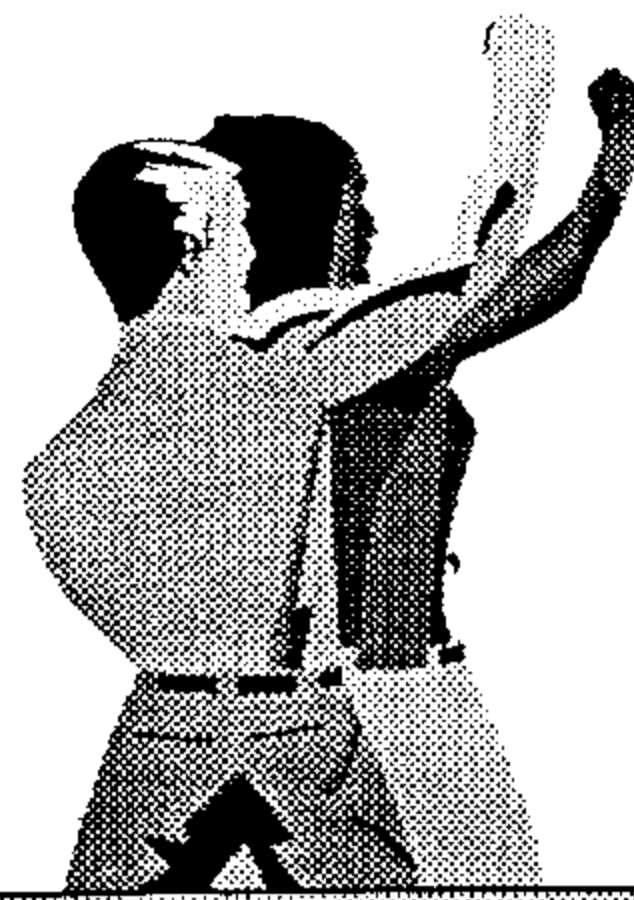


V socialist VOICE



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CONFERENCE SAYS:

Build New Leadership Out of Struggles



Irma Critchlow brought greetings from
Lambeth Anti-Racist Alliance



**UNITE THE STRUGGLES
CONFERENCE** full report from
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**WORKING
L I F E**

Peter Kerrigan
Interviewed ~
**A Docker's
Story**

The Concluding Part

W E L S H W A T E R / W O R K F A R E
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Monthly Paper
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League



British Section
of the
International
Workers'
League

[4th International]

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This Issue By
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and Martin Ralph

*signed articles do not
necessarily reflect
the views of the ISL*

Contributions

We welcome letters, articles,
and comments from readers.

THE VOICE SAYS

Unite

One of the main features in this issue of Socialist Voice is the report about the conference "Unite the Struggles in Public Services and Communities". It was a very successful conference. One reason for this is that there are very important processes towards struggle taking place within the working class.

The resolutions for the conference show the great deal of discussion which took place leading up to the conference and at the centre of that discussion were the questions: what were the actual and concrete processes in the working class and how do we assist them forward?

The discussion drew on the experiences which developed in the 1984-1985 miners strike, the anti-poll tax movement and the widespread spontaneous opposition in October to the plans of the Tory government to close the pits.

The poll tax movement, which developed three years after the shock of the failure of the miners to prevent pit closures, as a result of the treachery of the TUC and the Labour Party, proved decisively that the working class had not been finished off.

The poll tax movement brought into it young people, communities and many who had not been involved in organised politics before.

Millions did not pay the poll tax, many sections of the middle class and all layers of the working class were involved. Large numbers of Labour Party members and trade unionists were involved but did not participate under the banner of their organisations.

The poll tax movement showed that there were great changes taking place in Britain. The type of mass movement which had developed in the past spear-headed by the advanced sections of the working class in manufacturing, heavy industry and transport, dockers, miners etc was changing.

The depth of the crisis in Britain is stirring all sections of the working class into struggle. The task is to fuse the great community struggles with the movements which are now developing in the organised working class.

One thing is absolutely certain, if the contributions at the conference revealed processes going on in the working class

- and they do, the desire for unity in struggle is an important and rapidly developing ingredient of the movement which is already fighting the Tories in the communities and the unions.

The movement in October quickly collided with the left labourites. That was seen in the Socialist movement conferences when last year it could not even take a resolution in support of the miners and this year at Sheffield sought to impose their methods of working a conference even when there was loud opposition.

The conference showed not only the desire for unity but it also recognised that we have to grapple with the question: how do we assist the actual concrete movement in Britain towards unity in struggle? Many contributions showed that it is not a question of a solidarity or a support movement but one of participating and intervening in the new rise of the working class.

The conference itself brought those in struggle from some of the minority communities, in particular the Black communities, together with rank and file and leaders from the hospitals, oil rigs, buses, local services, building sites, safety campaigns etc.

It was a powerful beginning with a powerful aim to bring all movements together but that can only be done if a drive is based on principles and a conviction based on the revolutionary nature of the working class and continually developing our understanding of changing reality today.

Such a force will develop if it grasps the essential unity of the national and international content of all workers' struggle today and unites the working class in the communities and industries.

This process will develop and produce new leaders who will be based on the desire for international class action. Real leadership today cannot come from sectional leaders, that is by those who seek to defend and fight for their own sections. The real leaders will be those who seek to fight for the unity of their class.

These are the questions which beginning to develop inside the working class.

ISL COMMENT



Things ain't what they used to be in the Olympic city.

No More Mr Nice Guy

Graham Stringer, Leader of Manchester Council, once went to football matches with Derek Hatton, nowadays he wants to watch the Olympics with John Major.

ONCE UPON a time, Graham Stringer the Labour leader of Manchester City Council was a fully paid-up member of the 'loony left'. In fact, his left wing antics got him expelled from the Council's Labour Group in 1980, 1981, 1982 and 1983.

But Graham had his revenge, and after the left gained control of the city in 1984, he became leader of the Council.

Times change. Throughout the 1980's the city's logo proudly boasted; 'Manchester City Council - Defending Jobs, Improving Services'. Now it has been quietly changed to 'Making Things Happen'. That is not all that has changed since

Graham was going to introduce socialism in one county.

Nowadays Stringer is making all sorts of things happen. Every time the council meets there is a protest outside.

Last month 100 housing staff walked out of work in support of two employees who had been sacked from the city's Cheetham Hill office. All 100 received threatening letters from the

caring council which said that they would be dismissed unless they returned to work. Yet just four weeks earlier, Graham Stringer had publicly applauded council staff who walked out in support of the miners. Stringer, who occasionally likes to pretend he is still a friend of the working class, did not see any contradiction. Others did, and branded him a hypocrite. Stringer retorted in the local

Manchester City Council proudly point to the £184 million they spent on housing last year. Residents of the city wondering why, with this level of spending, the city's estates are so run down, might like to know that £110 million of the budget was spent paying back loans to banks.

press; "that's the crass logic of a five year old". As we have said in 'Socialist Voice', given the scale of cuts in Manchester, it's a good job that the City Council don't own a coal mine.

★ Last month we reported on the crisis at cancer hospital Christies, when it was revealed that they were having problems getting enough cash for drugs. Patients and visitors will be pleased to hear that they can relax.... in the new coffee shop, gift shop, or hairdressing salon that are being built.

LONG TO RAIN OVER US 14 Years of Tory Rule

Starting next month, 'REAL LIFE' will remind you of those wonderful promises the Conservatives made in their election manifesto's!
We will also tell you what really happens!



★ Private health care company BUPA have come up with a really sick idea. If you're worried about dying before you get your NHS operation, just pop into BUPA's hospital in Whalley Range, and you can have your op on HP!

You have your operation, then just pay off the cost so much per week. The scheme brings queue jumping within reach of anyone desperate or sick enough to need urgent treatment. However if you don't keep up your repayments, the prospect of bailiffs calling round to remove your new kidney might make you feel ill.

★ Many readers will be taking part in events around 'International Women's Week'. The week is even more significant than usual as this year marks the 75th anniversary of women winning the right to vote.

Manchester City Council are helping to provide a whole series of exhibitions, conferences and celebrations. Meanwhile, in neighbouring Tory controlled Trafford, kick off with a Beauty Care Day, Cookery Classes and a Fashion Show. Presumably the Burghers of Trafford are already planning celebrations to enter 20th century in seven years time.

Admission

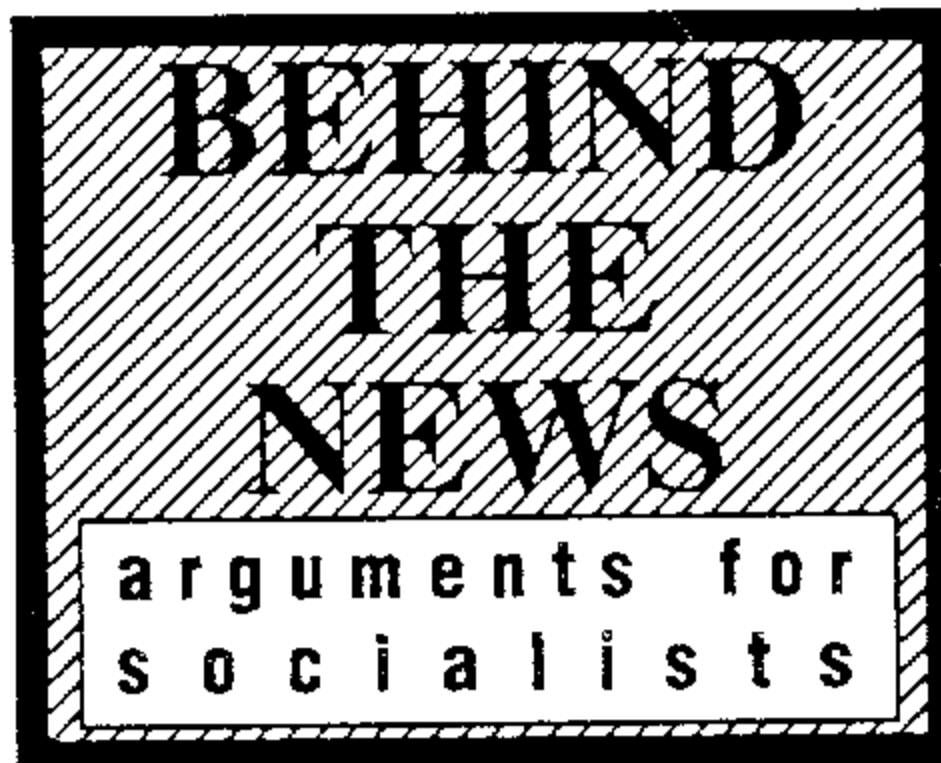
In America workfare has been used to victimize single mothers. Single parent families are, of course, a favourite target of the religious right in the United States. If the same idea is introduced in Britain, and for the last fifteen years wherever America has gone Britain has eventually followed, the result is unlikely to be what most people might expect.

If workfare is introduced into Britain it will be an admission that large-scale unemployment is with us to stay. It will also be an admission that the government has given up trying to solve the problem of how to achieve economic growth.

In such circumstances many will ask, "why not give the unemployed something to do". There are not enough care-assistants to look after the growing mass of old people, or street cleaners to pick up litter, and why is it that it is never possible to find a porter at a railway station when you want one. Worse still, affording good domestic servants these days has become virtually impossible. What a good idea Mr. Major. Why, in an instant, we can stop the unemployed hanging around the streets, give them a 'purpose' in life, and have all sorts of jobs done for which no-one is prepared to pay.

But unlike most good fairy stories this one does not have a happy ending. Four million unemployed people cannot all be found jobs, not without putting workers already in employment on the dole. If, for example, the unemployed become porters in hospitals, what will happen to the porters now employed? Even if they are not sacked they will find that, as they leave or retire, a growing army of conscript labour will be recruited to do their jobs. In shops, factories, local garages, indeed anywhere where low-paid workers are to be found, the unemployed can be introduced to do the job for less, in fact, for free.

Employers will be queuing up to ensure that they get their ration of free labour. Workers in low-paid jobs will find it difficult to demand pay increases, "just remember", they will be told, "I only have to ring the labour exchange to replace you for free"!



LABOUR PARTY BACKING FOR WORKFARE

DAVID BLUNKETT, Shadow Health Secretary and member of the Labour Party's National Executive Committee, has put forward a workfare style plan of his own. The MP for Brightside in Sheffield, said that unemployed sixteen to twenty one year olds should be forced to undertake "at least nine months of compulsory community service". In return they would receive "modest but proper wages".

Doubtless Blunkett's idea of 'modest wages' would be the 90p an hour paid to second year YTS trainees. The Labour Party still has no commitment to abolish compulsion on to the scheme or to raise the allowances paid to participants.

If, as seems likely, Labour accept Blunkett's proposals, they will be sentencing young people to another nine months of slave labour.

David Dunnico



Slave Army

And once work has been found for the unemployed, how are they supposed to have the time to find paid work for themselves? Their plight will be made even worse by the fact that millions of them will be doing the very jobs they might otherwise have been paid to do.

And what rights are they going to enjoy? Will they be allowed to join a union, or go on strike, or refuse to do other work than that which they have been 'employed' to do? And will they be covered by employee accident insurance and health and safety legislation?

What will be created will be a slave army of permanently unemployed, unskilled and semi-skilled worker ready to be deployed by the state whenever and wherever an employer has a problem with his workforce. How long will it be, I wonder, before the unemployed are used as conscript scab labour to break strikes!

We are already well along to road to having a low-skill, low-wage economy.

Free labour for all might be an employers dream, but it is the mark of an economy, and a country, that is in retreat. When businessmen have to rely on free labour to make a profit, their businesses can hardly be said to be thriving. Paying workers has always seemed unfair to employers.

But it is those self-same workers who, at the end of the week, buy the goods that those employers manufacture. No pay, no profits! Mrs. Thatcher may believe that we cannot spend what we do not earn, but neither, as Mr. Major is about to find out, can people earn unless others spend.

If wages are to be undercut by using the unemployed as a threat to stop workers demanding more, then demand for goods in the shops will continue to fall.

In the short-term this may help to solve the Balance of Payments problem, but, in the long term, it will lead to an economy that is dependent on free labour to keep it going and that requires an ever higher level of unemployment to provide the free workforce to keep ailing companies in business.

Welsh Community Resistance Conference

Forty people from all over Wales attended a conference at the end of January to build a fightback-Marc Jones reports



HERE IN Wales we are being hammered by multi-nationals who threaten communities with dangerous chemicals and toxic waste, as well as nuclear power stations and oil firms who want to exploit newly found reserves off the coast.

Mobilising communities against these people means raising big questions about democratic control (the hundreds of quangos who authorise these plans), energy policy (Hamilton Oil wants to build a gas terminal next door to the Point of Ayr mine near Prestatyn - cashing in on the dash for gas) as well as asking who benefits from such developments.

The conference itself was very positive about continuing to link up. We are going to produce a regular bulletin of events, etc. and there is a much bigger conference planned for 12th June. One weakness was the lack of trade union activists there, but I think that is a reflection of trade union activity to-day.

The proposed local council cuts in Wales will be the deepest ever - for the first time ever our 'colonial-governor' David Hurst is threatening to cap overspending councils. We replied that councillors now had two choices: Resign or Resist. They are currently opting for number three: total surrender.

I think I have said it before, but cities like Manchester - which have been cutting for years, at least had something there to cut before getting to the bone - mainly because of 'progressive' policies that built up some services. Here the councils are either Labour-Mafia run or Independent-Mafia run, and have not bothered to develop services, so we are straight into cutting hundreds of teaching jobs etc.

If we can unite the union campaigns with the popular campaigns to save community centres or Old Peoples Homes from closure then we will be in business.

WATER COSTS MORE IN WALES

The recently privatised company Welsh Water, which makes profits of £3 million a week, is cutting-off sixty families every week. Last year they cut-off the water supply to over 2,600 households. Already 50,000 families have been summoned to court for non-payment and the number of disconnections is likely to rise.

Anger against the cut-offs is fuelled by the fact that although Wales gets 50% more water than England, Welsh families pay 50% more for it and the 1 1/4 million households in Wales are three times more likely to be cut off.

One of the first things Welsh Water did after privatisation was to end the system whereby water rates could be paid along with council rents. This meant low paid families could no longer pay their water rates weekly and also meant Welsh Water did not have to pay local councils for collection.

Their vindictive policy of instant cut-offs, has given the company the worst record of any large water firm in England or Wales.

Welsh Water claims to oppose the introduction of water meters because of the high charges. Water meters cost £200 to install with a standing charge of £90 a year and a reading cost of £20. Only 30,000 (3%) of Welsh Water's 'customers' have chosen water meters. Welsh Water along with other water companies favour a flat-rate water tax which would be cheap to administer and easier to introduce. In other words a water poll tax but for the moment they are holding fire - I wonder why?

Article based on information from:
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For Justice and Truth in Lambeth Defend the DLO

Ed Barbour reports on the latest developments
in the Lambeth corruption saga

THERE HAS been much made recently of the allegations of corruption in Lambeth council and the 'theft' of possibly as much as £15 million over the last ten or so years though this figure includes money 'illegally spent' on services rather than stolen.

If money has been stolen then it is a crime against the people and workers of Lambeth and justice must be done, but the Tories and the Labour Party would rather punish those who spent money on services than those who stole it.

To put it into perspective a greater crime is that every year Lambeth pays £100 million (almost a third of its budget) to banks as repayment of loans and interest on loans!

After years of the Labour Party condemning councillors who tried to defend services they respond immediately with a declaration that the Lambeth Directorate of Operational Services (DOS) and the Direct Labour Organisation (DLO), employing a total of 2,000, should be disbanded. In the same breath as this declaration of their intention they declare support for a government organised public inquiry. An inquiry such as this, with predetermined conclusions, can only be called in order to give a cover of impartiality to class attacks. This is clear because many of the charges relate to tendering arrangements so disbanding the DLO can only make more problems.

Later Jack Straw claimed that the expulsions of left councillors was part of a campaign against this corruption though no mention of it was made at the time and Herman Ouseley's report does not implicate any elected councillor in the corruption. Tory councillor Mary Leigh, on the other hand, said of Steve French, an expelled Labour councillor in Lambeth "I cannot fault Cllr French on his efforts" (to clear up corruption in the DOS).

Even earlier Ouseley, whose previous achievements include the dismantling of the GLC, showed that he did not have the interests of the council at heart by giving the report to a journalist before even councillors saw it.

All this goes to prove that the proposed public inquiry will be far from impartial - it is an attempt to use the scandal to further the Tories political agenda. The workers and communities of Lambeth must reject

*"A greater crime is that
every year Lambeth pays
almost a third of its budget
to banks in repayments
and interest"*

this as the cynical move that it is. If we do not the DLO will be lost with enormous job losses and the tendering out of the contracts to subcontractors. With Lambeth communities already suffering 27.8% unemployment we can not accept more job losses and already the alleged fraud is being used to justify a rent rise for council tenants of £6, almost 20%. It is also well known that health and safety conditions in private companies are lower than in the DLO so more injuries at work are bound to result. This is without taking into account the depletion of services that is inevitable in any privatisation.

The only answer acceptable to us is a inquiry conducted by those who have most to lose by theft from the council the workers and communities of the borough. This should be carried out by committees based in the council offices and DLO yards and in the estates and communities of Lambeth and should investigate not just stolen money but should include an investigation into the requirements of a budget for the needs of Lambeth's communities. Lambeth, and all other councils, must provide the services needed at whatever cost, not decide what can be provided according to what they are allowed to spend.

This position will be fought for by Socialist Voice at the Lambeth Borough Conference on 27th February, Lambeth Town Hall and in public meetings to be arranged from now.

Unite the Struggles in Public Services and Communities

Conference Report



Tony O'Brien Convenor of Direct Labour Southwark Council



Paul Maddox from the Ian Francis Community Truth Campaign

LAST MONTH, nearly a hundred people from all over England, Scotland and Wales came to Manchester to take part in a conference organised jointly by the Crisis in London Campaign and the North West Anti-Poll Tax Forum.

The aim of the weekend long event was to unite the struggles that are taking place in the communities and public services.

Some came as individuals, but what was particularly important was the range and number of fighting organisations that came together. All realised that to win, workers have to do more than just talk in abstract forms about 'unity'.

In this supplement, 'Socialist Voice' publishes a taste of the contributions made at this important conference.

In the next issue of 'Socialist Voice' we will be including a number of articles about some of the campaign groups who came to the conference. If you want a copy, write to us at our usual address.

Speakers at the conference represented or came from the following organisations: Campaign Against Child Support Act; Crisis In London Campaign; East London Teachers Association; Hatfield Anti-Poll Tax Union; Ian Francis Campaign; COBAS (Italian Unofficial Union); Joint Sites Committee; Lambeth Anti-Racist Alliance; Leeds Trades Council; Leicester Trades Council; London Busworkers' Committee; London Fight The Poll Tax; Lothian Anti-Poll Tax; Manchester NUS; NALGO Camden, Southwark and Bexley; NATFHE Derbyshire; North Sea Union OILC; North West Anti-Poll Tax Forum; NUM, Lancashire; NUPE Manchester Social Services, Prestwich hospital; Orville Blackwood Campaign; Southwark Direct Labour Organisation; Tower Hamlets Trades Council; UCATT Executive.

(Continued on the next page)

UNITE THE STRUGGLES IN

Martin Ralph from the North West Anti-Poll Tax Forum who chaired the first day of the conference, in welcoming visitors and delegates to the conference said he was sure all present were fighters, part of a common struggle. "We must make a start of uniting all the struggles in which tenants, community groups and others were involved".

Peter Gibson, a member of the TGWU national executive and a delegate from the London bus workers committee, told the conference that his boss who earns £60,000 per year, although not prepared to take a wage cut has asked Peter and his fellow workers to take a £50 per week cut and work another five hours a week. Even with the so-called crisis in public transport in London fares in other European capitals were much lower.

Capitalism cannot run a safe transport system anymore.

The best way to control transport is for it to be controlled by those who work in it and those who use it.

Ron Doel from the executive of UCATT, the building workers union, spoke at the conference advising that most of his members worked for local authorities and would be immediately effected by cut-backs. "People were having to live on the streets while 500,000 building workers had no jobs." Ron made a call for

a massive turnout by workers on May Day, "and make it a real May Day, not the government's May Day".

Fredrico Gattolin, a teacher from Turin gave the conference an international dimension, bringing greetings from Italian workers. He explained that last July the leaders of Italian unions and the government had agreed to scrap the 'scala mobile', which linked wages to changes in living costs. There had been massive demonstrations against this and he had been involved along with fellow teachers in an unofficial movement which involved 40,000 people. He stressed we could only go forward at an international level by building what the reformists had erased:

"We must fight for a new leadership and for democracy in the unions. If we do this the movement will take off"

international class solidarity. (In the next issue of the Voice we will give a longer report of his contributions to the conference).

Clara Buckley explained to the conference how her son Orville Blackwood had been killed in Broadmoor. In a moving speech she left the audience in no doubt of the injustices of the case and on a personal note the terrible loss that a mother suffers from the death of a child compounded by the callous nature of the police and prison authorities. (The next issue of the Voice will carry the latest statement from the Orville Blackwood Campaign.)

Paul Maddocks spoke from the Ian Francis campaign. Ian had died in suspicious circumstances after playing football at Send prison in Guildford. Paul was convinced that the cause of death was not from 'natural causes' as stated by the coroner's court and the campaign was fighting to overturn the verdict.

Mike Zeitlin from London Fight The Poll Tax asked how do we develop the unity that everybody wants. "Some are fighting for their lives - in prison, against the attacks of the fascists. You could not get unity simply by tying issues together".

Lillian Winter spoke from the Campaign Against the Child Support Act. The only people to benefit from the Act will be the Treasury, she insisted.

Willie Stephenson spoke on behalf of the offshore union OILC. He outlined the fight against the leaderships of the EEPTU and the AEU, particularly in connection with the helicopter disaster last year in when three OILC members were killed.

He also reported on growing connections between the Norwegian oil workers' union OFS and the OILC.

Celia Ralph, A NUPE steward working for Manchester City Council, said we needed this conference not just to share experiences, but to work out a perspective, a socialist perspective. At one time in Manchester there were thirty



Clara Buckley holding a picture of her son who died in prison

PUBLIC SERVICES & COMMUNITIES

eight old peoples homes, now there were five and they want to close them. "We need services", she said, "...based on need, not on profit. Workers want to know what alternative there is. Workers will fight and they are listening carefully".

Mike O'Farrell, Hatfield Anti-Poll Tax said he had not come just to listen and be educated, but to take some decisions and find some means of generalising from each of the struggles. What was needed was a trades-community council. The two are complementary he suggested. The Poll Tax taught us that correctness of ideas is more important than numbers. He said that he had been impressed by the Crisis In London Campaign. He thought this had to be carried forward on a national scale.

Tony O'Brien, convenor from Southwark Direct Labour Organisation and a member of the Construction Industry Safety Campaign, said that the struggles we are involved in affect your very being. "The struggles now affecting people were physically changing their thinking. We must fight for a new leadership and for democracy in the unions. People who think: I must look after my family - and this a natural sentiment - must get an identity. If we do this the movement will take off, it will be new, a breath of fresh air".

Barry Bidulph, a member of Southwark NALGO said that hundreds of jobs have been lost in the construction sector because of compulsory tendering. New conditions for council workers meant that if you have twenty days off sick in a year you could be sacked right away. He agreed that most of the unions are bureaucratic but said they have been built by the working class and we have to take control of them.

Paul Henderson, secretary of Leicester Trades Council believed; "The state was moving openly to the use of force. The response of the Labour leaders is to say that the laws must be obeyed. What we need is a movement with a perspective. We must build the sort of organisation that will develop it".

Tim Loveridge, delegate from the Joint Sites Committee which has built among rank and file building workers in London, said that the JSC does not see itself as a separate union. You are not going to challenge unions by going away and forming a separate union - this only leaves the union in the hands of the right wing.

John Cooke, a student in Workers' Power, said it is not enough to put things down in resolutions. What is needed is a strategy.

Liz Leicester from the Crisis In London Campaign and a delegate from Camden NALGO. "In Camden the whole work force is faced with a lay-off clause, the council now has the right to terminate trade union rights at three months notice and workers are being asked to take a pay freeze. But many feel the council has overstepped the mark. All are affected for the first time in years and there is a joint union campaign". She stressed that the Crisis In London Campaign is not simply a campaign against the cuts but is asking what sort of services we need and how to form a strategy to get them. The self organisation of the working class is a key question. She also called for support for the North West Miners Support Group Conference later in February.

The first speaker on Sunday was Norman Laws. He said that the fight against the Poll Tax had still not yet been won. Commenting on the discussion he asked; "do we need little support groups around the country or one big national movement?"

Irma Critchlow, Lambeth Anti-Racist Alliance and former surcharged Lambeth Labour councillor, said it was good to see all these people challenging the government. "Nine years ago we stood up in Lambeth and refused to cut jobs and services and the councillors had got great support. I feel this spirit is here again. LARA had decided it was time to stand up and fight - we welcome support from white colleagues and friends" Irma said in concluding her contribution.



Peter Gibson delegate from the London Busworkers' Committee

"There is a feeling for a new leadership. This may not come all at once, but come it will".

Build New Leadership out of Struggles



Norman Laws jailed anti-poll tax campaigner

Ron Doel from the UCATT Executive

Frederico Gattolin Turin Teacher, member of Revolutionary Socialism and a leader of the COBAS in Italy

Billy Pye a member of the NUM executive, discussed the present situation facing miners and added; *"I see no difference between the closure of a pit and the closure of a hospital"*.

Not one pit should close he concluded.

Bill Hunter member of the International Socialist League part of the Workers International League, described the movement in the working class in Britain towards unity as the greatest since the end of World War II.

He referred to the conference which the North West Anti-Poll Tax Forum had helped organise one and a half years ago and asked was it an advance? *"There is no doubt that it was"* was he concluded.

"We have seen movement after movement against the Tory government" Bill continued, *"...but we must see what sort of leadership we need for these struggles."*

It is necessary to develop the movement represented at the conference.

We must cherish and encourage this movement. There is a feeling for a new leadership. Workers cannot move except internationally.

This may not come all at once, but come it will".

John Rees from NATFHE Derbyshire Community Education said there was a big campaign against cuts building up in his area. The Derbyshire campaign has expressed many of the elements present at the conference. He referred to the circular sent out by the Larry Whitty, Labour Party secretary, last November instructing Labour councils to make cuts demanded by the Tories.

Adrian Blakelock, a NALGO member from Bexley, said he had been struck by the contributions from the Orville Blackwood and the Ian Francis Campaigns. He said they had summed up in three words what many books had tried to say: *"Not mad but angry"*.

Stuart Carter, delegate from Prestwich Hospital NUPE, discussed the questions of trust status and the internal market, by 1994-95 per cent of the National Health Service will be in trusts. The market will cause chaos. *"We should demand that Labour councillors either fight the cuts or resign. If they resign then the miners support groups or the Anti-Poll Tax movement should perhaps stand candidates"*.

Make Socialist Voice Part of Your Campaign

Socialist Voice supports workers and communities whenever and wherever they fight for their rights and against injustices.

In this issue we have highlighted the way national and local government are attacking ordinary working class people.

Every month we open our pages to campaigns, groups and individuals.

Send us articles, news, stories, photographs etc.

ISL PO Box 9 Eccles SO Salford M30 7FX

Working Life is a new series where workers talk about the experiences that made them fight. Last month, we brought you the first part of Peter Kerrigan's story—here is the conclusion.

A Docker's Story

Peter Kerrigan who played the pyjama clad George in Alan Bleasdale's 'Boys From The Black Stuff' is perhaps better known to workers in Liverpool as a life long militant fighter on the city's docks. In the second part of an interview with Bill Hunter, Peter talks about his struggles with employers and union leaders.

I WAS on a delegation to London dockers during the 1954 strike, and I remember we discussed then how best to move, whether it was better to continue unofficially in the T&G, working with the official committee of the 'blue' or to make a complete break. The attack on the members by Deakin and the officials was so bad that if you did any fighting you were always in danger of losing your registration book and your job on the docks. Danny Brandon was soon to be a casualty and lost his "book" for attending a meeting in the afternoon..

After the 1954 overtime strike, we were more and more convinced of the course of joining the "blue". There was big support among the rank and file. When Dick Barret came up to Liverpool to speak at the Liverpool stadium there was the biggest meeting of dockers ever seen there. The hall overflowed, there were eight thousand people there. They passed a resolution to join the National Amalgamated Stevedores and Dockers. Barret was carried out of the hall. He was a little cockney sparrow of a man, proud of the stevedores' traditions of sticking together and fighting for old and infirm dockers. He got caught up in something that he didn't realise would have the effect it did: bringing the whole trade union bureaucracy down on his head.

That stadium meeting was the culmination of dock gate meetings where we got a consensus of opinion from the dock by resolutions. After the stadium meeting we opened premises in unused shops up and down the dock road. The central office was above the Mersey Cafe at the Pier Head, Liverpool. Constable, Harry Freeman, (who came up to recruit us but was a witness against us in the subsequent court case), and Bert Aylward were sent up by the Blue union from London as recruiting officers. During this recruitment, men were leaving the ships where they were working to sign up with the Blue and get their union cards. They signed forms declaring that they wished to transfer their membership from the Transport and General Workers' Union to the NAS&D and an official of the 'blue' would countersign the form. We had four or five thousand members sign up in three weeks. In Birkenhead by this time, there was only a handful left in the TGWU.

We didn't know about the Bridlington Agreement, which was an agreement among the trade union bureaucracies that they wouldn't poach each other's members. We just thought it right that you should be able to be in the union that you thought would fight best for you. When Bill Johnson

was asked by counsel in the court case, what he knew of the Bridlington Agreement at the time, he said he thought it was a "sweet club".

The Transport and General officials tried all kinds of methods; show of cards with the officials declaring that anyone who didn't show a T&G card would not be available for work; trying to refuse our

registration as dockers. But they continually came up against the solidarity of dockers. The men who stayed in the T&G knew that those who joined the NAS&D were generally fighters. We'd been on the old unofficial committees and anything that had been won had not come from the T&G officially, but through the unofficial movement. And there was also the widespread detestation of Transport and General Workers' officials. Some of those older dockers who had been a lifetime in the T&G found it difficult to leave even though all they could show for it was a small funeral benefit, but they had an allegiance because they had been in so long. There were men who had been in the old carters union which went to form the T&G. They supported the blue union fight and they would say: "If I was younger, I'd be with you". Most of those people who stayed in the T&G recognised that if there was no blue there would be no fight.

We failed to get recognition through the Recognition Strike, although the Hull dockers won dockside recognition which meant the blue union official negotiated on arbitration's, dirty cargo, piece-work etc. In Hull a blue union docker could get his son on the dock. The T&G prevented that on Merseyside. Any recruitment to the register had to be T&G members. That was one of the biggest pressures they operated.

**WORKING
L I F E**

PETER KERRIGAN

Continues on the next page

Peter Kerrigan: A Docker's Story

Mad Men of the North

The blue union continued through the sixties and was able to show its teeth in the 1967 strike. It went through some hard fighting in the north but the fact that men continued in it is really a big proof that the reasons for the big break from the T&G were overwhelming and it was a viable undertaking and it showed the big pull that the idea of a national, democratic, fighting union had.

The fight was made hard because of the simple fact that the leadership of the Stevedores and Dockers, in order to get back recognition from the TUC, were also attacking us and trying to show to the TUC that they were a 'responsible' organisation and it was the 'madmen of the north' - which is what some of these leaders began to call us - who wouldn't allow them to be so. While the blue did not recruit any large number of men after the recognition strike, it did recruit men after every strike in the sixties.

I very often think how there were men in Number Five Control, (which was my control, with 1500 men, but there were similar men in other controls) who were ready to give time and effort for a cause, the way they did. For example, if there was a strike coming off, you'd print a thousand leaflets and say: "Let's get these out in Birkenhead, we'll leave at six in the morning". They'd be there at six. The commitment was terrific to the blue. These men had no idea of getting a job out of it like those who became officials then for the TGWU. The thought of doing something for the T&G wouldn't get anybody out of bed. That was a phenomena of this time. I can't completely explain it. It was the result of the nature of the fight that won that, and which brought the resolve and the capacities of leadership that didn't sell out.

There were many of the unofficial leaders who gave of their best. Here, I must say a word about Bert Aylward, who was the 'old man' among us. Bert Aylward was the hardest working man I ever met; a hard disciplinarian, but nobody ever questioned Bert's honesty or that he was a man of principle. He played a big part in keeping me in struggle, and he was a Trotskyist member at the time. As a speaker he was very good; I always felt he had dotted the i's and crossed the t's. He was very analytical and a good committee man, giving good guidance. Bert only drank lemonade.

I was made a paid official of the Blue in 1967 and I must have been the shortest serving paid official a union ever had. This was the time of the Devlin modernisation scheme. This was supposed to come into operation on the 4th September 1967.

The employers and the government were aiming to get containerisation and palletisation and everything they called modernisation at the expense of the dockers.

Peter Kerrigan was talking to Bill Hunter. The full text of the interview is included as an appendix to a new book Bill has written called 'Conflict of Leadership'. The book deals with the struggles of British dockers between 1945 and 1989, concentrating on the role of the unofficial movement.

Bill's book will be available later this year. We will be including a full review when it is published.

Meeting

We said the union should be opposing Devlin and fighting, as a start, for sick pay, pensions and bringing conditions in the north up to those of London so that we would not become a scab alley. Put simply, the aim of the Devlin Scheme was to modernise the ports for the benefit of the employers and profit. Certainly it wasn't to benefit the docker's working conditions.

Any so-called betterment of their conditions was in order to get the plan through for the reorganisation of the docks which would cut the number of employers, give them tight control over labour, do away with the Dock Labour Scheme and drastically reduce the

number of dockers. We wanted the benefit of modernisation to go to the workers and not to the shipowners and harbour companies.

I called a meeting on Devlin in the Liverpool St George's hall. The following day I got a telegram from the Executive Committee of the NAS&D instructing me not to attend such a meeting, not to address the membership and to keep in line with the official union policy on Devlin. That policy was no different to that of the T & G - so far had the London blue union leaders retreated under the squeeze of the TUC.

I held the meeting in St. George's Hall and put it to the men: "Did they want me to address the meeting?" They unanimously instructed me to do so, which I did. A few days later I was sent my cards by the national leaders of the blue union. If I'd accepted that I didn't report to the men as their official, then they might as well have been back in the TGWU. I put that point to the men, that the reason I joined the blue was that I felt that the ranks had democracy over policy and control over officials.

It was the blue union in Liverpool that pushed the fight against Devlin. When the chairman put a resolution to go back to work in the middle of the strike in 1967, it was the blue union men who got it rejected at the meeting at the Pier Head and the strike went on to win a number of big concessions on conditions and wages.

When I think of the achievements of the blue union in the north I think of how it built the consciousness of dockers, both industrially and politically. And it did have a big effect on the Transport and General Workers Union; it shook the bureaucracy and forced them to retreat and give shop stewards in 1967. I have no doubts at all that the struggle for the blue was right. There may have been wrong tactics at times, but they happen in every struggle.

I have no doubts, also, about being correct in joining the Trotskyist movement. It taught me how to think things out politically and, as far as I have the capacity, to have a Marxist outlook. ■

"When I think of the achievements of the blue union in the North - I think of how it built the consciousness of dockers both industrially and politically."

Build an International Committee for the Defence of Palestinians

PALESTINE

Women Still Fighting

The 415 Palestinians expelled by Israel and abandoned in 'no mans land' on the Lebanese border in disregard of the most basic human rights and the Geneva Convention, tragically illustrates the conditions of life of the Palestinian people who, since 1948 have known only banishment, exile, repression, refugee camps and misery.

To-day, there are over 13,700 Palestinian political prisoners in Israeli prisons and detention centres. The overwhelming majority have had no trial and have been placed there under 'administrative internment'. Many have been secretly interned and deprived of all rights of defence.

Since the beginning of the Intifada five years ago, 80,000 men, women and children have been arrested, detained and often tortured. In all the Middle East there are Palestinians suffering for their freedom and will to defend their people and their fundamental rights.

Violence is the daily lot of the population who live in the occupied territories; when it is not the army which attacks them they are tormented by extreme right wing Zionists.

Each day, the Palestinian people see the denial of their right to exist by a multitude of procedures which recall the methods one thought to be a thing of the past. Methods by which the Jews themselves were victims during the darkest hours of the second world war.

LIST OF CRIMES

*The exhaustion of the reserves of water in the occupied territories (80% of the water supply of Israel comes from Cis-Jordan and Golan)

*The expulsion of intellectuals with the aim of destroying the Palestinians social culture and to force the emigration of the population.

*The massive implantation of Israeli colonies, confiscation of land, destruction of orchards, dynamiting of houses

*Looting and searching almost daily...

FOR URGENT ACTION

*The immediate return of the 415 expelled Palestinians.

*The freeing of all prisoners.

*An end to repression, arrests and looting.

For the above reasons, we call upon all the defenders of human rights, all democrats and democratic organisation, irrespective of their position on Palestinian, to build an international committee to defend Palestinian prisoners.

Such a committee could organise the following initiatives:

*Delegations to Israeli embassies to demand the immediate return of the expelled Palestinians.

*An international commission of legal experts, doctors and democrats to inquire into the situation in the places of detention.

*Sponsorship of Palestinian prisoners.

*Meetings and assemblies in towns and cities.

*A regular information bulletin.

We make the proposal to all those for whom the phrase democratic freedoms has meaning to join in its defence.

Marc Mennecier, doctor Bernard Meurgues, teacher 10th January 1993
Initial signatories: Rene Dumont; Claude Bourdet, journalist-writer; Gilles Perrault, writer; Denis Langlois, barrister-writer; Francois Geze, editor, Pierre Fougeyrollas, university professor; Michele Blanc, barrister; Gilbert Collard, barrister; Nassan, doctor; Guy Holstein; Mourad Oussedik, barrister; Pierre Broue, historian.

**All correspondence to Marc Mennecier,
Boissans - 12100 Creissels, France**

This report was taken from the December/January newsletter of the Women's Organisation for Political Prisoners.

On 22nd December, the women prisoners (of Hasharon Prison) held a protest strike against the mass deportation of the 415 Palestinians from the Occupied Territories on 17th December and refused to leave their cells for the recreation period.

9th December was the fifth anniversary of the Intifada, and the women prisoners in Hasharon wanted to mark the event with a meeting. As this was not allowed, they celebrated by singing in their cells.

Somaiyeh Aghbariyeh, a 23 year old Palestinian Israeli citizen from Musmus and a second year student in sociology in the Hebrew University in Jerusalem, was arrested on 17th December. During the first week she was forbidden by an order to meet with a lawyer. Somaiyeh was interrogated at first in Petah Tiqva and then brought to Kishon Detention Centre and put in solitary confinement.

She was questioned by four interrogators, kept shackled for long hours with a sack on her head, or enclosed in a very small cell. She was insulted and threatened that she would not be allowed to continue her studies. As she was denied access to the dining room, she was brought her food by the criminal detainees who harassed and cursed her. On 24th December one of them poured boiling water on Somaiyeh's arm scalding her severely. The same day several women pumped the contents of a fire extinguisher into her cell, nearly suffocating her. When she complained to a warden, the answer was, "it is a pity you did not die".

Somaiyeh requested that either a female warden or a Palestinian criminal detainee bring her food but the next day the food was again brought by one of her tormentors. Somaiyeh then began a hunger strike. The prison authorities responded by putting her in the infirmary and fed her by infusion. On 31 December Somaiyeh was released without being charged.

M a r c h 1 9 9 3 1 1

WEST PUSHES FOR

There is anything but a peaceful intention in the "peace" plan which Cyrus Vance and Lord Owen have conjured up for ex-Yugoslavia.

The estimated number of troops which are needed to enforce it has risen sharply over the last few weeks from 20,000 to 50,000 to the highest reported figure of 100,000. They will be needed until the next century, in other words a permanent army of occupation.

As the US talks of emergency food drops and aid for the Muslims in Bosnia they plan a dirtier involvement.

They use the question of aid as a cover for what they intend to do and also as a weapon in the blackmail campaign to achieve the "peaceful" splitting up of Bosnia.

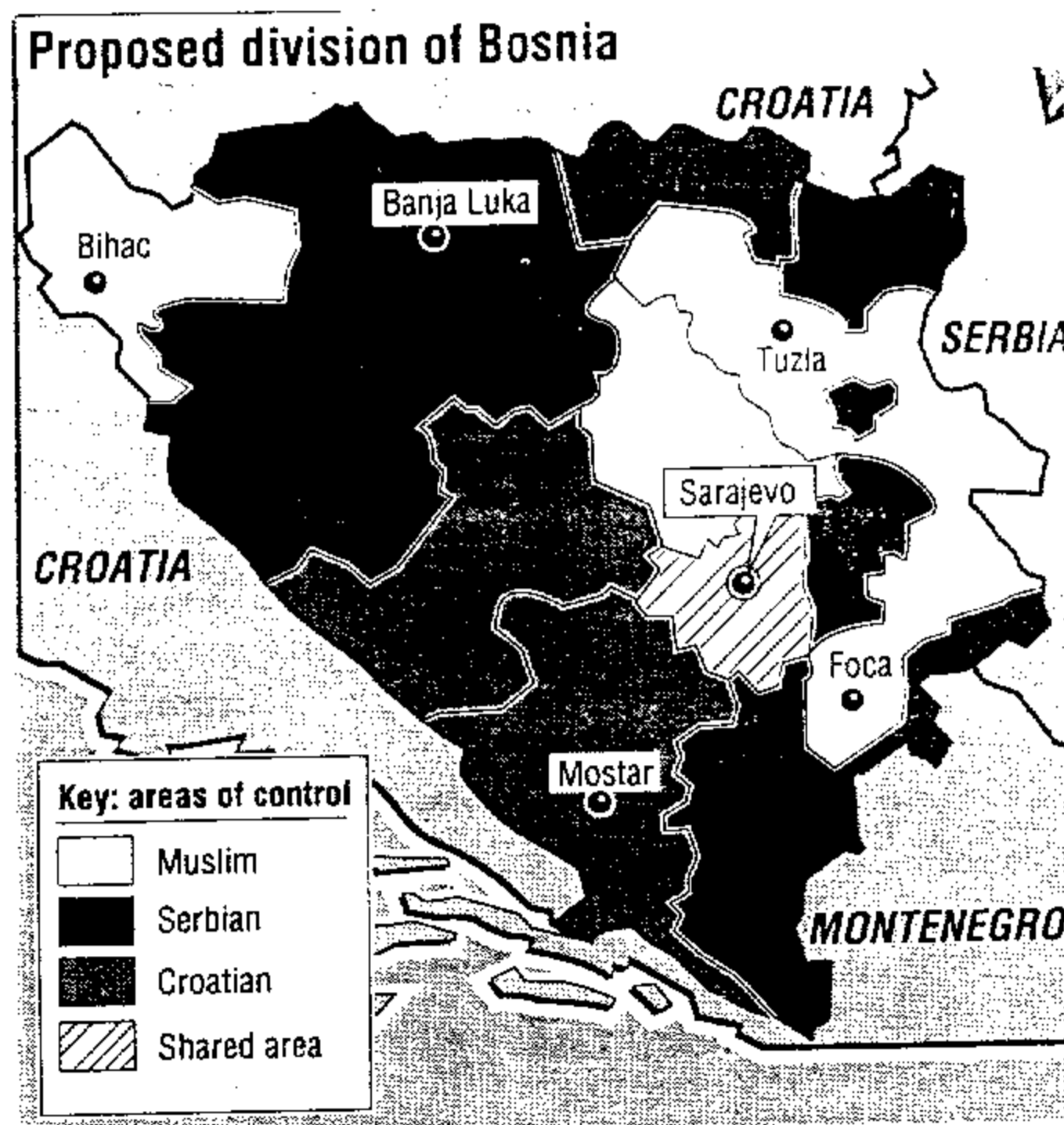
The Western plan is to divide it into "cantons." Muslims are being cleared out in many towns where they are the majority.

The Guardian 3rd January commented: "The obvious reason for the Croatian aggression is that the Bosnian Croats have received more than they could have ever hoped for from the Vance-Owen blueprint and are resolved to consolidate the gains while the going is good."

Croats make up 17% of the population but get 25% of the territory. The Muslims, 2.5 times more populous than the Croats, get about the same area but divided into two separate cantons.

US IMPERIALISM

The hesitation of the US over the original Owen-Vance plan is not because it was concerned about the fate of the Bosnian Muslims. As Zbigniew Brzezinski, from the Carter Administration days, says: "There is little predisposition in the US for a full-scale and potentially bloody military intervention." (Guardian 25th February). While Brzezinski



warns that the peace plan is too much he also warns it is too little! He argues for early use of UN forces including sending them to Kosovo and Macedonia.

To further his point he attacks the "peace plan". He says that in one way or another all parties oppose the plan and that it "simply propitiates the ethnic cleansers."

"Worst, it almost guarantees further ethnic cleansing, since all three of the Croat cantons or provinces, and two of the three Serb ones are contiguous to Croatia and Serbia... The plan thus leaves the Muslim Bosnians (the largest ethnic group before the cleanings) isolated in two pockets, confined to a territory significantly smaller than they had originally inhabited."

BRITISH INTRIGUES

The picture that the British press try to convey that Major is so concerned is completely false, Lord Owen represents Britain's and their allies carpet baggers but also brings

to bear the historic experience of Britain's colonialism and imperialism. His partner in crime is Cyrus Vance who served as Secretary of State under President Carter.

Britain has had a continuous history of oppressing nations. The British troops went into Northern Ireland in 1968 with the excuse that they were going to protect the Catholics. Twenty Five years later they are still there, still oppressing the Catholics, the republican movement and the working class. They certainly have no history of helping minorities or small nations.

Owen goes to ex-Yugoslavia but Britain refuses to open its borders to the refugees which the British Labour and Trade Union movement must demand: open the borders immediately!

US imperialism is hesitant in deciding what to do and how to do it. The chaotic situation creates immense problems for imperialism. A great danger for them is that the

ETHNIC DIVISION

working class in ex-Yugoslavia will throw off the infection of chauvinism and develop their struggles as a class. And that means as a multinational class.

STALINISM

History has shown that Stalinism did not solve the problems that Yugoslavia faced. It was firmly opposed to linking the working class internationally and increased the national problems. Imperialism's economic intervention via the IMF since 1951 undermined Yugoslavia's equilibrium long before the explosions.

It is ironic that for decades the IMF has pushed for policies which increased regionalism and nationalism tied to the bureaucracy and now they have to handle the fruits of their work.

Under these conditions reactionary nationalism was promoted. There was a hatred against Milosevic in the working class but the pro-restorationist forces have promoted Milosevic and the war. The only unity which can prevent further slide into war, famine, privatisations, imperialist intervention, military or economic is a class front of workers. They confront imperialists and the pro-restorationist forces in Yugoslavia.

There was no easy question in Yugoslavia for the imperialists. Some pushed for the divisions immediately such as Germany others preferred at the beginning to work through a single state which could control the restorationist process.

ETHNIC CLEANSING

Today imperialism promotes the "National cleansing" by the formation of "nationally pure" cantons in Bosnia. But the conflicts within imperialism have prevented an open imperialist intervention up to now. At the same time they are not sure

who they will be negotiating with in the future but are compelled to find points of support for their aims.

The leaderships of the Serbs, Croats and Muslim seek to extend their positions based on their concepts of race. In asserting the right of self-determination of a national that does not give the right to oppress minorities. The rights of all the minorities have to be insisted upon the Serbs in Croatia, the Muslims in Bosnia and the minorities in Serbia.

MULTI-NATIONAL PEOPLE

But even now neither the cliques nor imperialism have succeeded in breaking up all of the old unity. Twenty two per cent of Bosnian soldiers are Serbs and Sarajevo is still defended by an ethnically mixed population. Despite the threats of reactionary military leaders 50,000 Serbs are still living there. Last August when an unprotected refugee camp was attacked by Serb paramilitaries it was defended by local Serbs.

It is worth recalling the ethnic mix in Bosnia. In 1981 a census gave the following figures: 1,320,000 Serbs, 758,000 Croats, 1,629,000 Moslems, 3,000 Slovenians, 4,000 Albanians, 2,000 Macedonians, 326,000 classified as Yugoslav, 14,000 Montenegrins, 1,000 Hungarians. It is against this mix that imperialism and the cliques are hitting.

The only solution is in developing the connections with workers for a proletarian solution which alone can guarantee rights of nations and groups within a nation. We raise here the old slogan: "workers have no fatherland". It is only with an internationalist perspective and the struggle for internationalism that the right of nations and ethnic groups can be guaranteed.

Milosevic developed the nationalist card against the rising protest of

the sections of the middle class, student and working class movement. In March 1991 there were massive demonstrations against Milosevic. The police and army ended it by killing two people. This was followed by a General strike of 750,000 Serbian workers and Milosevic met their demands.

It was after this events that Milosevic increased the calls for a "greater Serbia." And made alliance with the most reactionary nationalist forces.

INTERNATIONALISM

The only answer for the working class is the development of an internationalist leadership which seeks to reunite the splintering of the working class in ex-Yugoslavia in the fight for socialism and workers' democracy.

As Bill Hunter said:

"Internationalists who follow Lenin and Trotsky know that the progress to socialism can only take place with full expression of the national culture of oppressed nations. One salient fact of today is that in this period of imperialism's power to dominate small nations economically and militarily and the international links of capital, a small nation is only able to realise fully its potential in cooperation with the workers' international revolutionary struggle. Otherwise it must sink under the domination of imperialism.

The proletarian struggle for its part is undermined and corrupted if it blocks the demands for national freedom in defence of its supposed own interests. That is one enormous lesson from the history of Stalinist nationalities policies."

"LUCKY COUNTRY" AUSTRALIA

Ten years of Labour Party rule has resulted in the Thatcherisation of Australia. Against a background of over one million unemployed (11% of the working population) the federal Keating government has announced a General election on 13th March.

Once described as the "Lucky Country" Australia has seen the gains of its working class eroded with an avalanche of privatisation, anti-union laws and cuts. With a foreign debt of 19bn Australian dollars (£9bn) overseas banks are calling for more attacks on workers.

However, Australians are now beginning to fight the policies that have resulted in the breakdown of family life with a swelling army of children selling themselves on the streets of Sydney and Melbourne.

Although there is now to be a national election the Victorian Liberal government of Jeff Kennett has embarked upon a massive series of attacks on workers and their families. Within 6 weeks of his election sweeping changes in the public sectors and industrial relations have been pushed through the Victoria Parliament. Always having a secret agenda but never prepared to reveal it is now the way parliamentary politics are conducted in Australia.

We print below part of an editorial from the November edition of *RED*, produced by Communist Intervention a Trotskyist Australian group.

"During the decade since the Bob Hawke's election, the Accord between the Australian Congress of Trade Unions (ACTU) and the Australian La-

bour Party (ALP) government has eroded the basic training ground of the class struggle in workplace union activity. At the same time, those unions which have defied the Accord, the BLF and the

Once described as the "Lucky Country" Australia has seen the gains of its working class eroded with an avalanche of privatisation, anti-union laws and cuts. With a foreign debt of 19bn Australian dollars (£9bn) overseas banks are calling for more attacks on workers.

Pilots, have been isolated and smashed. In 12 days from the announcement of the cutting of annual leave loading on 28 October to the general strike on 10th November, unions were flooded with new applications for membership and the work of a decade of class-collaboration was undone.

"The campaign of industrial action against the Employee Relations Bill, The Vital Services Bill, the Public Sector Management Bill and Kennett's other class-war measures must be maintained. But these laws will not be the only focuses of working class anger. Stimulated by Kennett's attacks and the upsurge of working class opposition, other disputes will break out against closure of public services and enterprises, against wage-cutting and sackings. All these disputes must be supported and encouraged and united under the slogan of Kennett has no mandate - he must call a new election

on the real agenda!

"The spectre of trade war haunts the major economic powers of the world. To pretend that there is a free-trade solution in this situation is Alice-in-Wonderland material. Rural Australia is already bleeding to death. The most efficient wool industry in the world can only fill increasing acres of warehouse space with surplus wool. Wheat growers with a minuscule domestic market, competing with subsidised US and European producers can't give their product away. Ostrich or seaweed farming cannot save the day.

"Kennett's declaration of class war is not "foolhardy". Hewson and Howard as well as Groom and Kennett all understood that the issue is to defeat the union movement and impose drastic cuts in wages and all benefits. If Kennett is successful, the resulting misery of Victoria workers will not win Keating the next Federal election. And even if it did, the ruling class intend to pursue their class-war perspective. That perspective can only be defeated by a class struggle perspective in the working class. Kennett must be defeated by the working class.

"But Kennett cannot be defeated by industrial action alone. Unless the working class brings forward a political alternative in the fight to bring down the Kennett government, even an indefinite general strike would be smashed and starved out, and Kennett/Hewson's ultimate victory assured. The industrial action is already underway. The need for a socialist political alliance to pose an alternative to ALP class collaboration and Liberal repression is urgent."

Due to a lack of space in this issue of 'Socialist Voice', we were unable to publish the second part of Audrey Smiths article 'The Loyal Opposition' on the direction the Labour Party is moving in. We hope to include it in the next issue of our paper.