalition. They've always been for pleading with and pressuring the capitalist state in order to get "socialism" through parliament but now they've even scrapped the "socialism" bit and they're just saying, oh, what we need to do is pressure the capitalists so we can get "respect". They formed this electoral coalition and they explicitly say: so many people are angry at Blair and the war, they don't think there's anyone to vote for, so we just have to restore hope that you can get someone in government that can respect you.

It's really gross stuff, and just like in the miners strike they don't see the class line. There aren't even basic socialist demands. Obviously they don't call for troops out of Northern Ireland—they never do that—but the SWP spearheaded a vote *against* a call to abolish the monarchy. These guys don't even want to oppose the monarchy! They'd be opposed to the English Revolution! I've confronted SWPers on this point: I've said, so what do you think about your organisation voting down a motion against the monarchy? And they've basically said, yeah, proud of it! It's not important, it's not top priority right now to oppose the monarchy! One of these SWPers said, what is really needed is a platform so they can get across their ideas to the widest masses. He said, that's what Lenin would have done! And I replied, not only would Lenin have denounced you, but you wouldn't even have made it into the *Mensheviks*! This is an example of their young members not being introduced to the basic concepts of Marxism.

I also want to make a point about the executive of "Respect". On top of the list is George Galloway, who's a devoted Christian and is opposed to abortion; together with SWP honchos John Rees and Lindsey German, who don't think it's important to call for rights for lesbians and gays. Then you've got Muslim religious leaders, because they're trying to get the Muslim vote. A lot of Muslims are fed up with the Labour party because of the "war on terror", which of course Respect does not explicitly oppose. They're trying to get Muslims on board but they're opportunist and they don't want to offend the imams, so they don't call for the rights of women and gays. But what do you expect from an organisation that hailed the *mujahedin* in Afghanistan against the Soviet Red Army? The SWP even held a *segregated* Stop the War Coalition meeting in Birmingham where the women sat on one side and the men on the other side. Retrogression of consciousness is a real thing.

So I think it is really important to learn about things like the miners strike because it shows that things were not always the way they are right now. Working class consciousness can be raised in struggle and that's a really important thing to understand. I learnt a lot from it. Thanks.

Miners...

(Continued from page 12)

neutral and even-handed!

Well, the miners strike gave a pretty graphic demonstration of the real role of the state as the executive committee of the British capitalist class. What the picket line means is the *right to have a conflict, and without picket lines you don't have a union*. That's the real reason why the bourgeoisie in this country, aped by Kinnock, made a hue and cry about picket lines, because they know damn well that picket lines — mass picket lines — are an essential instrument for waging class struggle. And they wanted to get rid of that. One of the results of the defeat of the miners strike is that they've attempted to implement laws that seek to handcuff the unions by making it illegal to have mass picket lines. So that's what really lies behind the issue of the ballot versus the picket lines: it's hostility to class struggle. And it wasn't simply Kinnock, but many so-called left organisations, that aped this line. There was Workers Power; an organisation called Leninist then, now called the CPGB [Communist Party of Great Britain] and I gather the Socialist Party, then called Militant, has retrospectively endorsed the ballot.

We were for picket lines that no one crosses. Another article you can see in the display is on the Socialist Workers Party, "SWP: Scabbing With Pleasure" [*Workers Hammer* no 61, September 1984]. Their leader Tony Cliff gave a public meeting in London where he literally bragged about how members of the SWP in various steel plants in Britain were crossing miners' picket lines. This is what we stood against, not only we, but a hundred and seventy odd thousand coal miners stood against this, for picket lines. You didn't have to be a Marxist, frankly, to understand what a picket line was.

As a result of the blatant baiting by Kinnock of the miners for their so-called "violence" on the picket lines — police brutality was not in Kinnock's vocabulary — miners called him Ramsay MacKinnock (after notorious Labour Party traitor Ramsay MacDonald), or Judas Kinnock. Likewise with the TUC, it was no secret to the miners that these guys were openly selling out the NUM. At a big rally in South Wales when Norman Willis, who became the leader of the TUC after Len Murray was knighted for his services, was speaking, a bunch of miners dropped a hangman's noose right in front of his face. That's why we never appealed to the TUC to do anything during the strike, because anything they were going to do was only going to be sabotage.

The so-called left-wing union leaders were more subtle. They preached solidarity, but they did something else. In fact, despite the army of cops (and often undercover soldiers) it really wasn't the state in the last analysis that defeated the miners, but what we call the "fifth column" in labour's ranks, stretching from Kinnock and the TUC tops to the so-called left leaders of the unions like the T&G and the rail unions. There really wasn't anything Thatcher could have done had these unions blacked coal, because coal played a central role in the British economy. Had power workers refused to handle coal, had steel workers refused to handle coal, had the rail workers refused to handle coal, together with dockers and lorry drivers this country and its economy would have simply ground to a halt. From the beginning of the strike we knew that the miners were up against the entire British state and that no union alone could win a battle like that. At the beginning of the strike, as I recall, the NUM leadership basically argued that if they could picket out the Notts area, the biggest scab area, they

could win the strike. Well, we were all for shutting down Notts, but what we asserted from the very beginning of the strike was stated in the headline of our first supplement in March '84, which said: "Miners must not stand alone! Spread this strike!"

At a certain point it became evident and pressing that other workers needed to take action. There were literally thousands of workers who wanted to defend the miners strike and who understood that the fate of the miners was their fate: if the miners went down, they would go down. During the course of the miners strike there were two national dock strikes. Scores of rail workers in Coalville and Shirebrook in the Midlands were sent home every day because they would not handle scab coal.

were used to keep them corralled within the framework of the Labour Party.

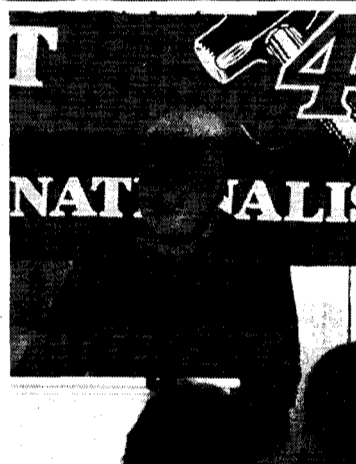
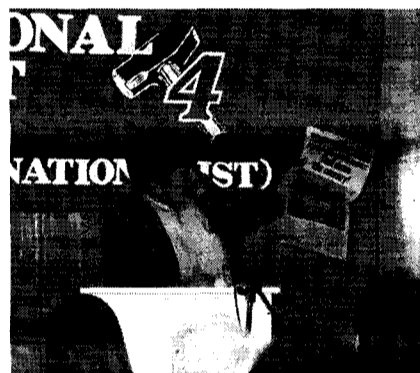
When the dockers went out on strike in July, we had another supplement. It said: "Strikes paralyse Britain—Thatcher threatens troops/Shut down the country! General strike now! Victory to the miners, dockers! No more redundancies! No more denationalisations! 10 per cent wage rise plus cost of living indexing!" This was our version of what we called a "Fighting Triple Alliance" between the T&G, rail workers and miners. We said everybody should go out for these demands. Now, the leaders of the unions know all about trade union tactics, believe me, they know about secondary picketing. That has nothing to do with the reason

State." After Lloyd George said that, the miners leader Robert Smillie commented: "From that moment on we were beaten and we knew we were." They were beaten because they had no intention of running the country. If you shut it down, it poses the question of what class is going to run the country: the bourgeoisie or the proletariat. It poses the question of proletarian revolution. And that's what these guys didn't want to touch with a barge pole, whether it be 1919 or 1984. That's the real reason, it had nothing to do with whether people understood trade union tactics, fundamentally it had to do with politics.

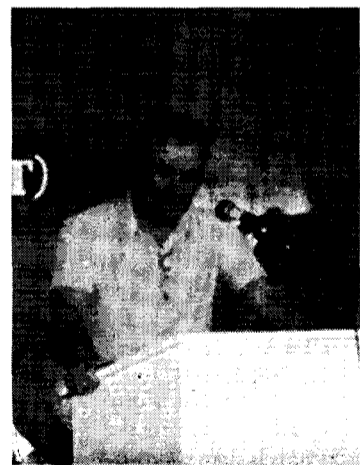
If you listen to a speech of Neil Kinnock from that period his basic argument is if you want to change things you do it through Parliament, not through pickets, and on that level there really was no difference between him and Tony Benn, and this is critical. Benn kept voluminous diaries, which are interesting to read. If you look at his 9 September 1984 entry, he's explaining why the lefts don't go after Kinnock. Well, Benn says, "Still, he's going to be there until the next Election and we see him as a key to the door of Number 10; that will give us an opportunity to do what has to be done." And then Benn said, and I underscored this: "It is hard to know whether the left should go on covering for the right of the Party, which is covering up for capitalism."

You couldn't ask for a better definition of the role of the left social democrats: covering up for the right wing which is covering up for capitalism. That's exactly what they did one month after he made that entry into his diary. It was the Labour Party Conference, and nobody, but nobody got up and criticised Kinnock in any fundamental way. Kinnock was re-elected leader of the Labour Party unanimously and that includes Scargill and the NUM delegation, Benn and the rest of them. They did not want a split in the Labour Party even though everybody knew that the Labour Party leadership was stabbing that strike in the back. But as I said, the priority was to maintain unity with the strike-breakers and the Kinnock leadership. And this is why, in a nutshell, you have to have a genuine Bolshevik party.

I hear that Scargill came out recently and criticised the role of the Communist Party. Actually, that's not a revelation. We ran a graphic of a *Morning Star* headline from April, a month after the strike began, saying: "Kinnock gives complete backing to miners' fight!" That's what I mean by covering up the role of the right wing to cover up the role of capitalism. We also had our own experience with the CP. Although we had a small organisation, we had a few supporters in the rail union NUR [now the RMT] and in the T&G, who fought for their unions to refuse to handle coal. We exposed the fact that scab coal was being sneaked into the British Leyland car plants in Birmingham. The convenor at BL in Longbridge—his name was Jack Adams—was a member of the Communist Party. Oh, every week he'd give a speech in solidarity with the miners strike, and they took up collections. Meanwhile, they're working with scab coal in the plants. So we raised hell about it, and our supporters in the union fought for motions. At one point the T&G actually sent a delegation, a kind of token picket line, to the BL plant because of what we did. Later, one of our supporters who worked in the Rover plant was fired because he put out a leaflet advocating that the car workers go on joint strike with the miners. Of course, the union leadership stabbed him in the back, they were happy to see him gone. Members of two different miners lodges came and demonstrated at the gates of the car plant to get his job back and miners elsewhere in the country wrote letters defending him. The



Workers Hammer photos



Spartacist League dayschool, London, 10 April (top). Speakers, clockwise from left: Howard Hopkins, former miner at Celynen South Colliery, South Wales; Jon Branche, Spartacist League; Dick Hall, former miner at Warsop Main Colliery, Derbyshire.

Something like four hundred lorry drivers were sacked because they would not handle scab coal. But the leaders of the T&G would not call a national strike alongside the miners. And though I understand that Arthur Scargill has recently attacked Kinnock and the TUC for their scabberding role during the strike, which is certainly true, he has not said much about the left trade union leaders. This is a real political difference that we have—he has not criticised, and never did criticise, the left wing of the trade unions or the Labour Party. But that's in a sense the really important point, because it was the left wing that served as a fig-leaf for the whole Labour Party, the idea being that they are the guys with the socialist rhetoric; when the right wing piss people off, these guys

why they didn't do this.

Very early in the strike we ran an excerpt from a book by Aneurin Bevan called *In Place of Fear*. He's talking about 1919, when there was a Triple Alliance between the rail workers, the T&G and miners. And the deal was that they would go out on strike together if the demands of any of these unions weren't met. So Lloyd George, who was a very foxy guy, called these union leaders in and said: well, you guys have me beaten. If you want to, you can shut down the country. But, have you weighed the consequences? The way he put it was this: "For, if a force arises in the State which is stronger than the State itself, then it must be ready to take on the functions of the State, or withdraw and accept the authority of the

leader of his union, Ron Todd, a so-called leftist, did nothing. Our supporter was by no means the only guy who was fired; I think there were hundreds of T&G workers fired because they wouldn't handle scab coal. But that's my point about the actual role of the left-wing union leaders.

We didn't have the size to be a revolutionary party. But if you did, ultimately what does it mean? It means you must have people in the unions. Because you can write anything you want on a piece of paper, and as brilliant as it is, unless you have people in the unions fighting for class struggle policies, it's not going to go anywhere. We had a few people in unions and in their own way they made a point about the kind of work that a revolutionary party would do to further class struggle.

The other point is, you cannot bluff in big things. When nothing particular is going on, it's easy to give speeches about socialism. The "lefts" were perfect at it; they could give a speech any Sunday about socialism. But what happens when you have to deliver in practice? We had a lot of quotes in our newspaper from Russian revolutionary leader Leon Trotsky, who talked about the period of the 1926 British General Strike and the role of the "lefts" on the Trades Union Congress then. And Trotsky said in January 1926, a few months before the General Strike: "It should be thoroughly understood that leftism of this kind remains left only so long as it has no practical obligations. But as soon as this question of action arises, the left-wingers respectfully cede the leadership to the right." That is a perfect description of what happened during the miners strike. And in fact Scargill—for all his courage, which he had a lot of—had pretty much the same perspective. So throughout the strike he gave speeches similar to what he said in May of 1984: "Above all, we will pave the way for a general election to elect a Labour government."

From the standpoint of trade union militancy, we don't have a lot to criticise Arthur Scargill for. The NUM did a really good job fending off the state, facing the sequestration of funds, and that is not an easy thing. You can't trust the banks, and they didn't. And the NUM had everybody spying on them, MI5 and all the rest. The NUM also did a pretty good job on the level of trade union struggle. But what Scargill was *not* is what you need most: to be a revolutionary and to have a revolutionary party. At that time, when push came to shove, his party was the Labour Party. And the Labour Party was not going to mobilise, they were going to counter-mobilise, to sabotage the miners strike. That was and is the key lesson—the need for a revolutionary party.

Obviously, a strike of this magnitude dominated what happened in Britain for a full year, but it also had enormous ramifications internationally. Scargill supported the "Plan for Coal", which we characterised as protectionist. The idea is that a Labour government gets elected and imposes import quotas on foreign coal coming into the country, to create new jobs for coal miners. Of course, anybody can play that game. If there should be British jobs for British workers, then presumably the same was true in France, Germany, Australia, the United States. Then you get a trade war with trade unions of different countries competing against each other for a dwindling number of jobs. So that's a nationalist dead-end.

But the miners strike provoked real solidarity internationally. French workers dumped French coal that was destined for Britain. French families put up thousands of children from miners' families during the strike. At that time you still had apartheid in South Africa and although they were very poor, the South African

mineworkers union donated money to assist the miners in Britain. And as I said before, the unions that were most anti-communist, like the American AFL-CIO and the German DGB [national union federation] contributed almost nothing to the British miners. We set up our own fund called "Aid to Striking British Miners' Families" and the Partisan Defense Committee, the class-struggle, legal defence arm of the Spartacist League [US] raised over \$23,000 internationally. Later the PDC gave monthly stipends to a number of British miners who were jailed for their courageous defence of the NUM and the strike.

What happened in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe is interesting. Lech Walesa of Solidarność of course showed his true colours in the strike. He was buddy-buddy with the scab union in Notts called the UDM [Union of Democratic Mineworkers]. In the middle of the strike,

ping tons and tons of coal to Britain during the strike. That's why, as well as defending the Soviet Union and Poland against efforts at capitalist restoration, we said that workers there had to make a political revolution to throw out the bureaucratic caste and create genuine workers democracy based on workers councils that would have an international programme. So that's how the strike was reflected internationally.

Now there is a very important lesson regarding the question of special oppression. I hope that people speak a bit more on this point because I can't go into much detail on the role of the miners' wives and the women in the coalfields, who really bloomed in the sense that for many of them it was their first entry into political activity and political life. Their lives changed, indeed the lives of everybody in the coalfields changed. After the strike the women were certainly not willing to go

participated in demonstrations for gay and lesbian rights. This is something that we had better not forget. We had better not forget it, because these things get forgotten, and we always say that the job of a communist organisation is to be the collective memory of the working class. The point I want to make is that this is, on balance, a pretty reactionary period that we live in now. But we had better understand one thing: you cannot simply take a snapshot of what exists in society at any given time and think it's going to be that way forever. People change in the course of struggle and that is a very important thing to keep in mind, particularly if you're going to be a revolutionary. The miners strike showed that.

In conclusion, as I said we were not a very big organisation, but we tried to work to the maximum. We increased the frequency of our press and had a paper every month, which we'd never had before, plus



Walesa came out with a statement that Margaret Thatcher was "a wise and brave woman". That showed what side of the class line he was on. In the Soviet Union, there was a debate among the leaders. On one side was the trade union apparatus, as well as old-timers like Gromyko who at that time was the foreign minister, who wanted to support the strike. On the other side you had Gorbachev, who wanted to cultivate close relations with Thatcher. We called the Soviet Union a degenerated workers state. Now, in no capitalist country in the world would you have had even a debate among the leaders about whether to give money to the mineworkers. So that ought to tell you something about the Soviet Union. As it turned out, the Russian and Ukrainian miners donated, I think, a million pounds to the miners strike. Later the British authorities tried to frame up Scargill. There was a lying campaign that he embezzled donations from the Soviet miners, supposedly to feather his own nest, which was exposed. We did an article at the time, and afterwards Seumas Milne wrote a book about it. [See "1984-85: what it would have taken for the miners to win", *Workers Hammer* no 145, April/May 1995.]

The contradiction within the Soviet bureaucracy showed the basic contradiction in that society because it had collectivised property forms, but the bureaucracy that sat atop it was also a transmission belt for the pressures of imperialism. Their ideology, based on "socialism in one country", meant they wanted to make peace and not pursue revolution. The Polish bureaucracy, which was much in debt, actually scabbed, ship-

back to the old ways where the woman's place is in the kitchen. But this was really an amazing phenomenon, to the point where it was often the women who put backbone into the strike. They were the ones who told their husbands "you will not return to work; you will not scab". There was immense determination from the women in the coalfields.

Equally important are the lessons learnt about racism. Miners came from small villages where workers were not exclusively, but mainly, white. They went to the cities, to black areas, to Asian communities and they found, maybe to their initial surprise, that the people from whom they got the most support were the minority communities who, of course, instinctively solidarised with the miners because of their own experience with oppression. When they saw the miners being attacked by the cops, they knew exactly what it meant and the miners began to understand what it was like to be a black person or an Asian person for whom police brutality was no stranger. By the end of the strike you had miners contingents that participated in demonstrations. A miners contingent at a big demonstration in Belfast in August 1984 commemorating the thirteenth anniversary of internment was welcomed by the Catholic population there with a banner saying: "Victory to the miners". It's pretty unusual for Irish Republicans to solidarise with British workers. It's not unprecedented, but it tells you something. And the fact that there were British miners marching against British troops in Northern Ireland tells you something too.

Miners marched against racism; they

three supplements. Politically we made the points: we opposed the witch hunt of Scargill over Solidarność; we exposed Benn's unwillingness to defy Kinnock; we defended the USSR against Reagan and Thatcher; we argued to extend the miners strike to other key sections of the class. When the dockers went out on strike, as I said we got out about 15,000 supplements and got them around to the docks and to key sections of the striking miners. The key thing that we pointed out is the need for a party that acts as an organising centre for those who want to fight and which would draw in women and minorities who are doubly chained by capitalism and thus make doubly fierce fighters. That's like an embryo of what a Leninist vanguard party would be. Above all, we based ourselves on the lessons of past victories, particularly the Russian workers' conquest of power in 1917. I'll just conclude by repeating what I said before, which is that without a revolutionary party the proletariat cannot conquer.

Howard Hopkins:

It's 20 years since the miners strike and in some respects it's almost emotional for me. It was the greatest dispute this country has ever seen. I didn't know that at the time, but my old friend and your friend Don [Hughes] made absolutely clear before the strike that this was going to be something special, something we'd never experienced before. I can see that now, 20 years on from the dispute that we engaged in and witnessed. It's clear for me now, it wasn't back then, that we could never have won it on our own. I have to say that the

continued on page 8

Miners...

(Continued from page 7)

Spartacist League said this throughout, right from my first meeting with comrades Jon and Debbie in the Miners Institute at the Celyn South.

I'm going to give you a personal insight into what took place during the miners strike. There are certain issues that obviously we were looking to defend. It was a tale of enormous courage, determination and I have to say, treachery by many. Some have been mentioned already. It was very important to me in terms of my personal development and education in politics. The NUM was the bastion of the working class within this country. We'd experienced a few disputes before then, but the NUM stood as the last defence against Thatcherism as she led the bloodthirsty drive to defeat the miners. We stood defiant for quite some time in a vain attempt at saving the communities and the families that supported the mineworkers.

But before we go on to that, I think it's very important for people to understand that the NUM was not just about supporting miners and their families, it was about education. I was very fortunate to experience a trip to the Soviet Union set up by Arthur Scargill, who spent some time over in the Soviet Union round about 1982-83. I was sent on a course at Ruskin College in Oxford and it was a steep learning curve because it gave me the opportunity to travel to the Soviet Union where I spent over four weeks. The trip was agreed between the mineworkers in the Soviet Union and Arthur Scargill. At the time, Scargill was infamous because he had called President Reagan "Ronald Raygun" and Margaret Thatcher the "Plutonium blonde" in Moscow. It was a bit of a hoo-ha to say the least because there was talk about arresting him when he arrived back in Heathrow. But Scargill was used to that, it happened when he arrived back from Cuba.

This, by any stretch of the imagination, was an interesting time to be involved in politics and I did take that opportunity to travel to the Soviet Union. Don said to me, son, you've got to go there, this is the chance of a lifetime, and it certainly was. At the time, a Korean airliner had been shot down. A couple of MIGs found a Korean airliner over a very sensitive area in the far eastern region of the Soviet Union. I ask you here now, and I asked at the time, what would have happened if a Soviet airliner was over GCHQ, or indeed over Greenham Common airbase? What do you think would have happened there? When you mentioned this at the time it was very difficult, because—and I make no apology for this—in the mining industry we were quite backward in some of our thinking and approaches. But I can tell you the strike certainly raised the awareness for many, many people including myself.

What I described regarding the Korean airliner, the "Plutonium blonde" and "President Raygun" was the backdrop to what was going to follow. The purpose of the trip was a theoretical study of the trade union movement within that country. Twenty-three of us spent two weeks in Moscow University, four days in Siberia where we went down a mine; we spent time in the historical cities of Vladimir and Suslov and in Leningrad. Many fascinating events took place and some were very reminiscent of a James Bond movie, I can assure you, and some of those I'll be only too pleased to share over a couple of bottles of beer with you later on.

Prior to the start of the strike, there was an overtime ban. We were building up to the strike for 18 months, which then rolled into the year-long dispute. Unfortunately, despite what some comrades may say, there was a lack of consciousness and lack of willingness to defend our industry. This was because Thatcher had already had success in the steel industry, and the selfish attitude "we'll take the cash and run" was very

pickets were getting beaten by the thugs in blue that were doing Thatcher's work. To us, it was what we'd come to expect. As time went on we took it for granted that we were going to get a pasting and by God, didn't we get a pasting on occasions!

March 5, the day the strike started, is a day that I have mixed emotions about. I was born on that day, it is also my father's birthday, but now when I wake



In opposition to anti-Soviet Cold War, international Spartacist tendency opposed Polish Solidarność in pamphlet (October 1981) and welcomed the Soviet intervention into Afghanistan in *Spartacist*, Winter 1979-80 edition.

important among some workers. Thatcher was making very generous offers to the miners to sell their jobs. That may seem harsh, but it's a fact.

It's well-documented now that the Thatcher government whilst in opposition and over many years plotted the downfall of the miners union. She brought in new anti-union laws, sequestration of union money and gave the police substantial pay rises along with increasing their numbers. They alone couldn't defeat the miners. But with the

up on that day the first thing that comes to my mind is the miners strike. I can't help but think how things could have been so different. The strike was punctuated by missed opportunities. But we mustn't forget the role played by the scabs in undermining solidarity within the coalfield. Nottingham area has a track record of doing its own thing, which, if you didn't know, was because of the bonus scheme that was supported by the Labour government whose minister for energy was the Right Hon-



Covering for Labour Party right wing: *Morning Star*, 19 April 1984 (right) lying about Kinnock's treacherous role while "left" trade union misleaders refused to oppose witch hunt of Scargill and NUM at 1983 TUC Conference (left).

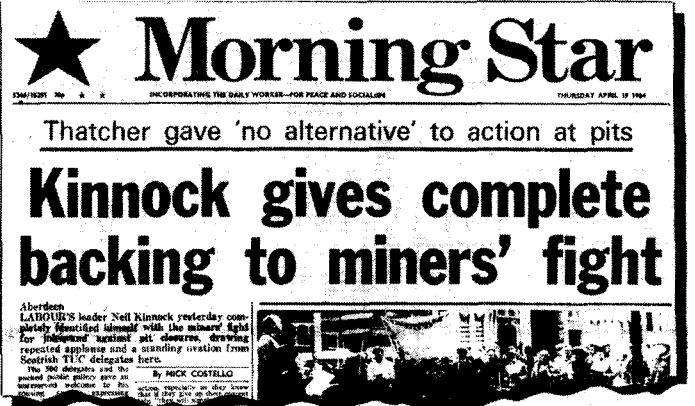
help of the Labour Party and the ineptitude of other unions, the die was cast. It's a historical fact that the bureaucrats in the TUC betrayed the strike—Len Murray and of course, dear old cuddly Norman Willis. I'll never forget his face when that noose dangled down the front of his neck. The smell, I assure you, was one I cannot describe, but it did bring pleasure to all our eyes. That hangman's noose was dropped down in November because Willis had condemned violence on the picket line. He of course had no interest in how many

ourable Tony Benn. What a bastard he turned out to be! Labour cleverly worked alongside the NUM president at the time, Joe Gormley. In 1977, I'd been in the industry only twelve months when a ballot was held for a wage increase and we won that ballot. We were going to go on strike. Labour was in government at the time, Callaghan was the prime minister. But Nottingham area implemented what we call "Rule 42" which was that any area could exercise their own autonomy, and they did. Good old Lord Gormley decided that, to

keep the union together, we'll accept the divisive bonus scheme that set miner against miner. That meant that Nottingham, in some respects Yorkshire, more so Derbyshire and also Leicestershire, could plough through coal and churn it up like it's a factory. This was unlike Kent, Scotland or South Wales—we worked knee-high in water where we couldn't produce enough coal to get the bonus.

In 1981 there was a two-day strike. Thatcher was in power and we thought we'd have the opportunity to take her on but again, Lord Gormley of Wigan stepped in. He accepted £2.50 for every ton of coal that was produced and stockpiled. In effect that meant we were doomed. Of course, hindsight's a marvellous thing. But it's a reality that this was all planned and calculated, with help from the leadership within the NUM—Lord Gormley. There was an interesting programme on TV a couple of months ago where Gormley was seen as an MI5 agent. I'm not going to challenge that for one moment. A million tons of coal were produced and stockpiled. Then something like three years later 20 pit closures were announced and the first one to be closed was Cortonwood. Translated, that meant 20,000 jobs just at the stroke of a pen, and a knock-on effect on other industries. I for one was not prepared to accept pit closures, let alone 20,000 jobs being lost. We had accepted all along, right back from the early '70s, closure due to the exhaustion of pits. If there's no coal there, we can't work it, that's common sense. I was recently asked by a colleague, what about those who lost their jobs during the strike? I say to her, what about those who lost their jobs after the strike?

All the propaganda spewed by the media concentrating on violence on the picket line was transmitted into people's homes to give a negative biased view of what was actually taking place. My brother had tape reels that show there were more miners reported to be going back to work than actually existed. Cleverly done! It was trying to show thuggery against the "good old boys in blue" that were protecting the scabs' right to work, that was, the right to break the strike. The media were help-



ing the huge political victory for the state. As time passed we became immune to the daily news, which didn't replicate what was happening on the ground. The media referred to us as "stormtroopers" and "hit squads" and flashed this across the screens repeatedly throughout 1984-85. But the sequestration, the fact that they'd taken our money, the fact that they were about to take our jobs—if they thought that was going to send me back to work, they had another thought coming.

Without a doubt, we wouldn't have

got as far as what we did during that twelve-month strike if not for the women that were involved in that dispute. For many men it was an unnerving time, let me just say that. All of a sudden the women were leaving by droves, coming away from the kitchens and standing on the picket line. I can tell you it was inspiring. It was inspiring to see the women coming on the picket lines, telling the men you will not go back to work, you will stay out on that picket line, you will defend those jobs, they are not for sale. They were not for sale then and no job is for sale now. And as old Don used to say, no man has the right to go into a corner and secretly put an X in the box to sell another man's job. That is not acceptable and that's what we were fighting about.

We heard so much in 1984-85, and we hear it now with the recent programmes about the miners strike 20 years on, about the ballot issue. Let's be clear about this: the dispute was not about the ballot, the dispute was about taking 20,000 jobs.

I have to say I enjoyed what was going on. It raised my awareness, as it did for many, many others. It was a very, very steep learning curve, which I will never ever forget. Without the support of comrades here and in other areas, where would we have been? But it could have been so different and should have been so different. If only we hadn't been betrayed by the trade union leaders, by the likes of Tony Benn and good old Kinnock. I'm very fortunate—I say tongue-in-cheek of course—Neil Kinnock is my MP. Someone's got to have the bastard.

At the time we were meeting people different from what we had ever come across. Yes, mining communities were parochial, very few people went outside these communities. But when we did, it was so exciting. Going to London collecting money, going to different communities—the black community, the Asian community, the gay and lesbian community—and speaking to them raised your awareness to such an extent, it was a very exciting time. And for the young comrades who were not around at that time, you may have the opportunity to experience that again. I was part of that. I was proud of that and I am proud of it. I am proud of you and I thank you for giving me this opportunity to go into a little more detail for you. Thank you very much.

Dick Hall:

The only little problem is that Howard seems to have a very selective memory. I'd like to remind him about the National Power Loading agreement in 1972. Though it was particularly true that Nottinghamshire and Yorkshire did pretty well, Derbyshire under no circumstances did. [Laughter]

Having listened to the last two speakers, who have stole all my thunder, there's very, very little left to say. I mean, we went on strike in March. We got defeated. Thank you very much. But I don't suppose I will get away with that. I used to work at Warsop Main pit along with 850 men and 12,000 in the Derbyshire area. Today, nobody works at Warsop Main, in fact there is no Warsop Main. Nobody works in Derbyshire because there is no Derbyshire coalfield. Warsop Main was a pit with the head stocks in Nottinghamshire but the actual coal mined was in Derbyshire and, through a quirk of history, we belonged to Derbyshire NUM. The pit village was in Nottinghamshire and most people actually lived in Nottinghamshire. We remained solid for "only" eight months and then we ended up with 600 scabs. And when we went back to work, I think there were 157 left to do that. Personally,

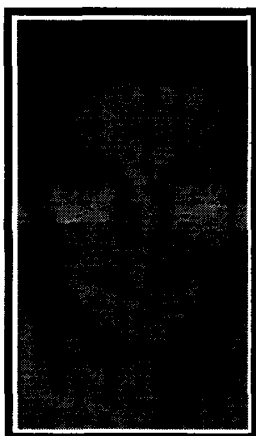
I lived in Nottinghamshire, just a little way from the pit village in a place called Mansfield Woodhouse. Our MP were better than Kinnock: it was Mister [Don] Concannon. Wonderful fella. I'm sure if anyone knows any history, particularly of the Irish Republican movement and Bobby Sands, you know that his greatest claim to fame was to go to Bobby Sands after 85 days on hunger strike, to tell him

home. Luckily I had a motor bike, I had to go through fields and everything else. And that became a way of life in Nottinghamshire—nobody could get in and nobody could get out.

In the area where I lived, most people initially went to work. I was very fortunate, my next-door neighbour was on strike from Sherwood Colliery, which was very nice because that made two on

one little bit. All in the name of breaking the strike—no, I'm sorry, "protecting the people who wanted to go to work". You have to get it right.

After about six months, when the first scabs went back into our pit, we were actually moved out of the NUM office and we had a little garage on the pit lane with no windows. I was physically assaulted one morning. We were



Two miners were killed defending picket lines during the strike: David Jones (above) and (right) miners at funeral of Joe Green, Pontefract, June 1984.



Spartacist Britain

to go ahead and die. Which were very kind of him, not everybody would do that. Fortunately, Concannon got his just desserts. His lad worked in Nottinghamshire; he stopped talking to his father and went on strike for a year. So something good comes out of everything.

But what I want to talk about today is about living in Nottinghamshire, the actual violence and the role of the state during the strike. I used to have to travel four-and-a-half miles to the pit everyday and to do that I had to negotiate several police blocks: at the end of the road, at the corner of Sookholme Lane and halfway down. I had lived there for quite some many years and this is where I would normally go to work. At the outset Warsop Main pit was solid and we visited other collieries to gently inform them that we would like them to

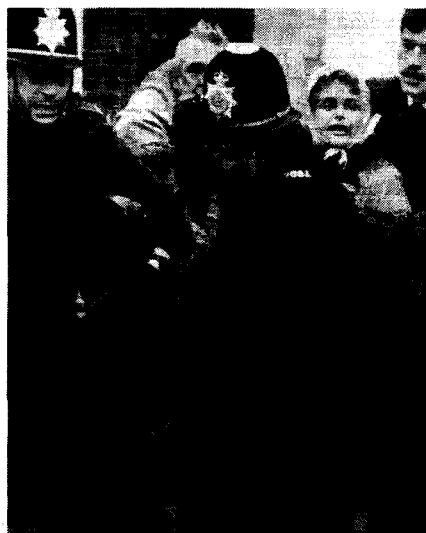
our street and it gave you a feeling of solidarity, knowing that you weren't on your own. In the first week we went to picket Sherwood Colliery and we were very successful, for about 20 minutes. Then we were arrested, put in a police cell and spent twelve hours there. We were fingerprinted and photographed and every time they told us to do something and we said no (well not as polite as that) we were put back in the police cell, till eventually they wore us down. This happened three times in the first week. Straight away the intentions were very, very clear. This went on quite steadily for four or five months. Then the "back to work" campaign started and the few hundred police we did have couldn't cope, so more were sent. There were lots of tales of undercover soldiers that were never either proved or dis-

proving pickets the subsistence money, to put petrol in the cars and renew the tyres, when we had a visit from about 40 "boys in blue" who managed to chuck us on the floor, ripped me best shirt and laughed about it. And I think the laughing was the worst part about it. I thought, "I'll have you, you bastard", but you had no chance. The police numbers increased, and they increased; and the more we sent pickets out, the more they tried to stop us. We had a system of giving little notes to people about where the mass pickets the next day would be, it was all secret. Lo and behold, these buggers would be all over the place to make sure we could not leave. So we spent many, many, many fruitless hours trying to get out of Nottinghamshire, which seems ironic because we were actually trying to get into other parts of Nottinghamshire, to talk to our fellow mine workers. Very quickly it became quite clear that it weren't just the police.

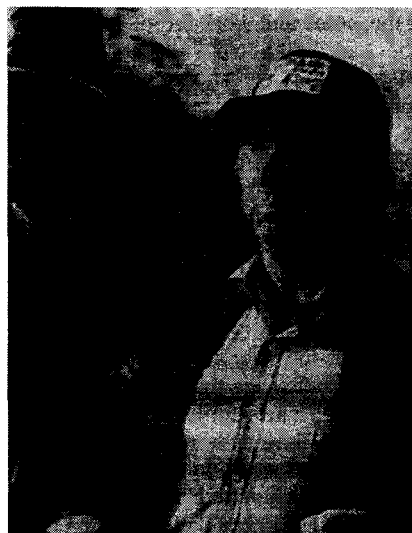
I've seen "Z Cars" and "The Bill" and everybody has a perception of the policeman: he'll take the old lady across the road; he'll talk to kids and clip 'em round the earhole; he'll generally be a nice bloke, just like you and me—he earns his bob, goes home, has a pint and it's fine. I did say that I would not be sectarian, because if some of you know me, I tend to occasionally be sectarian about other groups and I don't really want to do that. But one group that really stood out that was in the Labour Party was called Militant. They were advocating that the way forward, to change the police, was to get them to affiliate to the TUC. Wouldn't that be wonderful? If they had been members of the TUC, I know damn well that they wouldn't have ripped me shirt, because we would all have been brothers, all paying the same union dues! Fortunately, that didn't come about. I'm not sure whether it's fortunate for the police or fortunate for the trade union movement.

People's concepts of the police certainly changed over the years in the mining communities. I can remember one small instance when my daughter was about 15, half way through the strike. She said "Dad, I've got a new boyfriend." I said, "Oh, very good

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John Sturrock/Network



Independent

NUM was left to go it alone against the might of the state. Police rampage through mining villages arresting black youth who supported strike (left) and (right) arresting Scargill on picket line.

join us, particularly the scabs from Wellbeck, Ollerton, Sherwood and around Nottinghamshire. They were very good, the "boys in blue": the first week, I was stopped by people in a car asking for directions. I presumed they were pickets and I was spotted by a gang of police, I think there were about 80, which isn't a lot (I were a bit younger then, in that particular sense). I was told that I could not go along the Queen's Highway and I was to go

proved. But by God, there were some bloody big cops and of course they came better prepared. Not only were they getting seven days lodging and overtime allowances, but they were given big shields and big sticks. And it was a wonderful sight—at maybe three or three thirty in the morning they would go rampaging through a pit village, beating these shields, kicking it out of anyone they saw. Whether it be man, beast, woman, child didn't matter

Miners...

(Continued from page 9)

duckie, what's his name?" "Jonathan." I'll never forget it: "His name's Jonathan." "Where's he live?" "Wellbeck Colliery village." [scab area] "What?!" "Wellbeck Colliery village." "Bring him here, I want to have a look at him" (because I'm a caring father). So they come home from school, this young lad opens the door and says "Me Dad don't work at the pit, Mr Hall." Poor little bugger! That shows the way it is, even today: my house is open to everybody, except pigs and scabs.

People might think it strange that after 20 years we still talk about scabs. The next village to Warsop Vale, where the pit was, was Church Warsop, which when I was a lad was always called "Scab Alley". Nobody ever really thought about why it was called "Scab Alley". But it got that name from the 1926 strike, when miners from down here came up to break the strike. There was an old man named Bill in the club who never played dominoes with anybody else. I couldn't work it out. What was the matter with him? Doesn't anybody like him? "Oh no, you can't talk to him. He scabbed in 1926." This was 1984, and it was still going on. Today, I don't live in Nottinghamshire. Perhaps one of the reasons is that I can't stand scabs. You would have thought that after the days, the weeks, the months, the years, it would get easier. But I'll tell you it doesn't, it bloody well doesn't at all. In fact it gets worse. Because when you look at the opportunities that were afforded to us in 1984, people actually sold their principles for a few bob (as Don [Hughes] would say, and I can still feel him here today, it's obviously strange to be at a meeting without Don). People will sell their principles for 25p. But if they're worth having, you would keep them and never let them go.

Basically, that's what it felt like. It was a very difficult period. We had people that lost their houses, their jobs, in fact lost everything, to do it. The one thing they did keep was their dignity. It's very, very emotional to talk about the strike, particularly if you remember the last day of the strike. Some people said, rightly or wrongly, we went on for a year and we went back because South Wales and Yorkshire were terrified of having any scabs. But you actually saw the whole workforce at a colliery in South Wales marching back with their banners, their bands and everything else, and then you saw the 30 or 35 lads in Nottinghamshire who had to walk up that pit lane, knowing that there were one-and-a-half thousand scabs waiting for them. I, unfortunately, had to visit Wellbeck Colliery two years after the strike. In the pit bottom a sign said: "NUM—National Union of Murderers". Today, very little is said of the strike. Except, if anybody watches football, occasionally when you see either Mansfield Town or Nottingham Forest, teams from South Yorkshire will start singing, "I'd rather be a picket than a scab!" Presumably they don't have that many songs to sing at football now.

Secondly, I want to talk about the role of the state, along with its allies in the Labour Party. I'm sure that many of you have read what Lenin had to say about the state and it sounds pretty good, doesn't it? Quite straightforward, like all sorts of theories. But when we look at it, he was absolutely 110% right in what he was saying—that there was no way that the state would allow a trade union to usurp their power. And people do learn, because I'm sure

somebody will remember that, come the 1984 strike, I were chairman of Mansfield Woodhouse Labour Party—only because I was in the IMG [International Marxist Group] and it was an "entry tactic", I hasten to add! But there were lots of illusions in the Labour Party and lots of illusions in the left of the NUM. They'd had leaders like Joe Gormley, and when people like

went on to say:

"The trouble was that the majority of the miners saw this strike as for jobs and communities, but as the strike progressed they came to realise that it was a political, orchestrated move towards the destruction of the NUM. And the government were out to destroy the NUM because they were out to destroy trade unionism as a whole. They had planned since 1978 to get the NUM, it was the key union in the country, the



Workers Hammer photos



Women of the coalfields were backbone of the strike; TGWU banner from Ford Dagenham (left) shows black and Asian workers supporting the NUM.

Mick McGahey and Arthur Scargill came along you thought something really good was going to happen. Unfortunately, we also had Dennis Skinner. I can remember Dennis Skinner saying to me, you must come and vote for me, come and work for me—I don't believe in the Labour Party and I don't really believe we should be sending people to Parliament, but we need to send one person there, to come back and report. The only problem with Dennis is that he thought he was that person.

But the way forward has been and always will be a political question. I mean the question: do we have a party to actually lead the class forward? It seems to me that is the only way. Your problem is to make sure that you build that party ready for the next time. And there will be a next time, no matter what Tony Cliff may talk about—upturns and downturns and side turns and whatever other turns. There will be a time, once again, when conflict will be on the agenda. The Spartacist presence in 1983 was very small. It's larger today. You have to make sure that it is larger still and that it is prepared for the next time. Thank you.

Tribute to Wally Roberts by Spartacist League supporter Jo Woodward:

I'm going to speak about Wally's experiences in the strike using his own words from the pages of our newspaper, and why he became an active supporter of the Spartacist League at that time. In a weekend school in Paris in the summer of 1985, he described the devastating effect pit closures would have, and

union that brought down the previous Tory government with the 1974 national strike."

At the start of the strike at Wally's pit, Lea Hall in Staffordshire, the union area official would only say the strike was "recommended". Wally said: "I was so incensed by his reluctance to use the word 'official' that I jumped on the table in the canteen, and demanded that he close the gates and if he didn't we would. And that he should instruct them, those that are working that is, not to cross the picket line. At this point all he could quote was the laws laid down by the Trades Union Congress, about not having

secondary picketing—that's playing the game according to the bourgeoisie and under their rules. You can't win a fight by playing to other people's rules, laid down by them." In recalling the role of the TUC, Wally emphasised the centrality of the Russian Question:

"In 1983, at the TUC Congress in Blackpool it became obvious as to where the TUC stood, as regards to any challenge by the unions to the Tory government. Arthur Scargill was attacked for his stance on Polish Solidarity. When the bandits of Gerry Healy's WRP waited seven weeks before printing Scargill's true statement that Solidarity was an 'anti-socialist organisation' they gave the rabid anti-communists of the TUC right-wing the opportunity to isolate the NUM, as part of the anti-Soviet hullabaloo over the Korean spy plane. The TUC's policy at the Congress was so-called 'new realism'—which was a promise to the Tory government not to stand in the way of its anti-union legislation and above all of its coming attack on the NUM. The Solidarity scab union that the TUC supported, along with Thatcher and Reagan, was led by Lech Walesa who said during our strike that Thatcher was a 'brave and wise woman' and who welcomed Nottingham scabs to Poland. The point that the people who hate the Soviet Union are the people who hate the trade union movement and love the scabs, was brought home to us with the experience of the printers' strike and the banning of unions at the government spy-centre [GCHQ] in Cheltenham."

After the strike, the WRP listed Lea Hall as sponsors of a march they were organising for sacked and jailed miners, without approaching the union there. Wally noted in a letter to *Workers Hammer* that the WRP had the audacity to ask miners to walk behind their banner after what they had done to Scargill in 1983. Although the next Lea Hall union meeting couldn't deal with Wally's resolution, because of the significant discussion they had to have on the question of the change of rules, he was so angry that he sent a copy of the resolution to *Workers Hammer* so that it could be printed. It said: "This branch is for freeing the jailed strikers and reinstating all our sacked comrades, and believes that the national union should be boldly campaigning on their behalf. This campaign should never have been allowed to be used as a publicity stunt by the WRP and its YS [Young Socialists]. Therefore the branch will write to the National President of the union asking for his advice about sponsoring this march, and noting that we suggest that the WRP write a letter of apology to Arthur Scargill and all our members in England, Scotland and Wales for its attack on us at the 1983 TUC Congress."

At the meeting in Paris, Wally pointed to what had been necessary when

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he said:

"As our paper, *Workers Hammer*, laid out again and again, the need was for a fight for national strike action particularly in the main industries connected to the coal industry — rail, steel, the docks, shipping and road transport and especially in unions like the NUR and the Transport and General Workers Union, where the bureaucrats talked loud and long about support to the miners, but always refused to put their money where their mouth was. What was needed was a general strike, but where do the workers look? Not to the Labour Party and that traitor Kinnock, who attacked the pickets who were fighting the state's violence in defence of the union. The fact is that Kinnock was condemning violence of the pickets and by doing so was supporting the violence of the state."

When our supporter Patrick Sliney was sacked in January 1985 for his fight to spread the miners strike and stop the scab coal in the Longbridge and Rover car plants in Birmingham, striking miners from Staffordshire pits, Lea Hall and Littleton, including Wally and Mick Cooper came to Rover to give support to the call for Patrick's reinstatement. Mick Cooper, a stalwart of the strike, died recently and we honour his memory here today. We also honour the memory of Nigel Ashfield, the secretary of Lea Hall's strike committee, who died in 2001. He was a source of strength in holding together a substantial minority of the pit for the entire year of the strike. Nigel had left the Labour Party to become a founding member of Scargill's Socialist Labour Party. At a public meeting we held a few weeks after Patrick's victimisation, Nigel acknowledged the importance of what we had fought for. He said:

"Going back to last summer, Patrick and other supporters of the Spartacist League highlighted the situation at Longbridge and brought it to our attention.... Patrick's involvement in the scab coal issue last summer did show the striking miners at Lea Hall and their wives that there were people who were prepared to come out in the open and fight alongside the miners on particular issues. And I think that had the West Midlands movement mobilised on that issue at Longbridge and then on to Solihull, there may have been a better situation in the West Midlands, in the Midlands area at this time. It's important that we recognise that initiative of Patrick and other comrades."

This is how Wally emphasised the role of women in the strike:

"Unlike previous strikes in '72 and '74, this strike brought in the women and the families. Because Thatcher not only threatened the jobs of the men, she aimed to starve the women and their children as well, with the aim of demoralising the men to such an extent that they returned to work for the sole purpose of saving their families hardship, starvation and the suffering that goes along with it. But in fact it had an opposite effect — the women, that is wives, mothers and sweethearts organised themselves in support of their menfolk and culminated into the women's support groups. I say support groups, but in actual fact as the strike progressed they became the backbone and inspiration of the strike. Not only in distributing food but standing shoulder to shoulder along with the men on the picket line."

Wally described his personal experience of the massive support the strike received from minority communities. He said:

"I myself was asked to go on a food collection in Wolverhampton, a nearby city, and at this point it was the first time I'd ever communicated with any minority group. And in walking the streets of



VAAP
Lenin and Trotsky's Bolsheviks led October Revolution and creation of world's first workers state.

Wolverhampton and going from door to door collecting, it struck me just how much the ordinary man in the street was behind the strike, especially the blacks and the Asian population in the area. I've still got the ticket (the NUM authority to collect), which I shall always keep, as a reminder of the generosity of the Asian community in Wolverhampton. It made

clothing factory in Birmingham, whose picket line I and other strikers manned during the course of our strike."

Wally carried this support to Handsworth in Birmingham [in 1985] when the police rioted, leaving Handsworth in flames for hours, which meant two Asian men burned to death. Thatcher and the cops were intent on teaching a

lesson to the black and Asian population who had massively supported the miners. Hundreds were arrested and a Big Lie campaign aimed to transform what was a police riot into a supposed blood-bath between blacks and Asians. Wally spoke as a supporter of the Spartacist League at a defence cam-

Don Hughes, former South Wales miner, a hero of 1984-85 miners strike and friend of Spartacist League.



me realise that the suffering and oppression we were under at the time, that these people have it every day of their lives from the cops and the state, and because of this they themselves realise that it was an opportunity to align themselves and identify with a fighting force for the overthrow of Thatcher and the capitalist system. It made me and some of my comrades realise that the union has not just got to fight for its own interests but also for the interests of all minority groups, like the Kewal Brothers strikers, mainly Asian women who were fighting for union recognition at a sweatshop

campaign meeting organised by the Afro-Caribbean Self-Help Organisation. This organisation was very hostile to our revolutionary integrationist programme, which is counterposed to their black nationalism, but they applauded Wally's message with great enthusiasm. Here's part of what he said:

"After our experience of the strike, everyone knows police were used to break the strike and are racists, how they oppress and harass — daily — minorities in this country. We will never forget the bond that was forged between us and the minorities

who supported us so generously.... The police occupation of Handsworth has to end. The dragnet arrests must be stopped. Trade unionists and black, Asian, Irish communities have the same enemy and must fight together.... I have no illusions about the leadership of the unions but the fight must be taken up by the unions. Unions have power in this country that the bosses and the government can't ignore."

In 1987, we came under attack from Dave Douglass of Hatfield Main NUM who put a ban on our supporters and our newspaper after we criticised their call to "Ban South African coal!" Wally wrote a letter to *Workers Hammer* at the time protesting the ban, as did Dick. One of the points Wally made was as follows:

"The whole issue hinges on the policy of sanctions, asking an imperialist government to impose sanctions on a country like South Africa. To ask the government of a class which has waded knee-deep through the blood of India, Ireland and South Africa, to ask it to change — there is no way that will happen. What do these sanctions mean, like the call to 'Ban South African coal!?' This is a call for import controls, whatever words you use.... It means what happened in America with the question of Japanese car imports with Japanese cars being smashed up and attacks on Asians in the streets. It inflames people to nationalism: just what the ruling class want. They want you to feel nationalistic fervour, to 'protect' yourselves against 'the rest'. What they're really doing is putting worker against worker."

Wally was one of the miners from four coalfields who marched with us on anti-apartheid demonstrations in 1985. One of our banners carried these slogans: "Down with Apartheid Terror! For international working-class action — not imperialist sanctions!" In the presentation that Wally made in Paris, he had this conclusion:

"The next time that a class war breaks out the workers must have a party — a party that will not tolerate scabs or reformists but a revolutionary party that will fight for a real workers government as the Bolsheviks did in 1917, a workers government that is based on the workers' own organisations, not Parliament. We need a workers government that expropriates the capitalists and builds a socialist society that provides a decent life for all."

He ended with a very different conclusion from Arthur Scargill:

"Speaking to last month's conference of the draughtsmen's union TASS, Scargill claimed a prime 'achievement' of the strike was that the Labour Party is 'in the lead in the opinion polls because of what has taken place in the last 12 months'."

Wally finished with: "I could tell Arthur Scargill now, I didn't go through this to boost the opinion polls of the Labour Party." Wally, you're sorely missed today and we wished that you could be with us.

The presentations were followed by a rich discussion and we hope to publish some of the contributions in a future issue of *Workers Hammer*. The dayschool concluded with the singing of the *Internationale*. ■

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Letter..

(Continued from page 5)

Blair government's worry at the FBU strike, provided the context for my renewed understanding of Marxism as a sympathiser of the SL. By the end of the summer, my girlfriend was contacting the party and I had decided to move to London.

The main lessons I have learned over the past two years have been about the pressures of society: Labourism in the form of the Peace Campaign and the SWP, and even petty bourgeois liberalism in the

form of "Philosophy". They must be fought and challenged if one is to keep in mind the Marxist method which one is to use to understand and change the world. That is why I have decided to come to London to join the SYG, youth section of the Spartacist League/Britain. I agree emphatically with the programme, I agree to pay a financial contribution, and I agree to abide by the discipline. I look forward to joining other committed youth in the fight against capitalism, and for communism.

Comradely greetings,
Paul A

WORKERS HAMMER

Lessons of 1984-85 for a new generation of fighters

The great miners strike

The Spartacist League/Britain held a dayschool in London on 10 April in honour of the twentieth anniversary of the heroic miners strike of 1984-85. We reprint below edited transcripts of the presentations given by Jon Branche of the Spartacist League/US, who was in the Spartacist League/Britain during most of the miners strike; Howard Hopkins, a former miner from Celynen South Colliery in South Wales; and Dick Hall, a former miner from Warsop Main Colliery in Derbyshire. Also included is a tribute to Wally Roberts, a former miner from Lea Hall Colliery in Staffordshire, who was unable to attend.

Jon Branche:

The miners strike was the sharpest and deepest going labour conflict in Britain since the beginning of the 20th century: two miners were killed on the picket lines, David Jones and Joe Green; something like 10,000 miners were arrested; hundreds were sacked from their jobs. The strike lasted a full 12 months, reflecting the grim determination of the miners to fight against great odds—against the Thatcher government, which was aided and abetted by the treacherous misleaders of the TUC and the Labour Party. The strike did not win, but it was not in vain. The miners can hold their heads up high, because they fought. They returned to work defiant. The coal industry was shut down, but the union was never broken, and the legacy of this heroic struggle will prove invaluable for the next generation of fighters. So that's what we want to talk about today: the legacy and the lessons of this strike—they will not go in vain.

I've been asked mainly to talk about the intervention of our organisation, the Spartacist League, in the strike. I think if you flip through *Spartacist Britain* and *Workers Hammer*, you get a very, very good picture. It's a nice chronicle of the key political events of the strike. I want to focus on the main political lessons that we tried to point out at the time. They are still valid today. First a couple of caveats: this was 20 years ago and the period was very different from the one that we live in currently. Probably the most important difference is that at that time the Soviet Union existed and this was a shaping factor politically in any labour struggle, or any political struggle, of that period.

In fact there are two key events that took place before the miners strike began in March '84 that I want to refer to. One was the TUC Conference in September 1983 where there was a huge witch hunt of NUM leader Arthur Scargill. The organisation then called the Workers Revolutionary Party, led by Gerry Healy, set up Scargill for witch hunting by the Fleet Street press and the TUC by leaking—conveniently at that time—a letter that Scargill had written where he said quite accurately that Polish Solidarność was an anti-socialist organisation. It's very important to understand that the bourgeoisie regarded the Soviet Union as a mortal enemy, as it had done away with capitalist production, and therefore for them reconquest of the Soviet Union was



Workers Hammer



John Sturrock (Network)

Spartacist League banner in miners strike (top) insists that NUM should not be left to battle the capitalist state on its own. Pickets battle cops in Yorkshire (above).

part and parcel of attacking the trade unions at home. They very much appreciated Polish Solidarność precisely because it was a pro-imperialist organisation. It was the only so-called "union" in the world supported by Margaret Thatcher and Ronald Reagan.

What you'll find if you read an account of the miners strike is that those trade union leaders that were most anti-communist, such as the leaders of the power workers and the steel workers, were the unions that most vociferously urged their membership to cross the picket lines of the miners strike. So there was a real correlation in the workers movement between one's attitude to the Soviet Union and one's attitude towards the miners strike. When Scargill was attacked for his position at the TUC Conference, nobody, but nobody got up to defend him, including

members of the Communist Party. And that was a green light for Margaret Thatcher. She knew at that point that the rest of the labour bureaucracy would not rally to the defence of the coal miners. In direct response to the witch hunting at the TUC Conference, in the September '83 issue of *Spartacist Britain*, our article's headline said: "Yes, Solidarność is anti-socialist!", we defended Scargill. We made our criticisms of Scargill as well, but this article was what we first went out to the coalfield with and that's when we got our first subscribers in the mining industry.

Now to the second major difference from today. At the time of the miners strike there was a rather substantial left wing within the Labour Party, headed by a guy by the name of Tony Benn, whom you've probably heard of. There was, during what we call the second Cold War, a

split within the Labour Party. Benn was not a defender of the Soviet Union by any means. He was a "little Englander" who believed in unilateral disarmament, but because he was not a staunch advocate of the CIA and the Cold War, he was not trusted by the bourgeoisie. Our attitude was, we would just as soon have Benn take over leadership of the Labour Party, to demonstrate to British workers that the Labour Party could betray without the CIA connection.

In February of 1984 there was an important by-election in Chesterfield, which Benn won. What was interesting about it is that, despite the differences within the Labour Party, he worked closely with the right-wing leadership at that by-election—with people like Denis Healey, Roy Hattersley and Neil Kinnock. We put forward our criticisms of Benn's views, but we offered to give him critical support and asked him if he would accept it. He said no; he would not take support from anyone who is not a supporter of the Labour Party. Basically that was a statement from Benn that he was not going to criticise the Labour Party leadership because the most important thing was unity with the Labour Party tops: anybody who criticises the right-wing Labour Party leadership is out of bounds. This was the attitude that Benn took into the strike. Our issue [*Spartacist Britain* no 55] in March '84 covered that by-election. The headline reads: "Benn wins Chesterfield as Labour Party rallies to Cold War unity". Many workers had illusions in the left wing of the Labour Party. They thought that the Labour Party was something like a "broad church", everybody who wanted to could participate in it, and somehow the left would ultimately gain control of the party and institute what they thought were socialist policies. During the strike, though, the differences between the left wing and the right wing of social democracy were not fundamental. There was a political line between both of them and genuine communism.

Now I have not followed as closely as you what's been in the press here in Britain about the miners strike. I understand that there has been a lot of criticism of Scargill, because the NUM didn't call a ballot during the strike. Most of this stuff, in fact all of it, is utter baloney. Somehow the idea is, if you are well behaved and you don't disturb a single hair on the head of a scab and you are reasonable, the scabs would have been reasonable, wouldn't have scabbed—everything would have been hunky dory. This is a lot of crap. The way the strike was spread was through flying pickets, which is traditional in this industry, and once the pits were picketed out the only possible purpose of a ballot would have been to break the strike. So this has nothing whatsoever to do with workers democracy. Kinnock preached that if you have peaceful picket lines and you don't seek to defend your picket lines and you just put forward your view, you can win a strike—after all the government is supposed to be

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