

**INSIDE**

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**Workers  
power**

British section of the League for a Revolutionary Communist International

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**PUBLIC SECTOR IN THE FIRING LINE ...****Action can  
beat Tory  
attack!**

**TORY CHANCELLOR, Norman Lamont has made the Tories' post-election intentions abundantly clear. He has announced a "tight public spending round"—Tory code for massive cuts in spending on benefits, services and jobs in government services.**

Already the National Association of Citizens' Advice Bureaux has pointed out that under the existing rules restricting benefits for 16 and 17 year olds, ever more young people are coming to them who "do not even have enough to eat." Yet benefits are first in line for still further cuts.

In the NHS, "caring" Tory health minister, Virginia Bottomley, says that if the new market principles on which the health service is run show that any hospitals are "uneconomic" they should be closed. This is the reality behind opt-outs and trusts.

Like NHS workers, local and central government workers face creeping privatisation. They all face the "Competing for Quality" White Paper, which aims to force all functions out to tender. All obstacles to the cowboy outfits, such as wages' and conditions' guarantees, equal opportunities and union recognition have been removed. Various treasury spokespersons have indicated that they hope to see 90% of local and central government jobs, in-



cluding the hitherto relatively unscathed white collar sections, sold off through tendering.

By turning the government into

an administrator of contracts rather than provider of services, ministers hope, as the *Financial Times* recently put it, that voters:

"... may feel that shortcomings in health and education are the fault of individual hospitals and schools, rather than the health service or state education."

Of one thing we can be certain—there will be shortcomings!

National pay bargaining in the public sector is also a target for Tory attacks. Not only are British Rail and the civil service being offered pitifully low "increases" but the very concept of national rates of pay is under attack.

The Treasury has torn up its three year old "long term" pay agreement with the civil service unions and encouraged individual agencies and departments to introduce their own pay and grading structures. Hendon Borough Council has recently become the first to say that they will not be bound by nationally agreed pay rates.

To help win this latest offensive the Tories are lining up a new round of union bashing aimed primarily at the public sector. At the Institute of Directors' conference John Major promised postal strike ballots,

statutory seven day warning periods before strikes, openings for scab unions to poach members and the right of individual consumers to drag public sector unions through the courts for taking "illegal" industrial action.

By ensnaring the unions in legal shackles and encouraging union derecognition (only fifty of the 156 NHS Trusts have so far agreed to recognise the unions) the employers are hoping to coax other unions into becoming open scab organisations along the lines of the RCN and UDM.

As usual, the trade union and Labour leaders will take all of this lying down. They have made nice careers and comfortable lifestyles for themselves by opposing and heading off all resistance to the Tories since 1979. But workers cannot afford to lie down. Militant class struggle must greet each and every aspect of the new Tory offensive.

Against attempts to make unofficial action illegal we need to organise from the base up, in every factory, mine, office, school and hospital. We need militant organisation in every workplace aimed at winning support for strike action against job cuts, low pay and attacks on union organisation.

Within the unions, the Broad Lefts and left wing union caucuses we need to fight for the renewal of cross-union organisation, not from the standpoint of electing unaccountable "left wingers" to replace the right wing bureaucrats, but with the clear aim of co-ordinating action, and defying the anti-union laws.

A new cross-union movement of the militant minority must be built, to fight every attack, alongside the union leaders where possible but against them where necessary, unfraid to appeal for action over their heads to the workers they claim to represent.

Whether the immediate threat is job cuts, pay or privatisation, public sector workers need to link the issues and call on their leaders to launch an all out defence of public services. A fighting public sector alliance is long overdue. NUPE, NALGO and COHSE members must demand and, at a rank and file level, organise united action now, not a bureaucratic merger of their unions.

Above all, workers need a political party which represents the interests of our class as a whole. It must be a fighting party, a party that draws sustenance not from the parliamentary debating chamber but from the daily struggles of our class against the employers and their system.

It must be a revolutionary party, armed with a programme to link every fight with the need for the overthrow of this system and its replacement with a democratically planned economy based on production for need, not profit. ■

**B**EING PAID for sex is not a crime in this country. But soliciting on the streets, advertising in any public place or running a "sexual favours" business for the purposes of getting paid are all illegal.

These laws flow from a policy of suppression of prostitution which turns anyone who trades in sex into a criminal. At the same time millions of pounds are made legally through the trade of images of sex which permeate our culture.

It is prostitutes who work on the streets who are most affected by the laws. Once convicted of soliciting they can be arrested repeatedly and fined without further evidence being produced in court. The word of a single policeman is enough to convince the magistrate because the woman is down on record as a "common prostitute" and the case would rest on her word against that of a police officer.

### Prosecution

If prostitutes respond by working "indoors" they fall foul of the brothel-keeping legislation. This stipulates that if two or more women work as prostitutes on the same premises they are liable to prosecution. Male prostitutes tend to be charged with other offences such as loitering and indecency.

All of these laws are examples of the sanctimonious hypocrisy of the British state. It is not just occasional public figures like the Director of Public Prosecutions, Earl Spencer, and Frank Bough who pay for the services of prostitutes. Hundreds of thousands of men go to prostitutes. It is a hidden, but systematic, part of the organisation of sexual relations.

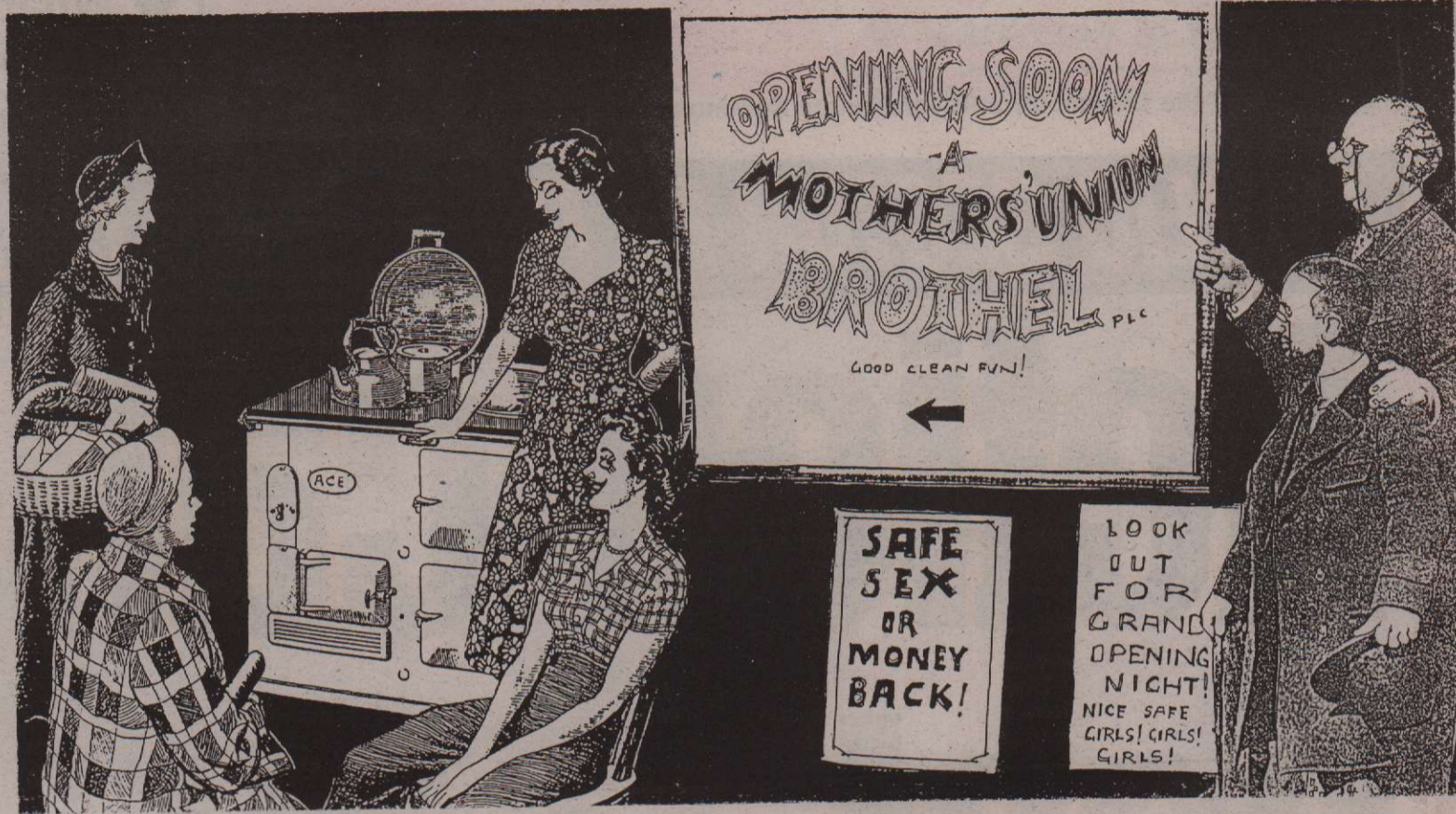
Under capitalism sexual relations are rigidly organised in relation to their role in reproduction. Sex is legitimate and fully acceptable only if it is heterosexual and in the context of a stable relationship, in particular one based on a common household and children—the nuclear family.

Even as divorce increases and pre-marital sex is more publicly tolerated, these basic rules dominate our culture.

Prostitution exists outside this sphere and is therefore stigmatised. But it is not an accidental development. It is a necessary part of class society, a type of semi-tolerated sexual outlet for men which is separate from the family structure. Commercial sex has been central to the development of the double sexual standard—monogamy for

Should the state run legal brothels? Thousands of women in the Mothers' Union are now discussing this issue. **Clare Heath** argues that prostitution should be decriminalised, not run by the state.

# State brothels?



women and polygamy for men. It's called the "oldest profession" precisely because it arose out of women's oppression in the ancient world.

But because this sector has only been tolerated, rather than thoroughly integrated into capitalism, it has remained largely outside of the control of the state. Prostitution, operating in semi-legality or illegality, tends to be organised in the same way, and often by the same people, as other such criminalised industries like drugs.

Corruption and abuse are common. The people that suffer most from this are the workers, the prostitutes, who may suffer extreme exploitation and abuse from within the sex industry but have no recourse to the law. The law operates as another form of abuse.

The proposal for state brothels therefore appears progressive. It suggests a recognition of the existence of prostitution and an attempt to bring it into a legal framework. Legal state brothels exist in Ger-

many, Greece and parts of the USA.

The calls for such brothels in Britain have arisen in response to the problem of HIV infection. As early as 1985 some politicians were suggesting that state brothels be organised as a way of reducing the spread of AIDS. Like the Mothers' Union today, they argued that the state could ensure that prostitutes were not infected with HIV, and that this would protect their clients and thereby the rest of the community from disease.

### Problems

This is the pragmatic approach frequently put forward by religious groups: prostitution is an evil, but by controlling it we can hope to make it less destructive.

State brothels would remove one problem from some prostitutes—that of the constant harassment from the law. But it would present them with a whole new range of problems. They would have to get

regular health checks. Not for their own benefit, but to prove they were clean in order to get a work permit. A sensible precaution? Not if you remember that no client would be forced to provide an "infection free" certificate before entering a brothel.

Women who were under age, drug users, illegal migrants and presumably also male prostitutes would be unable to register. They would continue to work in the illegal sector subject to even greater repression. They would find it almost impossible to get access to health checks and care. And the women would have to work according to the rules of the bosses of the brothels, which would in many cases be no better than the authority of people who control and exploit prostitution today.

Many women go into prostitution because of the lack of other opportunities for work, and because they cannot combine other jobs with the responsibilities of child-care. For many the flexibility of prostitu-

tion would be lost in state brothels. In Nevada women in the state brothels work extremely long hours and have no control over the clients they accept and the type of sex they provide, making them potentially more vulnerable to infection.

### Choice

Prostitution laws should be abolished and prostitution decriminalised. Prostitutes and clients should be encouraged to reduce their risk of catching disease through safer sex not through "AIDS-free certificates".

Prostitutes do not want to get infected. Given the choice, they will use condoms, have fewer clients and, for many at least, move into another job if the opportunity arises. Prostitutes need the opportunity to move into other jobs and enjoy good childcare provision. But those who choose to continue need to be allowed to work as prostitutes free from state interference. ■

# Poverty pay

APRIL 1992 was the first election Labour fought with a concrete minimum wage policy. Sooner or later the Labour and trade union leaders, searching for a scapegoat for election defeat, will try to ditch it.

Now, far from dropping the minimum wage demand, we have to make sure it is taken up by every trade union. Never mind the *Sun's* recurrent headline "Wot a lot you got". Poverty is a reality for millions. Nothing better demonstrates the need for a minimum wage than a recent Low Pay Unit report, *Poor Britain*.

The average income of the bottom 20% of households in Britain is £3,282. Over one in three workers in Britain earns below the recognised European Community "decency threshold".

And the last 13 years have seen the poor get poorer while the rich get richer. The average income of the top 20% of households has risen by £7,986 while that of the poorest 20% of households has actually fallen by £160.

*Labour's national minimum wage was one of its few concrete promises. The labour movement needs to take it up through direct action, writes Paul Morris.*

Women, black people and youth have suffered the most. Women's earnings are still only 70% of men's, and over six million working women earn less than the decency threshold. Under 18s earn only 37.4% of average earnings, 18 to 20 year olds 53% and 21 to 24 year olds only 72%.

Figures for racism in pay are difficult to find. But the Low Pay Unit's study draws on surveys in London and Leicester to show that black workers earn only 82% to 85% of white workers' wages.

One of the main ways the Tories have gone about fleecing the poor to line the pockets of the rich is through reducing employment protection law and the limits on low pay.

In 1983 they abolished the Fair

Wages Resolution, immediately cutting the pay of many different workers on government contracts. The 1986 Wages Act radically weakened the Wages Councils, which set the minimum wage for 2.5 million workers in recognised low paid jobs like hotels, catering and hairdressing. Half a million under-21s were removed from this protection.

As a result the number of full time workers falling below the EC thresh-

**Poor Britain:**  
Poverty, inequality and low pay  
in the nineties  
Low Pay Unit Pamphlet No56  
Price £10  
LPU, London EC1R 1UN  
Tel 071 713 7616

old has increased by a quarter, and the number of part time workers by 36%. Today 4.3 million part time workers work for poverty pay by EC standards.

The minimum wage advocated by Labour was a step forward, but would not have solved the problem of low pay. Their proposed minimum wage of £3.40 an hour was itself well below the £5.15 an hour demanded by the European Community.

Labour was constantly told that if the proposals went through then workers would lose their jobs. This was based on the idea that small businesses could not afford to pay higher wages and would go bust. In response workers being told their jobs are in danger should be able to fight for the right to inspect all the accounts of a firm. If it really can't survive without subjecting its employees to the torture of poverty then the state should take it over.

The key problem at the moment is that low paid workers are not collectively organised and fighting to force all employers to pay a minimum wage. That way arguments about undercutting and competition are shown to be a sham. And anyway millions of low paid workers are in big corporations—its not only corner shops that pay lousy rates. The fight for the minimum wage should

start with the unionisation of all workers in the low wage sector.

But many unions already organise millions of low paid workers. The public sector unions have never championed the fight of their low paid, female and young workers. They must be forced to take up the fight now.

The AEU and EETPU, right wing dominated skilled manual workers' unions now merged in AEEU, led the fight against the minimum wage in the trade union movement. They will be leading the fight to scrap it, based on what they see as the narrow interests of their skilled, higher paid workers. But there is nothing in the minimum wage that represents a threat to the interests of well paid workers.

The minimum wage would represent an increase in the general living standards of the working class which would benefit all trade unionists. The threat of cheap labour undermining established pay and conditions would be lessened.

Throughout the labour movement we have to renew the fight for a national minimum wage—not Labour's £3.40 but a minimum of £8 an hour, linked to inflation, the right to inspect the books of every firm and the nationalisation of those declaring redundancies. ■

# The real reasons for the LA uprising

THERE WAS nothing surprising about the explosion of rage across US cities. The acquittal of the police thugs was an outrage. It was testimony to the continued racism in US society and its courts, and to the oppression and deprivation that are the daily lot for millions of America's black population and urban poor.

Two decades after some of the questions of civil rights seemed to be settled, such as winning the vote in the South and the institution of equal opportunities measures, there are still glaring gaps between the living standards and quality of life for black and white in the US. And the divide is growing. For all the visions of black prosperity through individual success stories and programmes such as *The Cosby Show*, the reality is that only a small layer made it through to the ranks of the comfortable middle class.

In 1965, Los Angeles (LA) was the site of the most extensive previous rioting in the USA—the Watts riots. In the aftermath it seemed as if some improvement was in store for the black and poor population. The gains of the black movement meant some reforms, including the election of a black mayor, and an economic expansion in LA brought more jobs and social programmes for a while.

These temporary advances did not shield the black population from the harsh consequences of later economic crises, particularly the current recession. The economic attacks of Reagan and Bush have hit the inner cities and their black and Latino populations hard.

Jobs were slashed, wages depressed and cuts in welfare provision made an already dire situation worse. For millions in the cities there seems no way out of the decay and deprivation.

This is not a problem specific to the USA. Throughout its history, capitalism has excluded a section of the working class from regular employment and decent living conditions.

Capitalism's general inability to provide stable and full employment for the working class translates in

the US into a specific issue of race. Unemployment, poverty and the resultant criminalisation of sections of the working class have been concentrated in African-American and Latino communities. This reflects the racism of capitalism and the history of slavery and migration on which the North American whites have built their wealth.

Millions of blacks face a daily struggle against this poverty and marginalisation. They fight to improve their conditions, to retain their pride, to find a way forward.

But the deprivation together with the racism of police and courts, has meant the criminalisation of generations of black youth, as well as other minorities.

Gang warfare and an all pervasive drug industry, with its racketeering and violence, the lure of a criminal way out of poverty—these are the inevitable results.

The lack of an effective militant working class black leadership has never been more glaringly demonstrated than in the events following the Rodney King verdict.

The bankruptcy of the mainstream black politicians was revealed yet again. LA Mayor Tom Bradley reacted no differently from California's white Republican Governor, Pete Wilson. They both expressed disbelief at the acquittals—and sent in the state forces to put down the uprising. Having been one of the chosen few blacks to slip through into "respectable society" Bradley, like many other middle class blacks, will turn his back—and the state's guns—on the mass of the black population.

Black community representatives invited to a White House meeting with Bush could do little but plead for greater fairness in the courts. Asked whether he really had faith in the Bush administration to put things right, one churchman shrugged "He's the only President we've got".

The wily Jesse Jackson absented himself from Bush's crisis meeting and declared his solidarity with

## EDITORIAL

the oppressed. But Jackson's rhetoric offers no way forward either. He remains tied to the radical wing of bourgeois politics. Capitalism condemns millions of blacks to poverty, while condoning the presence of a handful in its state machine. Capitalism cannot afford any more than this. That is why it is an economic system in which racism is endemic.

Black workers and the black dispossessed need to break from the bourgeois politicians, black and white. A whole generation of them have been preaching the need to work in the existing structures. The result is that black voters get wheeled in to support one or other millionaire candidate—and get repaid with continuing oppression.

It is no wonder that many despairing black Americans have turned to the politics of the likes of Louis Farrakhan, who preaches (along with disgusting anti-Semitic propaganda) that black people should form their own businesses, take a pride in their communities, kick out the drug pushers.

But Farrakhan's politics also lead down a blind alley. Once again they tie black workers and the black poor to following a black middle class.

The US labour movement, like its British counterpart, has also failed to give a working class answer to racism and indeed to problems faced by all the unemployed. Its official leaders are wedded to the idea of ameliorating conditions within the existing profit system. They will not take up struggles which threaten that system and threaten their own comfortable existence.

And yet a working class answer is the one needed. It is needed not only because the Jesse Jacksons and Tom Bradleys betray, but because only the working class has the ability, the strength and the potential for organisation to overthrow the system that is the cause of racism and deprivation.

The revolutionary working class answer demands both an intransigent fight against racism in all its manifestations and a fight for the unity of all the oppressed and exploited in a struggle against their common enemy. ■

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## where we stand

WORKERS POWER is a revolutionary communist organisation. We base our programme and policies on the works of Marx, Engels, Lenin and Trotsky, on the documents of the first four congresses of the Third (Communist) International and on the Transitional Programme of the Fourth International.

Capitalism is an anarchic and crisis-ridden economic system based on production for profit. We are for the expropriation of the capitalist class and the abolition of capitalism. We are for its replacement by socialist production planned to satisfy human need.

Only the socialist revolution and the smashing of the capitalist state can achieve this goal. Only the working class, led by a revolutionary vanguard party and organised into workers' councils and workers' militia can lead such a revolution to victory and establish the dictatorship of the proletariat. There is no peaceful, parliamentary road to socialism.

The Labour Party is not a socialist party. It is a bourgeois workers' party—bourgeois in its politics and its practice, but based on the working class via the trade unions and supported by the mass of workers at the polls. We are for the building of a revolutionary tendency in the Labour Party, in order to win workers within those organisations away from reformism and to the revolutionary party.

In the trade unions we fight for a rank and file movement to oust the reformist bureaucrats, to demoralise the unions and win them to a revolutionary action programme based on a system of transitional demands which serve as a bridge between today's struggles and the socialist revolution. Central to this is the fight for workers' control of production.

We are for the building of fighting organisations of the working class—factory committees, industrial unions councils of action, and workers' defence organisations.

The first victorious working class revolution, the October 1917 Revolution in Russia, established a workers' state. But Stalin and the bureaucracy destroyed workers' democracy and set about the reactionary and utopian project of building "socialism in one country". In the USSR, and the other degenerate workers' states that were established from above, capitalism was destroyed but the bureaucracy excluded the working class from power, blocking the road to democratic planning and socialism. The corrupt, parasitic bureaucratic caste has led these states to crisis and destruction. We are for the smashing of bureaucratic tyranny through proletarian political revolution and the establishment of workers' democracy. We oppose the restoration of capitalism and recognise that only workers' revolution can

defend the post-capitalist property relations. In times of war we unconditionally defend workers' states against imperialism.

Internationally Stalinist Communist Parties have consistently betrayed the working class. Their strategy of alliances with the bourgeoisie (popular fronts) and their stages theory of revolution have inflicted terrible defeats on the working class world-wide. These parties are reformist and their influence in the workers' movement must be defeated.

We fight against the oppression that capitalist society inflicts on people because of their race, age, sex, or sexual orientation. We are for the liberation of women and for the building of a working class women's movement, not an "all class" autonomous movement. We are for the liberation of all of the oppressed. We fight racism and fascism. We oppose all immigration controls. We fight for labour movement support for black self-defence against racist and state attacks. We are for no platform for fascists and for driving them out of the unions.

We support the struggles of oppressed nationalities or countries against imperialism. We unconditionally support the Irish Republicans fighting to drive British troops out of Ireland. We politically oppose the nationalists (bourgeois and petit bourgeois) who lead the struggles of the oppressed nations. To their strategy we counterpose the strategy of permanent revolution, that is the leadership of the anti-imperialist struggle by the working class with a programme of socialist revolution and internationalism.

In conflicts between imperialist countries and semi-colonial countries, we are for the defeat of "our own" army and the victory of the country oppressed and exploited by imperialism. We are for the immediate and unconditional withdrawal of British troops from Ireland. We fight imperialist war not with pacifist pleas but with militant class struggle methods including the forcible disarmament of "our own" bosses.

Workers Power is the British Section of the League for a Revolutionary Communist International. The last revolutionary International (Fourth) collapsed in the years 1948-51.

The LRCI is pledged to fight the centrism of the degenerate fragments of the Fourth International and to reform a Leninist Trotskyist International and build a new world party of socialist revolution. We combine the struggle for a re-elaborated transitional programme with active involvement in the struggles of the working class—fighting for revolutionary leadership. If you are a class conscious fighter against capitalism, if you are an internationalist—join us!

## New publications from the LRCI

THE NEW edition of *Trotskyist International* features two key articles analysing the break up of the old USSR and the crisis facing the new rulers of Russia and the CIS states. In "Russia's fast track to ruin", Keith Harvey surveys the process of capitalist restoration and looks at the options facing Yeltsin and his imperialist backers, while Mike Evans explains how the Stalinist bureaucracy brought about their own destruction.

*Trotskyist International* No8 is appearing in a new format, including briefer surveys—for instance of the abortion struggle in Ireland as well as an explanation of the "Fuji-coup" from LRCI comrades in Latin America. The polemic section continues Trotskyist International's policy of polemic with others on the international left and in this issue we cover the debate between the LRCI and the Revolutionary Trotskyist Tendency (USA).

Other feature length articles include a survey of the rise of the far right in Europe—and how to fight it, a consideration of the issues raised by the struggle of indigenous peoples in Latin America and a look at the crisis in the making as the gap grows between the USA's global political reach and its economic decline.

The new format for *Trotskyist International*—which allows us to cover more political events and issues and to reflect the work of our different sections—means that LRCI docu-

ments will now be published in our new journal of record, *Trotskyist Bulletin*. Its English language edition will be available in May priced £1.50.

Both *Trotskyist Bulletin* and TI are available from:

Workers Power,  
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London WC1N 3XX

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**T**HE NEW Further Education (FE) Act means that FE colleges and some sixth form colleges will be taken out of Local Education Authority (LEA) control and be "incorporated". That is they will become corporations.

These corporations will have independent governing bodies, made up largely of business interests. They will be partially funded through national and regional Funding Councils. Colleges will be expected to produce increasing proportions of their income from "self-financing" courses.

This new "business ethic" will mean that hundreds of courses run because there is a real need in the community will be cut to ribbons. Courses such as English for refugees, part-time and evening courses to gain new skills and qualifications for working class people, clubs and courses for pensioners are all under threat. The new criteria will not be the needs of the community but profit, how much money a course will bring into a college.

For workers in the FE sector the stage is set for an employers' offensive on the lines of that experienced by the polytechnics two years ago. Then, quickly after incorporation, union organisation was attacked, conditions of service eroded and a longer working year imposed. FE employees can expect the same.

During the passage of the Act through Parliament Tory spokespersons made clear that one of the intentions of the new Act is to undermine national pay bargaining and the "Silver Book"—the national conditions of service agreement for college staff. In January college bosses met with Roger Ward, the Director of the Polytechnic Employer's Forum, to discuss a strategy for breaking union resistance.

Vesting Day, the day when the incorporated colleges move out of LEA control, is 1 April 1993. But staff and students in FE colleges are already under attack. Combined with the preparations for incorporation there are vicious cuts resulting from budget crises that are affecting virtually every authority and every college in the country.

Local Authorities, squeezed by the Tory cutbacks, have passed on the cuts to colleges. And the prospect of seeing the colleges go out of their control is adding to this pressure as LEAs try to force colleges to balance their books before next April.

In Birmingham, where the eight colleges are already all amongst the twenty most "efficient" in the coun-

## CORPORATE COLLEGES MEAN...

# Jobs slaughter!

try, the Labour council is piling on the pressure. Budget deficits run by the colleges are a direct result of years of underfunding—but the LEA just wants to make sure it gets the deficit paid off quickly.

Its first demands would have meant wholesale redundancies in the colleges and drastic cuts in provision. But after a well supported strike across all the colleges and a militant demonstration in the week before the general election, councillors indicated that the deficit repayments could be phased over several years. Other sources of cash have also mysteriously appeared as a result of this action, which will lessen the burden on the colleges.

Nevertheless, gung-ho managers and governors are still looking for cuts and the union has had to threaten further action in response to the issuing of redundancy notices at one college.

London colleges have been especially badly hit. They have been forced to raise fees, cram more students into overcrowded classrooms and many are now embarked on job-slashing programmes. In the Lambeth colleges, a 10% budget cutback is proposed after the 18% suffered last year.

Managements in the three Lambeth colleges have announced that over 100 jobs will have to go. This is only slightly less than the numbers

*The Tory strategy of introducing competition and "privatisation" into education takes a major step forward next April. Colleges in the Further Education sector are already seeing the effects of the market on students' education. Sue Thomas reports.*

chopped last year through early retirements and voluntary severance (VS). This year it will mean forced redundancies.

Newham Community College which is £1.2 million "overspent" this year (a figure that includes £700,000 as the "costs" of incorporation) is now looking for more compulsory redundancies on top of the 35 losses through retirement and VS that took effect this month.

City of Westminster College has had two-thirds of a million pounds docked from its budget by Westminster Council. The tactic employed by the management is to force downgradings through the subtle ploy of making all senior lecturers redundant—then inviting them to apply for their old jobs on lower grades!

The strategy offered by NATFHE's national leadership in the face of the attacks facing rank and file workers is roughly equivalent to rolling over and playing dead. Despite an instruction from last year's conference to vigorously campaign against the FE Bill, including a campaign of industrial

action, the NEC and the bureaucracy chose to lobby for small improvements.

This approach won nothing. The only major concession—to continue the funding of adult education through local authorities—was won through a campaign masterminded by the Women's Institute!

Union leaders and LEA officials alike were hoping that the return of a Labour government would save their bacon. This was always a faint hope given that Jack Straw was committed to incorporation. Now even the prospect of marginal increases in funding has gone. And those working in FE who are consoling themselves with the thought that life can be no worse under the new Funding Council than it was under LEA control will be quickly disabused.

If there is to be any chance of defending jobs, conditions and a decent quality of service to students a militant strategy of fightback must be developed. Already, Lambeth Colleges are planning strike action and Birmingham Liaison Committee, like oth-

ers around the country, is going to take further action to get redundancy notices withdrawn.

The danger is that the struggle against these redundancies will be squandered in a series of one and two day actions designed to "strengthen the hand" of the union negotiators. They will try and avoid compulsory redundancies by agreeing more VS packages.

Such a strategy will have the opposite effect. The Education Authorities will sit out the strikes and the militancy of the workforce will be dissipated. Militants must argue with a traditionally non-militant workforce that threats of redundancies must be met with all out action until the threats are withdrawn. Colleges in Liaison Committee areas (groups of colleges under a single LEA) and regionally must link up their action through rank and file organisation if the official union structures stand in the way of an effective fightback.

Students, their brothers and sisters who will be deprived of college places, parents, community organisations must all be drawn into these struggles. If teachers and students fail to roll back this set of attacks, then the way will be cleared for a massive cut back in the provision of further education for working class people. This must not happen. It need not happen if we organise and fight now!■

### ANOTHER FIVE TORY YEARS?

*How do we organise a fightback?*

#### Socialist Lecturers' Alliance National Meeting

Saturday 16 May, 11am start  
Room A220, LSE, Houghton St,  
London WC1

(nearest tubes: Holborn, Temple)

Ring 021-554 0056  
for further information

## NUT leaders dodge action

**W**HEN THE Easter Conference of the National Union of Teachers (NUT) assembled they had to face, not as many expected, a new Labour government, but the return of the Tories committed to continuing their offensive against education. If any teachers thought this might have put some resolve into the leadership of the NUT to get the union onto a war footing to resist these attacks they quickly realised their mistake.

The very first move of the leadership was to try to remove all discussion of action from the main agenda. When they were defeated on this they manoeuvred like hell to avoid any decisions that would commit the union to a fight, whether over the imposition of testing, the boycott of appraisal schemes or fighting redundancies.

Although the executive managed to defeat the proposals to ballot the membership on boycotting the government tests and to refuse co-operation with appraisal, the size of the opposition was considerable. Conference also voted for national action over job cuts, although under the ambiguous formula "as and when necessary". Already, NUT members in ten areas are demanding ballots for action against redundancies.

The militant mood reflected anger at the wave of attacks teachers face and frustration after a whole period of being told to "wait for Labour".

Union leaders and LEAs alike had been hoping for a Labour victory to get them off the hook, provide a respite from further rounds of budget cuts and a reversal of the opting out



BY AN NUT MEMBER

policy. Instead, schools now face the prospect of life under new Tory education minister John "hell-fire" Patten.

Current plans for spending cuts mean that 4,000 teachers jobs nationally are threatened and those of many more support staff. Local Management of Schools (LMS) with budgets that are inadequate to maintain equipment or even experienced staff is leading to a wave of cuts and threatened redundancies. Parent governors are now in the position of saying what to cut and who to fire, just what the Tories planned.

Reduced budgets and LMS are all aimed at creating the "two-tiered" system that the Tories want. They will force more and more schools to opt-out of the state system in return for the preferential budget that opted-out schools get.

Given the refusal of the executive to organise a fight, the left will need to step in and provide the leadership. This is urgent not only for those who attended conference, but for the thou-

sands of members within each and every school who see and feel the threat so much more clearly than the Executive do.

This means organising our members into a fighting force. Teachers have been demoralised not by a government imposed defeat, but because in the face of every attack, the National Executive has backed down.

NUT branches and local associations will have to continue to organise opposition to opting out, and to the use of appraisal to fix pay or earmark teachers for the sack. Most vital is action to defend every job through local and national strike action.

The Socialist Teacher's Alliance (STA) and the Campaign for a Democratic Fighting Union (CDFU) must pool their resources. Moves were made in this direction at conference. Both organisations need to concentrate on organising rank and file action. They must mobilise alongside parents, whose children's education is threatened, exposing the Tory determination to strengthen the class divide in education.■

## Birmingham bus strike

**WEST MIDLANDS** bus drivers celebrated the May Day holiday in fine style, bringing the buses to a halt in a one day strike over pay. The management "offer" put back the pay review date from April to October in return for a paltry £125.

West Midland Travel (WMT) employees are being asked to pay the price of deregulation.

WMT buses proudly announce that they are "owned by the workers". In fact, control lies with top management. The union has even been stopped from looking at the accounts!

Deregulation gave management the green light to go on the offensive and they have been chipping away at work practices ever since. The union was turfed out of its office at the HQ in Summer Row. Now the bosses want to force down real wages for the majority, while they have received wage rises of up to 40%, bringing some to £90,000 a year!

Meanwhile, workers at the rival bus firm Midland Red have been offered a 6% pay cut.

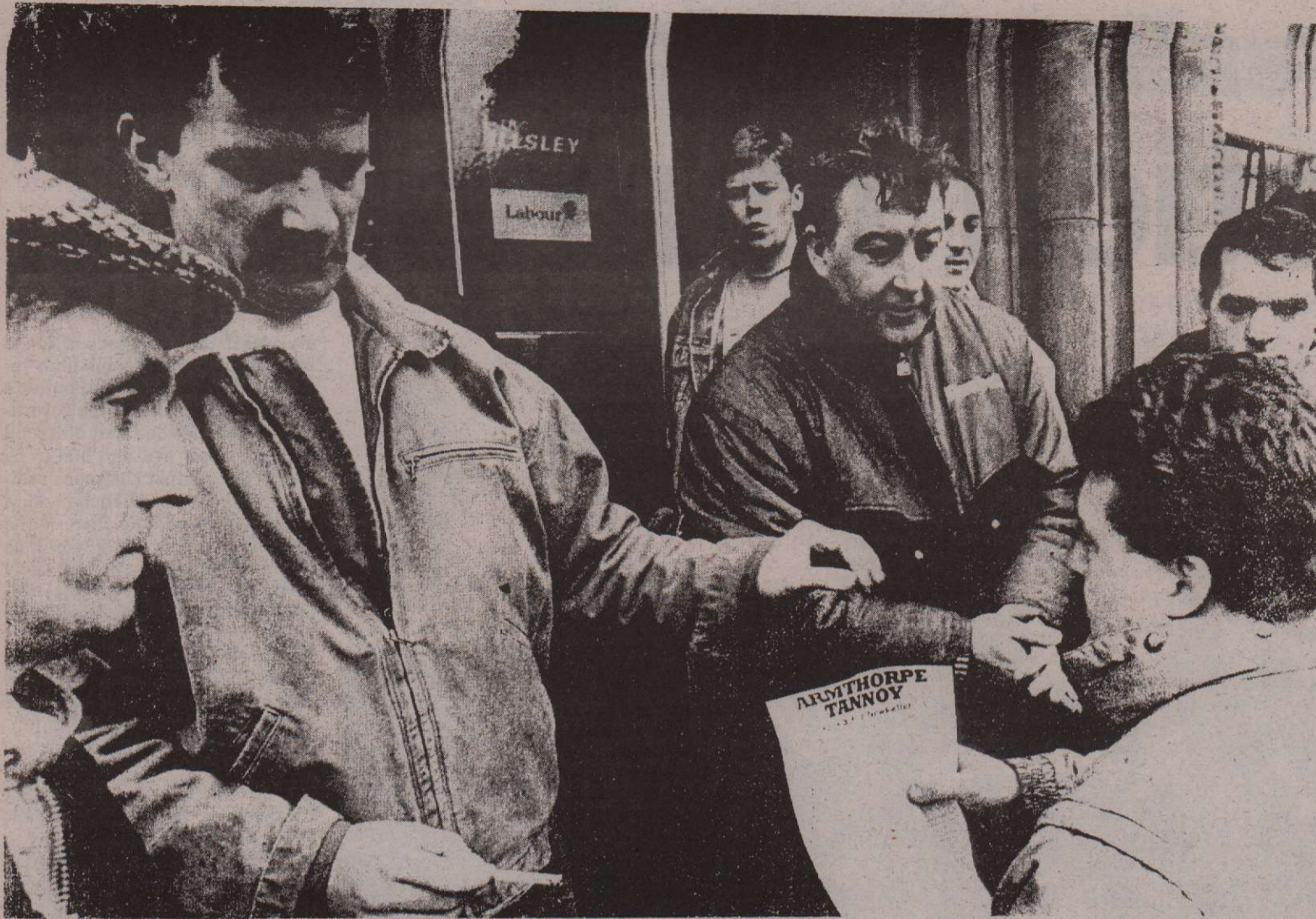
To fight back, WMT drivers will have to go further than the Saturday stoppages planned. Management could sit out a series of one day actions. Stopping on Saturday has weaknesses. Some drivers on the

picket lines told *Workers Power* that Saturday strikes were good because they hit the Chambers of Commerce rather than children trying to get to school and workers trying to earn a living. But the problem is that the really big employees—Rover, IMI, Cadbury—don't feel the pinch.

Another weakness on the first strike day was that some drivers worked. Considering that the vote for action was very close, the level of solidarity was high. Scab buses were few and far between in Birmingham. But the weaker garages must be shut down as well as some of the cowboy coach outfits that were running.

Workers are worried about sending out flying pickets, but these days it is impossible to take effective action if you stay within the law. WMT drivers have a chance to bring out Midland Red workers who have turfed out the wage cut they were offered.

The dispute must be taken out of the hands of the TGWU officials. Negotiator, John Partridge, was desperately "hoping for last minute talks" to avert the strike on 2 May. If bus workers are to get their pay increase now, then the cross garage shop-stewards' committee needs to make sure that it, not the bureaucrats, runs the dispute.■



Rank and file miners from Armthorpe campaigning for action

# Lessons of Armthorpe

**B** RITISH COAL chose May Day, the workers' day, to announce the closure of Markham Main pit, at Armthorpe near Doncaster. A typical piece of malice by a hard-nosed management.

This closure is yet another example of British Coal's (BC's) plans to decimate the industry in the run up to privatisation. But BC's decision on Armthorpe has a political significance beyond the issue of the economic calculations being made prior to privatisation.

Armthorpe was a test case for assessing what the NUM's response to privatisation would be. It was a deliberate attempt to ensure that a militant section of miners would not have jobs in the strategic Yorkshire coalfield when it is sold off to the profiteers.

Armthorpe was in dispute with BC when it announced the closure. Late last year the management decided to use private contractors to do development work on the pit. This was a deliberate provocation to the NUM branch, threatening the jobs of its own development workers. It was a clear warning by the bosses that privatisation was on the way.

## Ballot

A ballot of the workforce in February delivered a 71.8% majority in favour of action against the use of contractors. Immediately the bosses went to the high court and got a writ served against 14 members of the NUM branch committee. They were to be fined £10,000 a day if any action went ahead.

Trade unionists were legally barred from engaging in official action that had been balloted for. The men's names were posted on noticeboards and they were forbidden from saying anything to the private contractors' workforce to persuade them not to scab.

When a second ballot was called in March the majority for action

increased to 80.3%. Management abolished facility time for branch officials and declared that there would be no negotiations over the private contracting issue. All union offers of talks were turned down, bonus payments to miners were unilaterally abolished, disciplinary action was threatened against any miner taking action and a virtual lock out was declared.

Clearly management recognised that a lot was at stake. Armthorpe is one of the NUM's most militant branches. Its role in kick-starting the 1984-85 strike is legendary. Armthorpe village was the scene of one of the most brutal police invasions during the strike. And since then the pit has played a vital role in the Yorkshire region in holding the line against previous BC onslaughts. Management were out to break this tradition of militancy and demoralise miners across Yorkshire.

After a series of selective strikes, Armthorpe branch appealed to the Yorkshire NUM for backing. Under pressure the Executive called a ballot, but did little to win it. A special issue of the *Yorkshire Miner* was produced. It was an excellent appeal for solidarity with Armthorpe. But most miners didn't receive it until after the ballot was held on 15/16 April.

Despite this, for the first time since 1983 a ballot delivered a 50.7% majority for selective action to back the Armthorpe strikers. This result was largely won thanks to the efforts of rank and file Armthorpe miners. They produced a special issue of their rank and file bulletin, *The Armthorpe Tannoy*, and leafleted every pit, addressing meetings where possible.

As against this display of determination the Yorkshire Executive, headed by Frank Cave, Ken Homer, John Walsh and Ken Capstick, refused to act immediately on the ballot result. Instead they called for a period of two weeks of talks with management over the issue of

private contractors. They set a deadline for 5 May. No talks took place, and on 1 May the management, sensing the fear of the Executive, made their move. Closure was announced. Seven hundred and thirty jobs were to be slashed.

Faced with the threat of losing any significant redundancy pay (because of the action they had already taken), faced with the dithering and cowardice of the Yorkshire leadership and fearing isolation, the majority of the Armthorpe miners voted to call off their action over the private contractors, request talks with the bosses and ask for their case to go to the closure review.

## Merits

This procedure, which is supposed to consider the merits of each pit impartially and then decide whether or not to keep it open, invariably results in BC's plans being approved.

Management know that this is a victory for them. The Tories know it is a big plus in demobilising, in advance, any fight from the NUM against privatisation. The Armthorpe vote, which was overwhelming, came the day after Scargill had called for national strike action against the closure of the pit. Major will take comfort from the inability of the NUM's president to deliver action. Scargill himself is increasingly isolated on the Executive and can be outflanked by the union's regional barons.

This whole episode contains salutary lessons for every militant, in the NUM and beyond, facing the next round of the Tory offensive. The original votes for action at Armthorpe and the victory in the regional ballot stemmed from rank and file organisation. Militants were working together towards common aims. They were able to co-ordinate their efforts through an identifiable network. Militants in every workplace need to begin as-

sembling similar networks, even if they begin merely as caucuses of a few militants.

The management's recourse to the courts shows that in rebuilding rank and file organisation militants will need to take account of the law. The laws now in place debar trade unionists from openly going about their business.

Instead of bowing to the laws we need to defy them and mobilise to smash them. But to get to this point militants will, as their great-grandparents did in the nineteenth century, have to operate illegally and under cover. We must keep the management guessing as to who we are and what our plans are until we are ready to strike.

Last but not least we need to recognise that the rot within the union leadership is deep. Even lefts on the Yorkshire Executive panicked faced with the prospect of region-wide action.

We cannot ignore these leaders, but rank and file and workplace organisation must be built up as a means of challenging them and, where they bottle out, acting independently from them.

## Organisation

This means rank and file organisation has to extend beyond workplace level, and be linked up in regional and national caucuses. If nothing else, the Armthorpe dispute, and its tragic end, must teach militants these lessons.

But of course it won't if all that militants are told are lies, like those peddled by the *Morning Star*, that the 2 May Armthorpe mass meeting "voted to fight British Coal's planned closure of the pit".

It is down to revolutionary socialists to counter such lies and draw the attention of militants everywhere to the real lessons and the real tasks. And that is why above all else the period ahead demands the building of a genuine revolutionary socialist party. ■

## TUBE WORKERS SHUT DOWN LONDON!

BY G R McCOLL

AS WE go to press the Rail, Marine & Transport Workers' Union (RMT) is due to announce the result of a strike ballot of 12,500 members on London Underground Ltd (LUL). In the face of a fierce management assault on jobs, conditions and union organisation, the RMT executive had repeatedly delayed the vote, relying on the "wait for Labour" argument.

LUL's "company plan" would cost 5,000 jobs, including 900 drivers, out of a total workforce of 21,000. It will mean sweeping changes in grading structures, the virtual scrapping of demarcation and exhausting demands for flexibility. More cost-cutting can only threaten the health and safety of workers and passengers alike, creating the conditions for another King's Cross.

Managing director Dennis Tunnicliffe's proposals are no more than a revamped version of the infamous "slaves' charter" which provoked wildcat strikes in 1989. They come on top of a disciplinary crackdown across the network and petty harassment by managers in the depots.

Tube bosses are out to make workers pay the price for years of chronic underfunding and a huge deficit last year. If they succeed, the Tories plan to privatise the Tube. Transport minister, John MacGregor, wants to deregulate and hive off the whole of London buses by 1994, as well as the Docklands Light Railway.

The only adequate response from Tube workers is an all out, indefinite strike across the labour force. Anger at the "company plan" has seen record numbers at canteen and depot meetings.

The union leaderships have done their worst to keep Tube workers divided on sectional lines. The executive of ASLEF has adamantly refused to hold a ballot of its members. Some of its officials have urged members to scab on RMT picket lines. The TSSA, which represents booking office staff, has refused to enter the battle with management.

Jimmy Knapp's RMT has been far keener to defend its role in the bargaining machinery than to stem the slaughter of jobs. Management has spent a fortune selling the "company plan". But the RMT leadership has run a feeble campaign for a "yes" vote in the ballot. The union bureaucracy is certain to try and restrict action to one-day strikes, playing on many workers' fears of mortgage arrears.

As in 1989 management will be ready to sweat out limited action. But faced with an indefinite shut-down of the Tube, Tunnicliffe might have to beat a swift retreat.

The Tube Workers Action Group has been a focus for a core of militants who are prepared to spread the fight. A mass meeting of workers across all sections and unions is urgently needed. It must hammer out a strategy for victory and elect an accountable strike committee to break through sectional barriers and wrest control of the dispute from the union tops.

As ASLEF are not balloting, picketing will be essential. It should involve as many strikers as possible. Any negotiations with management should include elected depot delegates to stop any back room deal being done by union officials.

Resistance on the Tube should be linked to all out opposition to the piecemeal privatisation of British Rail and the axing of 40,000 jobs. Last summer's London Forest strike showed that many bus workers are ready to have a go. We must fight for joint action to shut down public transport in London and wreak havoc on the City's big business parasites. That is the only language the bosses understand. ■

With the capture of Kabul by the forces led by Ahmed Shah Massoud and the installation of an Interim Commission of the Mujahedin in power on 28 April the fourteen year long Afghan civil war came to an end. Another may follow, as Mike Evans explains

# Reaction triumphs

**T**HE HUMAN cost of the war in Afghanistan was enormous. One million died, five million fled the fighting across the borders into Pakistan or Iran, 300,000 have suffered permanent disablement, the rural and urban economy is in ruins, millions of land mines will continue to maim and kill long after the war is over.

Between 1978 and 1985 US military aid to the Afghan rebels cost \$280 million. But this itself was only a drop in the ocean of the total amount mobilised by the USA from its allies. The Saudis promised to match the USA dollar for dollar and are thought during the war to have spent \$1.5 billion!

For US imperialism the year 1978 was a decisive turning point. The Iranian Revolution saw the overthrow of the Shah, US imperialism's main gendarme in the strategically vital Gulf region. In Afghanistan, a coup brought the People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan (PDPA) to power, committed to a reform programme.

The USA and the CIA (wrongly) saw the loss of the Shah and the rise of Khomeini, as well as the PDPA regime in Kabul, as evidence of Soviet expansionism. They envisaged Soviet influence spreading down to the Indian Ocean, isolating their Pakistani and Saudi allies, undermining them with radical "anti-imperialist" Islamic fundamentalism and setting off a domino-effect in the whole region.

These events became the catalyst for the US ruling class abandoning the policy of *détente* which they had adopted to extricate themselves from the *débâcle* in Vietnam. They launched the Second Cold War. In this offensive Afghanistan was to be one of the three arenas for a "hot" proxy war with the Soviet Union, the others being Nicaragua/El Salvador and Kampuchea/Vietnam.

The Soviet military intervention



The face of reaction in Kabul

into Afghanistan in December 1979 provided the USA with all the pretext it needed. In reality of course Brezhnev was never interested in any sort of progressive revolution in Afghanistan let alone in absorbing Afghanistan into the Soviet Union. The Soviets had always distrusted talk by the PDPA of revolutionising the country. All the USSR required was a secure buffer state. The Kremlin installed their favourite "moderate" faction, led by Babrak Karmal, in the presidential palace. But the USA, and its Pakistani and Saudi allies, had their excuse.

A great hue and cry was set up about the Soviet "rape" of Afghanistan. Whilst the USA's other anti-communist crusades in Kampuchea and Nicaragua were never popular, Afghanistan fooled many left-

ists and liberals world-wide. In Britain organisations like the Socialist Workers Party (SWP) and papers like *Socialist Organiser* rushed to support the reactionary Mujahedin against "Soviet imperialism".

Their pretext was that the Afghan resistance was a national liberation struggle against this imperialism. This was a ridiculous claim which the whole course of the war has exploded. The war could only have been waged with the massive military aid of the USA and its puppets. Even then the Mujahedin probably spent more time and ammunition fighting one another than they did the "godless communists".

Their forces were not "soldiers of god", as they called themselves, let alone "freedom fighters" as they were dubbed by the CIA and their "leftist" dupes. They were little

more than gangs of bandits, swollen to gigantic proportions by US and Saudi dollars, bandits who are now fighting over the spoils.

The success of the Second Cold War and the crisis of the Stalinist leadership in the USSR forced the withdrawal of the Soviet Armed Forces in 1989. The Najibullah regime in Kabul could not survive the ending of all aid after Yeltsin's seizure of power in August 1991. From then on the Mujahedin forces, despite their disunity, were able to advance on the capital.

But their victory will not bring relief to the masses in Afghanistan. On the contrary, armed conflict between the warring factions and bitter repression, will be the results.

Ahmed Shah Massoud, the Tajik commander of the armed forces of Jama'at-i-Islami (the Islamic Soci-

ety) was in the strongest position to seize Kabul as the Najibullah regime collapsed. After Najibullah's arrest key elements of the government forces decided that Massoud was the lesser evil and had to be supported against the more radically fundamentalist Hizb-i Islami forces. Massoud, the "lion of the Panjshir", is now being touted as the moderate, the leader most likely to run Afghanistan as the imperialists and their Saudi and Pakistani allies wish.

Massoud's main rival is the "Islamic radical" Gulbuddin Hekmatyar, the Pashtun leader of Hizb-i Islami. He is a Muslim fundamentalist belonging to the reactionary Saudi Wahhabi sect and has strong links to the Muslim Brotherhood. He is also a virulent Pashtun "nationalist" unwilling to make any concessions to the ethnic minorities of central and northern Afghanistan. He was backed for a long time by the Saudis and by the Pakistani army secret service who virtually commanded his guerilla forces.

Nevertheless the Hizb-i Islami has a modern party structure, is not so tied to the big landowners and the mullahs and has drawn its members and fighters from the urban and rural poor and the sections of the intelligentsia. It talks of the need for an Islamic revolution. Hizb-i Islami also has a reputation for destroying not only the "godless communists" but all other political forces in the regions it controls.

In the struggle for Kabul it appears that Hekmatyar overplayed his hand and was badly mauled by the "lion of the Panjshir". At present, the regime of the new ruling council, a coalition of leaders, is trying to drive all the remaining armed supporters of Hekmatyar out of the capital. But it is unlikely to succeed for long.

The ruling council is weak and divided, and the situation of the masses in both town and countryside is desperate. Hekmatyar could come to appear as the champion of the Pashtun "majority" (40% of the population), used to ruling Afghanistan but now faced with losing this absolute dominance. Massoud, as a Farsi (Persian) speaking Tajik (25-30% of the population) will head a creaky coalition of the minority peoples plus the Pashtun rivals to Hekmatyar.

Hekmatyar has been unceremoniously dumped by his Saudi and Pakistani godfathers. But if he wants to continue to challenge for power, to carry out the "Islamic Revolution" then he has to go into armed opposition. If the latter is the case, the downfall of Najibullah could be but a short breathing space in a continuing civil war.

But even without continuing war or Islamic revolution, the prospects for the Afghan masses are bleak. Not only has the country been devastated by the war but all the forces making up the new regime aim to overturn any remaining progressive measures taken by the PDPA government. They will punish the civil servants, teachers and workers who supported and tried to implement, the spread of education, literacy, land reform and basic civil rights for women. They will plunge Afghanistan into a new dark age. ■

## Blood on their hands

**T**HERE IS much wringing of hands from the SWP under the headline, "Why there is no end to the bloodshed", and from *Socialist Organiser*—"Tragedy in Kabul". Knowing the likely consequences of the recent events they would certainly be hard pressed to welcome the "victory" of the Mujahedin forces.

Yet their previous positions should lead them to hail this victory. They wrongly saw "Soviet imperialism" as the greatest enemy of the Afghan masses. The reactionary politics of the guerillas, in the words of *Socialist Worker*, "shouldn't lead socialists to see Russia's defeat as anything but a boost for our side". The SWP called the USSR withdrawal in 1989 "a welcome blow against imperialism".

Despite warning of the reactionary nature of the government that would follow the eventual fall of Kabul, *Socialist Worker* and *Socialist Organiser* sided with the reactionaries. Workers Power advanced an alternative strategy. Our reaction to the Soviet intervention and the Second Cold War was neither to join the pro-imperialist hue and cry over "Soviet imperialism" nor to for-

get the anti-working class goals of Stalinism.

We decided at once that in the Afghan civil war we stood on the side of the progressive forces despite the fact that they were led by the counter-revolutionary Stalinist PDPA and despite the Soviet intervention, which in itself weakened those forces. We had no illusions that under such disastrous leadership the Afghan workers and peasants could well suffer a terrible defeat. Stalinism is the gravedigger of revolutions within the ranks of the anti-imperialist and progressive masses. Unlike the International Communist League (Spartacists) we did not "hail the Red Army".

However, we did not call for its immediate withdrawal because we recognised that the intervention and the crimes of the PDPA leaders prior to it had left the workers, intellectuals and women of Kabul and the major cities almost defenceless against the CIA backed bandits. But we recognised that under this leadership the masses could not win. Alas we have been proved all too correct.

For *Socialist Worker* "the cycle of misery will not be broken until

genuine socialist revolutions in more advanced countries provide the resources to overcome its economic backwardness". Jack Cleary of *Socialist Organiser*, referring to the middle class progressives of Afghanistan, argues;

"There is the tragedy of a class which took power in conditions where it could not realise its programme because of the backwardness of the society in which it lived."

It is perfectly true that those class forces and the PDPA regime could not carry through such a programme. But are revolutionaries thus to abandon large sections of the world to their fate of backwardness, effectively taking a "Menshevik" position of denying the possibility of successful workers' revolution? No. The defeat was not inevitable.

However tiny the Afghan proletariat was, it had an alternative to the choice of Stalinism or banditry. Through giving a lead to other progressive forces and through mobilising the rural poor in a fight for land reform the Afghan proletariat could have rallied large sections of society to its side against the mullahs, landowners and khans. It

could have begun to take the road of workers' revolution.

There are massive proletariats in Pakistan, India and other surrounding nations, not least in the disintegrating Soviet Union itself. It is to these forces that Afghan workers had a right to look. The Afghan proletariat could have advanced towards its goals through a common struggle with the workers of these lands. This was not a utopia. The workers in Iran had just played a key role in the revolution and developed from scratch their own workers' councils.

Last but not least the Afghan workers should have been able to look to support and solidarity from socialists in western imperialist countries. Instead, from the likes of *Socialist Worker* and *Socialist Organiser*, they got the opposite!

Those who hailed the "freedom fighters" have got blood on their hands and no serious working class militant should let them forget it. When the pressure of the media's Cold War hysteria was on they ran for cover. Such people are no use to the progressive classes of Afghanistan. They are no good either to the workers of Britain. ■

# Lessons of Spain

AT A TIME when the innumerable crimes of Stalinism are receiving ever greater publicity and critical attention on the international left, the editorial board of *Revolutionary History* have published an extremely useful collection of writings on the Spanish Civil War from an unambiguously anti-Stalinist perspective.

Liberal bourgeois histories and Stalinist orthodoxy have remained unchallenged for too long on the subject of how the greatest revolutionary struggle in Europe since 1917 fell to defeat. This book redresses the balance, complementing Leon Trotsky's writings on the Spanish Revolution and Felix Morrow's indispensable *Revolution and Counter Revolution in Spain*, not only in answering the lies of the Stalinists, but in enabling vital lessons to be drawn from the defeat of the Spanish workers. These are lessons that can arm the working class with the politics needed to win the struggles of the future.

Stalinist analyses of the tragedy range from simple explanations of military defeat, through cowardly attempts to deny that the objective situation had matured sufficiently for social revolution to triumph, to the slanderous allegations that Trotskyist and anarchist forces organised counter-revolution in the rear. In fact the principal cause for the Spanish workers' defeat lay with the Stalinist policy of the anti-fascist peoples' front.

## Revolt

Franco's revolt of 19 July 1936 was occasioned by the failure of the Spanish Popular Front government to contain and dissipate working class militancy following its electoral victory earlier that year. In response to the reactionary military and clerical fascist insurrection, the workers seized the factories and mines, instituting forms of direct workers' control, whilst the impoverished peasantry seized the land.

Workers' militias were established to conduct the defence of the revolution, and were organised on an initially highly democratic and independent basis. In Barcelona nothing moved without the authority of the anarchist CNT trade union federation. Yet as a result of the conscious policy of the socialists and the Stalinists, and of the failure of the anarchists to understand the need for proletarian dictatorship, the bourgeoisie remained in power through the republican government.

## Strategic

The Communist Party and its Catalan organisation (PSUC) held strictly to Stalin's policy of the Popular front: that a strategic alliance was necessary with the "democratic" bourgeoisie to secure the defence of "democracy". Stalin and his followers sought to demonstrate to the bourgeoisie that it had less to fear from the Republic than from Franco's fascist army.

In alliance with the right wing of the Socialist Party and the Catalan nationalists the Stalinists assisted in the reorganisation of the economic power of the capitalists and reasserted the primacy of the bourgeois government over the workers' and revolutionary organisations. They undermined the independence and revolutionary democracy of the militias replacing them with a bourgeois-style standing army.

The popular front refused to le-

Richard Brenner  
reviews  
*The Spanish Civil War: the view  
from the left*  
Revolutionary History Vol4 No.1/2  
Socialist Platform 1992

gitimise the land seizures, thereby demoralising the peasantry and weakening their support for the defence of democracy. It handed Franco a big advantage by avoiding any challenge to Spanish colonial policy. Had it espoused a clear anti-imperialist policy it could have weakened the morale and loyalty of Franco's Moorish soldiers at a stroke.

Under the slogan "First win the war!", the Stalinists crushed the revolutionary workers, broke workers' control and land occupations through brute military force, assassinated and imprisoned leaders of dissident socialist organisations. The Stalinists, in alliance with the right wing socialist Negrin in the misnamed "Government of Victory", assured ignominious defeat through these policies.

## Warned

The Fourth Internationalists alone pointed the way to victory and warned against the strategies that would lead into the abyss. Documents by Trotskyists, Jean Rous and Mieczyslaw Bortenstein, provide ample evidence of the treachery of the Stalinists, the political cowardice and vacillation of the CNT and the leaders of the centrist POUM (Workers Party of Marxist Unification) alongside the heroism of the revolutionary workers and peasants. They also reveal the superiority of the Trotskyist analysis and programme, that provided by supporters of the line of the Fourth International (FI).

This analysis can be compared to a number of alternative non-Stalinist viewpoints which are also assembled in this collection. These include Nicola di Bartolomeo, who had broken with the official Spanish section of the FI, and supporters of the POUM.

The book opens with a piece by Andy Durgan on the history of the Spanish Trotskyists prior to the war and their role in the founding of the POUM in alliance with the Workers' and Peasants' Bloc of Joaquim Maurin. Yet Durgan is ultimately soft on the decision of the Trotskyist Communist Left (ICE) to join with Maurin in the POUM, and he defends the ICE from Trotsky's criticism. Whilst he in no way supports the POUM's decision to sign the Popular Front programme and to enter the Catalan bourgeois government in October 1936, he defends Maurin against Trotsky's critique of his theory of the "socialist democratic revolution".

## Betrayal

Trotsky argued that Maurin's theory would pave the way for a social democratic betrayal. The experience of 1917 had revealed that the socialist revolution could not be carried out within the framework of democracy. Durgan argues that although the slogan "socialist democratic" is "hardly edifying", Maurin's theory was not responsible for the POUM's accommodation to the Popular Front.

What this ignores is that Maurin's formulation failed to break completely from the Stalinist/Menshevik stages theory. It was sufficiently ambiguous to enable the POUM leadership to adopt their fatally opportunist course.

This book should be read by anyone interested in re-arming the working class with the politics that can beat fascism and assure the victory of social revolution. With good reason Jean Rous concluded his work with the following words of Trotsky:

"The Spanish proletariat gave proof of extraordinary capacity for initiative and revolutionary heroism. The revolution was brought to ruin by petty, despicable and utterly corrupted leaders. The downfall of Barcelona signifies above all the downfall of the Second and Third Internationals, as well as of anarchism, rotten to its core. Forward to a new road, workers! Forward to the road of the international socialist revolution." ■

## THE SPANISH CIVIL WAR THE VIEW FROM THE LEFT



REVOLUTIONARY HISTORY, VOLUME 4, NOS 1/2

# East End fighter

Many myths have developed about the experience of the workers' movement in the East End of the 1930s. Here, A Stuart reviews *Out of the Ghetto* by Joe Jacobs (Phoenix Press), which sets the record straight.

THIS BOOK is a real tonic. Joe Jacobs' description of his life and political activity in the East End of London is refreshingly straightforward and written in a way that makes you feel you are listening to Joe.

Every working class activist reading this book can only be grateful that Joe kept such an excellent diary and documents to allow him to write such an unforgettable analysis and description of the 1930s.

It is also to his credit that he felt the need to write it in order to set the record straight and blow the gaff on Stalinist apologists like Piratin. His blow by blow accounts of events like Cable Street and then his expulsion from the Communist Party (CP) leave the reader in no doubt as to the bankruptcy of the CP's politics.

## Description

The book starts with a fascinating description of the life and conditions of Joe's East End—mainly Whitechapel, Aldgate and Bethnal Green. He portrays a poverty stricken, run down area which many modern day inner city dwellers can easily identify with. His description of police harassment of working class youth, the unemployed and strikers shows that there was no golden age of the "good old British bobby" beloved of the newsreels.

But he also shows the vibrancy of the area and its sense of community—things lost in the post-war years. The importance of the Jewish clubs and trade union halls for the majority of the people starts to provide an explanation for their solid anti-fascism in the mid-1930s.

It was through the activities of the London Jewish Bakers' Union that Joe was first made aware of the class struggle. He gradually gravitated towards the meetings of the Young Communist League (YCL) and the CP. Both organisations were very active in the area in the unions and on the streets. Joe was soon handing out their leaflets and eventually joined.

One of the many delights of the book is Joe's reminiscences of those comrades who were important to his political development. The contrast between the dedication of comrades like Nat Cohen (tortured in Latin America) and the party hacks who came to meetings to hand down "the line" is easy to see.

As the book develops we hear of Spain, the show trials of the Soviet Union, Joe's developing relationship with his future wife, Pearl, but above all of the fight against Mosley and his fascists. Against the background of these events we see Joe's gradual awareness that all is not right with the leadership of the British CP and he even starts to wonder about the Soviet Union itself.

However, like many before and since, Joe cannot believe that the

Party itself and Stalin in particular, could be wrong and so all doubts are shrugged off. After all there are things to be done!

The mid-1930s were an absolute maelstrom of activity for CP members. They were active in trade union disputes, international solidarity work, selling a daily paper and attending a constant round of meetings, both open and closed. Eventually, Mosley's activities became the main focus for Joe and his comrades in the Stepney branch.

He was increasingly worried by the apparent complacency shown by some of the "trade union faction" in the party, whom he came to regard as little more than resolution mongers who failed to carry out real revolutionary work. What they meant by work in the unions was in reality adapting to the trade union bureaucracy in order to win influence in the union machines.

Jacobs explains the feeling amongst the majority of the East Enders that something must be done to oppose the fascist attempts to break into new areas. This is an illuminating chapter, dealing with the famous Battle of Cable Street, and showing that far from the CP being the vanguard of this activity they were actually organising a rally in Trafalgar Square at the same time as Mosley's planned march.

Rank and file CP activists, including Joe, urged mobilisation against the fascists. It was only after the leadership realised that their credibility would be destroyed if they failed to mobilise that the line was changed.

## Bitter

Soon after this the row between the "street activists" and the "Trade Union faction" got increasingly bitter and once again we see the hacks attempting to stop any militant anti-fascist activity. Despite Joe's adherence to "the line" he was gradually manoeuvred against, then suspended and finally expelled for failing to carry out the line. The role played in these bureaucratic shenanigans by people such as Piratin is worth noting—especially by all people who have read *Our Flag Stays Red*, his account of the East End at the time.

Joe eventually rejoined the CP only to be expelled again (this time for doing "too much" trade union work) and he never again applied for re-admittance. It is obvious that over the years he realised a great number of things and yet he tried not to gloat or preach, but to encourage fresh thinking.

This book deserves to be read by all who claim to be revolutionaries today. Once again the arguments about how to fight fascism are coming to the fore. It is to be hoped that despite his many failings at the time, Joe's attitude of vigorous physical activity against them is the model that is followed. ■

# Steering right

**N**EIL KINNOCK, so the quality bosses' press told us, was dignified in defeat. No he wasn't. He was impudent and insulting.

Impudent in citing the words of Joe Hill as his own testament, "don't mourn, organise". Joe Hill was a militant organiser for the Industrial Workers of the World in the USA earlier this century. He repeatedly broke the law in order to defend working class rights and interests. He was framed and judicially murdered because of his loyalty to the working class cause. His words from the death cell were a plea for workers across the USA to launch themselves into direct action against the bosses.

How dare Kinnock, who denounced the miners and the Poll Tax non-payers amongst countless others who actually fought the Tories, who called on workers to shun direct action like the plague, who took the Labour Party further than it has ever been from even its paper commitment to socialism, steal the words of Joe Hill.

Kinnock added insult to impudence when he addressed the new Parliamentary Labour Party. He told them: "This afternoon the battle is to fight the Tories. Everything we do must be singlemindedly and solely dedicated to the election of a Labour government."

## Farewell

Believe it or not this farewell speech is identical to the one he made when he won the leadership of the party in 1983. He told the party conference that the fight was on to get a Labour government and nothing must deflect the Labour Party from task. His "single minded and sole" message to the working class was to put aside the task of fighting the Tories to defend jobs, wages, rights, the NHS, local services, to get rid of the Poll Tax, and "wait for Labour".

To repeat this message, nine years and two election defeats on, to repeat it in the face of a Tory government set on destroying the NHS and state education, privatising the mines and railways and implementing yet more anti-trade union laws, is an insult.

It is an insult to every worker who bought the lie that they should wait for Labour, to every worker who has lost their job as a result, to every worker whose hospital has, or soon will, opt out, to every Poll Tax non-payer who is, or has been, imprisoned.

Kinnock has bequeathed to his successor a Labour Party that has to a considerable extent been purged of its left wing. In his quest for electoral respectability Kinnock consolidated a regime of intolerance and bureaucracy. Oppose him and your constituency or ward would be closed down. Choose a candidate for an election he didn't like and a stooge would be imposed in their place. Support a policy out of line with the new Labour programme of caring conservatism and you would be sidelined at best, denounced at worst.

While all of this produced the desired results inside the party there was no pay off when the election came. Labour lost yet again, with a share of the total vote below even its 1979 level. This should have prompted a fundamental rethink within the Labour Party. It hasn't. The issues at stake in the current leadership

election revolve around how much further and how much faster Labour should move to the right and disengage itself from its working class base.

In the contests between Smith and Gould, Beckett and Prescott for deputy leadership traditional left or right designations have become meaningless.

Smith, a traditional right winger, is being partnered by Margaret Beckett, once a Bennite. Gould, long a champion of fashioning a "new model Labour Party" through witch-hunts and the destruction of active, participatory democracy at a base level, is being backed by *Tribune*, amongst others on the old left. Livingstone announced that he would consider voting for Gould now that he was not in the race.

The differences between Smith and Gould are important for the future of the Labour Party. But they are essentially differences of which right wing path to take. Smith has promised to continue Kinnock's work in ushering in the "modernisation of party structures." Modernisation is the code word for dealing with the thorny problem of Labour's trade union link. Here Smith is to the left (!) of Gould. In his manifesto he stated categorically:

"Labour, must not, and will not, sever its links with the trade union movement."

As a seasoned right winger Smith knows the value of the trade union link, both as a source of money for the party—no small matter given that it is £2.5 million in debt—and as an ally in controlling rank and file unrest in the event of Labour getting into power. The unions also provide organisational help and distribute pro-Labour propaganda amongst millions of union members. But like Kinnock Smith recognises the danger of Labour being seen simply as the party of the trade unions.

He wants to renegotiate the link with the unions, maintaining their presence but reducing their influence. This he proposes to do through the introduction of One Member, One Vote (OMOV) for all internal Labour Party matters and the selection of MPs.

Like Gould, Smith wants to

**The issues at stake in the current leadership election revolve around how much further and how much faster Labour should move to the right and disengage itself from its working class base.**

abolish the electoral college, depriving the unions of any say in the election of Labour leaders. Alongside this he will negotiate a reduction of the block vote within the party. But he will do this with the approval of the key union leaders, not least John Edmonds of the GMB, Smith's principal ally in the union bureaucracy. As Smith explained:

"I welcome the recognition among leaders of the trade union movement that the extent to

which the block vote determines decision making at conference requires reform."

Reform means reduction, probably to 50%. Smith believes that this will be sufficient to eliminate the union bogey, while retaining the benefits of the union link.

Smith's claims to be setting the agenda for a "radical response" to Labour's position, "for which there is no precedent". But his desire for a policy in which, "economic efficiency and social justice are inseparably linked and mutually supportive" could have come straight out of one of Kinnock's many forewords to the many policy review documents.

Smith poses no new answers or ideas for Labour, merely a deepening of the Kinnockite approach. He is offering a programme of sound economic management, firmly within a European framework, laced with minor redistributive reforms in the sphere of taxation and now, according to his manifesto, combined with a radical reshaping of the constitution.

A Smith leadership would signify a Labour Party in transition towards, rather than fully transformed into an openly bourgeois party. The transition would be one moving the party away from the unions and further away from the traditional values of Labourism—industrial interventionism, welfarism, special protection for the unions—but stopping short of a merger with the Liberals and the construction of a US Democrat style "friend of labour" purely capitalist party.

## Strategy

If this halfway house strategy fails in 1996 or 1997 then Smith will go, and it won't only be because of his heart trouble. A fifth election defeat would almost certainly convince a swathe of the party to break ranks and go for a complete break with the existing institutions of the Labour Party. One unnamed MP from the ranks of Labour's "younger, brighter politicians", as the *Economist* calls them, told the magazine that "we are not going to spend the rest of our lives in some hopeless enterprise".

This is where Gould comes in. He is a classic "young, bright politician" full of "radical" ideas about how to transform the Labour Party.

He has set a date for the reduction of the block vote in conference—down to 50% in three years—and has promised the immediate introduction of OMOV.

Like Smith he will not declare in favour of a pact with the Liberals. Both men know this would be suicide for an opposition party under Britain's current electoral system since it would mean conceding defeat in advance, a sure fire way of driving voters away. The same applies to proportional representa-



Spot the Labour leader

# Labour Crisis

*Kinnock's election catastrophe has done nothing to drift. Quite the reverse. The aftermath of the defeat that the lessons of decades of decline are to be ignored. class base, with further policy changes making Democrats, will be the outcome of the election*

Mark Harris

tion. While both Smith and Gould have said that they are open to a discussion of the Plant Commission's report on proportional representation, neither have come out firmly in favour of it.

What this means is that an explicit pact with the Liberals is not on the immediate agenda. But while Smith has talked in terms of building an anti-Tory consensus Gould has offered a more positive approach to working with the Liberals. He has hinted at a deal with their Scottish wing and declared that:

"If the Liberals will play ball with us, we'll play ball with them."

Most importantly, however, Gould's call for a "more radical and positive agenda" centres on the vestiges of Labourism in Smith's mildly redistributive tax package. This, according to Gould, is what cost Labour the election. He stated:

"It was not so much that our tax plans appeared to hit the pockets of the taxpayer in the South, but it did represent a cap on their aspirations. We have to tap into a con-

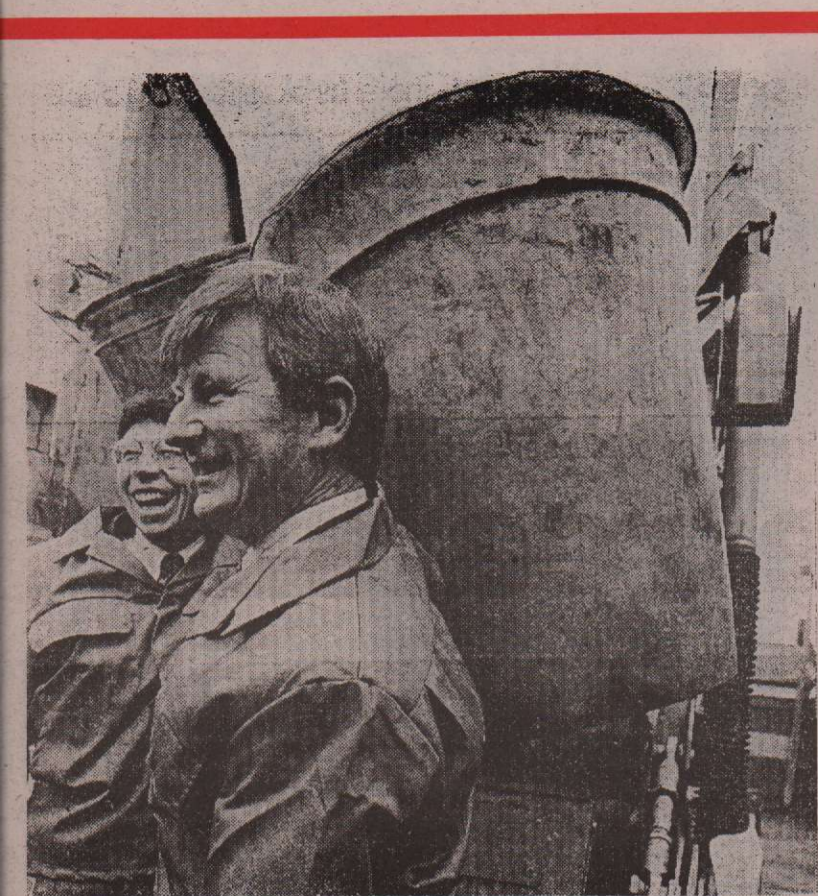
stituency that sees itself as moving forward."

Gould's radicalism is directed against traditional Labourism's redistributive values, however watered down they had become, and towards creating a new constituency for Labour amongst the middle classes. His aim is to present Labour as the party of prosperity far more than as the party of social justice, with wealth creation as a precondition for any wealth redistribution. Amazingly he is to the right of John Smith on this issue.

As leader he would conduct the party's transition away from the unions and the working class far faster than Smith, with the objective of transforming Labour, in the short term, either into a European style social democracy or into a US style Democratic party. But of course he won't win the leadership race. Smith will and Gould's plans will have to wait. But as a potential deputy for Smith he will achieve two things.

First he will ensure that Smith is under pressure to press ahead with





Gould unveils his plans for the Labour-union link

# our's sis

divert the Labour Party from its inexorable rightward  
including the current leadership election, suggests  
A radical shift of the party away from its working  
Labour even less distinguishable from the Liberal  
post mortem, whoever wins the leadership contest.  
explains why.

the renegotiation of the union link and changes to Labour's economic strategy. Secondly he will put himself in a commanding position to take over should Smith fail at the next election.

As for the other contenders, Beckett is Smith's chosen running mate, while John Prescott speaks for the shrinking rump of centre left traditionalists in the party who favour maintaining the union link and combining it with a more vibrant party organisation.

The left, represented by the Socialist Campaign Group of MPs and the Livingstone/Grant ticket, have been debarred from standing in the elections by the undemocratic rule requiring nominations from 55 MPs.

In its official post mortem of the election defeat Labour declared:

"There is no disguising the fact that the 1992 election result must rank as one of the most disappointing in the history of the party."

Yet it will not allow any section of the party members to discuss this disappointment. On 18 July a

special Labour Party conference will elect a new leader. The National Executive Committee voted 18 to two against a proposal from Dennis Skinner to have a debate prior to the vote. Kinnock declared that he did not want a "babbling rabble" at the conference, and both the Smith and Gould camps agreed with him.

The leadership stitch-up will place Smith in charge, and while there are hopes in the Gould camp that he can be pushed towards their "radical" agenda of transforming the Labour Party, his main aim will be to hold the factions together, consolidate Kinnock's right wing reforms and pursue a strategy of "one more heave" to achieve an electoral victory.

Not to put too fine a point on it, the leadership election, whatever its result, will deepen Labour's historic crisis and will deepen the crisis of bourgeois politics within the working class. Workers can expect nothing positive from the leadership battle and the policies that Labour is planning to embrace.■

**W**HILE THE would-be leaders of the Labour Party ponder their prospects of steering Labour to victory in 1996 or 1997 the party's ever shrinking active membership is in a spin. It's one that Walworth Road's infamous spin doctors have no cure for.

Quite rightly there have been protests from many sections of the party at the haste with which the battle for succession was launched. No discussion of the issues, no analysis of the causes of the defeat, Neil Kinnock to Europe and a new face at the despatch box by July. This is the leadership's recipe for dealing with the crisis of Labour.

The rulings and counter-rulings that were made by Joyce Gould and Larry Whitty added an element of farce to the succession battle. They also enraged many of the party members who had spent weeks campaigning for Labour and were now being confronted by a stitch-up concocted by the party machine and a handful of trade union general secretaries.

It is good that party members have turned on the party machine. It had given them a presidential style campaign, a media obsessed Labour leadership and a red rose that wilted every time there was an election. But if the rage of party members translates itself into supporting Gould as a left alternative to Smith and as a man who will put the union leaders in their place then they will play into the hands of those who want to end Labour's links with the unions. Ironically, they will play into the hands of Bill Jordan and John Edmonds too.

At the very centre of the crisis of Labour stands the question of the trade union link. Labour wants to rule for the bosses. The bosses do not trust the party because of its links with the unions. That is why they are pushing its leaders to make a break with the existing type of Party. Each concession to this pressure opens the door a little wider to the transformation of the Labour Party from a bosses' party with a working class base into a purely bosses' party.

Gould is most receptive to this pressure and is peering through this door. Smith is more cautious and is happy to see the door remain ajar for some time yet. Both will be affected, not merely by the pressure of the bosses over the next five years, but by developments in the trade union leadership itself.

Labour is, and remains, the political voice of the trade union bureaucracy. In the period after the defeat of the miners' strike there was a debate in the union bureaucracy about new realism. This meant ditching "old fashioned" militant trade unionism and replacing it with organisations geared towards providing services for the individual needs of their members, rather than their collective class interests.

New realism was able to survive the attacks that rained down on the unions by peddling the "wait for Labour" line, in unison with Kinnock, and by pioneering mergers as a means of creating "super unions". These could both sustain and expand services to their individual members and protect the considerable material interests of the bureaucrats running the unions.

But, just as the electoral defeat confronts Kinnockism with a crisis, it also challenges new realism itself.

And just as the current leadership battle is revealing a realignment of forces within the Labour Party, so too is it prompting a realignment within the trade union bureaucracy.

Kinnock was able to rely on a centre-left coalition in the party and the unions. John Edmonds, new realism's foremost thinker, was prepared to remain in a coalition behind Kinnock with Ron Todd of the TGWU. Today all that is changing.

The AEU has merged with the scab EETPU to form the AEEU. This is a far right outfit that could easily become an outright scab organisation. Jordan has deliberately refused to ballot his members for the Labour leadership election despite being 100% behind postal ballots as a means of running the union. Only the naive believe this is to do with money. Jordan is out to break Labour's union link. By demonstrating what he considers to be the undemocratic character of that link he is saying: this is what the formal link via the block vote means in practice.

Edmonds is employing a less provocative method but he is after the same goal as Jordan. He will ballot his membership for the sake of providing Smith with legitimacy. But his view on Labour's formal link with the unions is clear. He has called for:

"... a reappraisal of the relationship between the trade unions and the Labour Party. I think the block vote must go. We have a programme to reduce it. It should be eliminated in three years."

This goes further than even Gould's programme for the breaking of the union role. What Edmonds is moving towards, like Jordan, is the recognition that backing a permanent loser in elections ties the hands of the unions in broadening their politics. He wants trade union politics to break from their class restraints, which have

## At the very centre of the crisis of Labour stands the question of the trade union link

become "impoverished and introspective".

The theme is now appearing with increasing regularity in the speeches of Jordan and Edmonds that the role of the new unions centres on a more effective partnership with the bosses. This will lessen the need for them to have a distinct voice in Westminster.

Jordan hailed the introduction of Japanese style working practices in Rover (passed by a minuscule majority of 168) as "new trade unionism at work" and hailed the appointment of Heseltine at the Department of Trade and Industry because Tarzan, "understands the need for partnership between government and industry".

The renegotiation of the union link will lead to the reduction of union influence in the short term. But it will not necessarily lead to the destruction of that link entirely. Jordan would like that. But Edmonds is aware of the need, in a world where individual unions are becoming individual federations, to make sure that good relations with other unions are maintained. He does not want a poaching war because it involves too many risks to his own union. Moreover, unlike Jordan he is in charge of a union

that has not set itself the goal of becoming the sole organisation of the skilled, frequently white collar, manufacturing worker. He has numerous unskilled workers in his ranks and hopes to be able to recruit many more unskilled workers. For this reason he has to move towards his goal at a slow pace. Standing in his way are the leaders of the TGWU, MSF and the public sector unions.

All of these leaders favour a reduction of union influence in the Labour Party. That is now not an issue for any of them. But for the TGWU, NUPE and COHSE the public sector is a vital area, and the Labour Party is, at the very least, the party of the public sector. Their members would benefit, more unambiguously, from the election of a Labour government, and they want to retain some influence with the party that may constitute that government. This explains why Tom Sawyer, one of Kinnock's key lieutenants, has come out with a programme for maintaining the union link but on the basis of reforms that will, he hopes, lessen the damage that the visibility of the link does to Labour's electoral chances.

A Smith leadership would benefit all of these wings of the trade union movement for the time being. Smith would see to it that the link remains, but ensure that the unions' profile in the party is even lower than it is today. But just as Smith himself will have only one last chance so too will those within the union bureaucracy who want to keep some version of the status quo.

Indeed that status quo will, over the next four years, be undermined from within. The fusion of NUPE, COHSE and NALGO, could well see the merged union not affiliating to the Labour Party.

As for the TGWU, Bill Morris is far more flexible than Ron Todd. Immediately after the election result he announced the willingness of his union "to work with any government" and build a "consensus in industry" to make its "wheels turn faster and more efficiently". Add to this the fact that the union is £10 million in the red and facing an organisational crisis and the TGWU could easily melt away as the last redoubt of the trade union link.

Given that the most left wing opposition to the current moves away from Labour's links with the unions have come from the fading Stalinist, Ken Gill—whose own union, MSF, may be forced towards a merger with the AEEU—Jordan and Edmonds can both bide their time. After all, Gill's principal argument in defence of the union link is that it is "a very special British institution". So was Benny Hill.

The line up in the unions, then, reflects the line up in the party and vice versa. It all points to a period of transition for Labour. And it all points to a period in which the leaders of the labour movement are as distant from the immediate needs, interests and problems of rank and file workers as they can be.

Kinnockism failed. So did the new realism that told us to wait for Kinnockism to save us. The answer is not to steer further to the right in the hope that deliverance will come in 1996 or 1997. It is to face up to the bankruptcy of reformism in Britain today and to turn resolutely to a revolutionary socialist alternative to Labour.■

Five hundred years after Spain sponsored the exploration of a new world by Columbus the country is once again set to be the focus of international attention. Expo'92 has just opened in Seville and in July the Olympic Games in Barcelona will dominate the airwaves. But deep changes are occurring below this glitzy surface that will shake up Spanish capitalism and the labour movement. Sympathisers of the LRCI in Madrid sent us this report.



Gutiérrez and Redondo, Spain's union leaders, hanging together!

# A summer

# of discontent

BRITISH TOURISTS off to Spain this summer for the Olympic Games, Expo'92 or just the usual sex and *sangria* at Benidorm may encounter a few surprises. Angry pickets may block their path to the *tapas* bar, big demonstrations may delay their entry into the museums, the odd 24 hour general strike may force them to stay a little longer than they planned.

The Spanish working class is flexing its muscles in response to a series of attacks on it by the Socialist Party (PSOE) government of Felipe González. In March a new law was decreed depriving workers of unemployment benefit if they have not worked for a year and only allows them the new benefit for four months in any one year.

A programme of sackings in the state sector is to continue and the present assault on public sector pay levels is to be extended to the private sector. Savage cuts in social spending are to be announced.

Why is this onslaught taking place now, when through the Olympic Games and Expo '92 Spain's rulers are seeking to promote the image of modernity, consensus and prosperity?

The answer is Maastricht. In the modern Spanish political dictionary this is also translated as "convergence". It is about the harsh economic measures that Spanish capitalism has to impose over the next two or three years if it is to catch up with the other European Community (EC) countries on the road to economic and monetary union.

Last December in Maastricht all the EC governments agreed to work to a number of targets on inflation rates, budget deficits, public debt, interest rates and currency alignment within the Exchange Rate Mechanism (ERM). Without this convergence further economic and monetary union will prove an illusion for the EC. In turn the EC's hopes of being a strong imperialist bloc capable of competing with the USA and Japan depend upon this union.

## Targets

Spain has much to achieve if it is to hit the targets. At present it lies ninth in the league table of progress towards them. The implications are clear to the unions. Inflation at 6% is above the EC average. Since 1986, when Spain entered the EC pay levels have kept above inflation. The bosses need to reverse this trend. Spain's relatively high interest rates can only be lowered if the value of the peseta improves. This demands that the government's public spending is reduced to cut the budget deficit. Since 1980 public spending has shot up from 33% to 44% of GDP and the deficit has grown.

This looming confrontation between Spanish capitalism and the

## SPAIN

working class has been postponed for years due to the performance of the Spanish economy since EC entry. Between 1986 and 1990 Spain enjoyed around 5% growth a year. Business investment expanded at 10% a year. In 1986 Spain was classified as one of the "poor" countries in the EC and received around £2 billion a year in aid. Agriculture was improved, a massive road building programme undertaken and services expanded.

But the major effect of this growth was to accentuate the uneven development of Spanish capitalism,

to further deepen the divisions between regions; between the industrially developed Catalonia in the north east and the agriculturally backward Extremadura in the west.

Released from the long nightmare of fascism under Franco, the Spanish labour movement consolidated itself after 1976. It discovered new confidence, despite being divided between the larger UGT trade union federations (formally allied to the Spanish Socialist Workers Party—PSOE) and the Workers' Commissions (CO), led by the Communist Party of Spain.

On the back of the economic growth in the 1980s, and securely organised in the state industries, the unions have time and again

resisted the piecemeal attacks on them. Spain had the second highest number of days lost through strikes between 1986 and 1990, after Greece and three times as many as Italy in third place. Last year militancy outstripped even this record. Some 4.3 million days were lost through strikes (77% up on 1990) which drew nearly two million workers, mostly in industry, into action.

Industry is in the front line of recent and planned attacks. Spanish workers are facing up to what occurred in France and Britain ten or more years ago: an EC co-ordinated assault on the old coal and steel industries with the aim of destroying much of its capacity because it cannot be made profitable in the face of competition.

In Asturias, the main coal-mining region, the state owned Hunosa aims to sack at least 6,000 of the 18,000 miners over the next two years. A similar number are targeted at Ensidesa, the state steel company.

The miners have not been passive in the face of these threats. Last October the Asturian miners launched a 24 hour general strike in protest at government plans. Last December and January the miners struck again. Miners working in the private company MSP carried out a 500 kilometre walk to Madrid while others occupied one of the pits for fifty days.

Meanwhile, workers in Alava in the Basque country, fought pitched battles with the police during a strike against the closure of the ACENOR steelworks. Metal workers in Asturias staged a 24 hour strike when 20,000 of their jobs were threatened.

## Threatened

Those workers threatened by attacks in the service sector have also joined the fray. In Madrid there was a 66 day strike of transport workers against sackings and a four week strike of 25,000 municipal cleaners over their low pay. The unions claimed that 85% of the 660,000 *hosteleria* workers (in bars, hotels and restaurants) observed the two day general strike over the Easter holiday last month, organised for better job security and proper negotiations.

In agriculture the story is the same. Small farmers have taken action against the implications of

EC edicts. In Extremadura there was a 10,000 strong demonstration in March and a general strike planned in Murcia.

The outcome of these strikes has varied. In the case of the state miners, generous voluntary redundancy payments were offered to weaken resistance. As a result of the pit occupation MSP backed off and postponed job cuts until 1996. Metal workers' leaders saw the bosses come back with a 50% reduction in the planned job cuts as a result of their one day protest.

But these are skirmishes compared to the battles to come. Guillermo de la Dehesa, president of the Chambers of Commerce, said in February:

"I see difficult years. If the convergence plan presented to the EC is tough, we'll have labour unrest. If it's not tough enough, we won't converge."

So it's Maastricht versus mass strike!

## Escalating

This month the combined forces of the UGT and Workers' Commissions will hold a 24 hour general strike against the cut in unemployment benefit. Escalating action through the summer is planned, culminating in October to take advantage of the fact that Europe's eyes will be on Spain for much of this time.

When British tourists this summer pick their way through litter-strewn streets and settle down for more delays at airports because of striking air traffic controllers they may well be reminded of Britain in 1978/79 and "the winter of discontent".

The Spanish workers too would do well to refer to that experience and the cost of British workers' failure to defend themselves effectively in the face of a "socialist" government. If the current weakened state of the British labour movement is not to be the future of the unbowed Spanish one then they must learn the lessons of the last 13 years of Thatcherite policies that González admires so much: a labour movement divided and picked off in sectional battles over job losses and working practices; a union bureaucracy that refused to mobilise everything it had in the face of the first anti-union laws. Learn from history, learn from the rest of Europe. ■

## WATCH YOUR LEADERS!

**THE PROBLEM** Spanish workers face is not a lack of militancy or even in some sectors, strong organisation at the base. It is rather that they have a leadership pressured into action from below but willing to see the rank and file's energy and imagination frittered away in a series of fatal compromises with the government and the bosses that will divide and weaken the labour movement.

In the language of trade union bureaucrats the whole world over the General Secretary of the CO, Antonio Gutiérrez, said of the joint UGT/CO protests planned for this summer:

"The mobilisation must be great in scope and very overwhelming so that the government sits down and negotiates as soon as possible."

Gutiérrez and the UGT leaders recognise that such is the scale of the planned changes for Spanish capitalism in the next few years that they must hang together or hang separately; a substantially reduced state sector and union membership means a reduced basis for their own power and privileges. This is especially true as the government has announced this year that by the end of the year it aims to have in place a new piece of anti-trade union legislation that will restrict the legal framework for industrial action.

The recent rift between the UGT and the PSOE, as a result of the government's attacks, must not deceive the base of the unions into thinking that these leaders

have broken politically with the logic of the government's policies. They accept that Spain's transition from the second to the first division of EC countries is necessary. They want to soften the harsh effects of this transition on their members' jobs, pay and services, the better to protect their own bureaucratic interests. The union leaders want to keep control of the action and direct it towards a compromise with the government.

The recent conflicts have been defensive ones that have forced certain concessions from the employers or the government. It is possible that during the summer's key international events, more compromises can be exacted from the state. But the bills for all these events will have to be presented in due course and postponement of the day of reckoning will make the eventual conflicts all the more bitter.

Spanish workers must develop a class conscious vanguard across all the threatened sectors of industry and agriculture and build a revolutionary party that can weld that consciousness into a fight for an action programme.

The logic of Maastricht runs counter to the logic of workers' needs. An action programme for the Spanish working class will start by defending the workers' immediate needs against this logic—on pay, jobs and public spending—and direct this defensive struggle towards a fight against Spanish capitalism, and its PSOE minders, as a whole. ■

# GERMAN STRIKES

## Workers show their strength

**G**ERMAN SOCIAL peace has been shattered. In the last week of April hundreds of thousands of public sector workers went on strike. A ballot of the 900,000 members of the powerful öTV public sector workers' union resulted in a massive 89% vote in favour of action.

The public employers refused to accept a 5.4% wage increase, even though this was based on a ruling by a state commission which had been accepted by the öTV.

Behind the aggressive stance of the bosses and their state lies a general sharpening of social antagonism. Contrary to Kohl's promises, capitalist reunification led not to a land of milk and honey, but to increased state debt, taxes, prices (especially for housing), unemployment (especially in the East), the destruction of three quarters of the former GDR's industry, and finally, after a period of boom on the back of increased consumer demand in the East, to a recession of the whole economy.

The German capitalists are now asking the working class to pay the price for restoring the profit system in the East and for making Germany an economic power able to successfully compete with US and Japanese imperialism. That is why the German working class and the gains it made in the past are under attack.

Wages will be cut, whilst the cost of living rises. In major industries like steel, mining, cars and engineering there have already been announcements of major attacks on jobs, attempts to introduce Japanese work practices, and further flexibility of working hours.

The capitalists need to attack the mass organisations of the working class; they need to take on the trade unions and attack their legal rights, including even the tightly regulated incorporation of the unions in wage bargaining and the rights of the shop stewards at plant level. The high level of institutionalised class collaboration, once one of the secrets of Germany's post-war capitalist success story, has become an obstacle to the further advance of German imperialism.

### Battle

The 1992 wage round is highly political for the bosses. But, as their recent governmental crisis shows, the bourgeoisie is still looking for a leadership able and prepared to go through this battle with the German proletariat. And the public sector strikes and the regional "warning" strikes by IG-Metall, the four million strong engineering union, demonstrate that it will be a tough battle for the bourgeoisie.

The organisational strength of the unions has not been broken, or even seriously weakened, in the 1980s. The West German working class suffered no strategic defeat like the British miners' strike. The workers are prepared to fight back. This can be seen in the overwhelming majorities for action. And the move by öTV President, Wulf Mathies, to demand a wage increase of 9.5% after the strikes in the public sector reflects pressure from the rank and file.

But, as the wage disputes in the steel strike earlier this year showed, all activity is under the control of the

*Can the German bosses force the workers to pay the cost of restoring capitalism in the East? This question will be answered in the struggles currently sweeping Europe's economic powerhouse. Martin Suchanek of the Gruppe Arbeitermacht, German section of the LRCI, reports.*



Public service workers stop the bosses in their tracks

trade union bureaucracy. There is hardly any shop floor organisation. It is quite easy for the bureaucrats to switch the mobilisations on and off from one day to the other, once a "more favourable deal" has been offered by the bosses.

The record of these class traitors shows all too clearly their willingness to sell the workers out for another 0.5%. That is why they have always refused to combine the wage rounds in the West with occupations and strikes against closures and sackings in the East. IG-Metall has already indicated that it will agree to sackings and the introduction of Japanese work practices if the employers will compromise in the wage round!

For the workers' movement the recent strikes pose a possibility to come off the defensive. The first step must be to generalise and extend the struggle. The bureaucracy's tactic of one day strikes here, a day of action there—often without even informing the workers more than one day beforehand—is sooner or later going to demoralise the rank and file, who have no say on where and how long a strike should take place.

To prevent a sell out, or any hiding by stewards' committees and works' councils behind the legal restrictions which forbid them to call for strikes, the workers have to elect factory-based strike committees to organise and lead the struggle. These committees must be accountable to the whole

workforce.

To fight the bosses' offensive, links must be built between these committees. This must be combined with a struggle to democratise the unions to renew them as real class struggle organisations. Wage negotiations must be under the control of the rank and file, and the trade unions must provide full information to the workers. No secret diplomacy must be allowed. The negotiators must be accountable and replaceable.

Already many Eastern workers, their class consciousness eroded by decades of Stalinism, are asking themselves why they should support Western workers who are already on three times their wages.

This division could be ended at a stroke if the Western unions adopted the demand for equal pay and linked it indissolubly to their existing demands. They must fight against all sackings, unemployment and attacks on social services.

To really stop the bosses' attack it is necessary to raise the level of struggle beyond the limits of the fight for wages. A revolutionary party, one which the Gruppe Arbeitermacht is committed to building in Germany, would use the current struggle to overcome the divisions between the working class East and West and break the German unions decisively from the politics of class collaboration and social peace that the bureaucracy still hang on to. ■

## BOSNIA

### NO TO NATIONALIST SLAUGHTER!

**YUGOSLAVIA HAS** become a synonym for nationalist war, forced population transfers and massacres. The reactionary war between Serbs and Croats has now spread to Bosnia-Herzegovina. In only a month hundreds have been killed, 400,000 are homeless, tens of thousands are refugees in their own country.

The reason for this carnage does not lie in the "madness of the Balkan peoples", as racist commentators claim. It results from the rivalry of the nationalist leaders of the ex-Yugoslav republics, of the nationally fragmented Stalinist caste, the new proto-capitalist layers and their imperialist backers. In order to achieve the task of capitalist restoration these forces have consciously poisoned the workers and peasants with chauvinist demagoguery.

Small wonder that the results of this threaten to be most brutal and bloody in Bosnia-Herzegovina. It was created as a buffer zone between the three major nationalities of post-war Yugoslavia, the Serbs, Croats and Slovenes, and their respective bureaucracies. The 4.3 million inhabitants do not constitute a distinct nation, but are mainly Muslim South Slavs (43.7%), Serbs (31.3%) and Croats (17.3%). In addition 326,000 people declared themselves Yugoslav by nationality at the last census.

Apart from some districts in the north and the west of Bosnia-Herzegovina, the different nationalities do not live in distinct areas. Separation into compact national states could only be achieved by massive population transfers.

The Bosnian bureaucrats tried to save their privileges by stimulating nationalist struggles at home. Itzebegovic was the first to do so by setting up the "Muslim Party of Democratic Action", soon followed by the creation of the "Serbian Democratic Party" and the "Croatian Democratic Community". The latter started secret negotiations with Croatian president, Tudjman, to divide the republic between Serbia and Croatia.

Threatened by this, Itzebegovic announced a referendum on Bosnian independence. It formally registered a 60% majority of the total population in favour of independence. This vote represented a temporary alliance of Muslims and Croats, not a clear expression for self-determination.

### Inflame

Far from resolving the national antagonisms between the peoples any vote in favour of independence was bound to inflame them and provide a pretext for Serbian, Croatian or even imperialist (UN) intervention. Trotskyists should have campaigned against the holding of the referendum and for abstention when it took place.

Serb Chetnik militias, backed by the Federal Army, started to attack strategic villages and towns in order to gain control over large parts of the country. They claim about 62% of Bosnia for an "autonomous Serb republic". Revolutionaries condemn this attack, which has nothing to do with the right to self-determination of the Serb people or their protection against any real threat of national oppression.

At the same time Croat military units, especially those of Paraga's Ustashe, entered the republic. Like the Croat leader's call to vote for

independence in the referendum, his claim to defend "Bosnian independence" is a hypocritical and temporary manoeuvre, to gain as much Bosnian territory as possible to be incorporated in a "Greater Croatia".

The aims and methods of all the nationalist parties are equally reactionary. It is a pure utopia to imagine that Bosnian independence, or the division of the country into Swiss style cantons, could be exercised in a democratic way under the present Stalinist and nationalist leaderships. It would only lead to forced population transfers, pogroms, economic dislocation and misery.

It would not end nationalist hatred or oppression but would give it a new basis from which to emerge in still more sinister forms. It would allow the imperialists to strengthen their influence, to secure their goal of finally restoring capitalism in Yugoslavia and provide them with a pretext for military intervention.

### Solution

The only possible solution for the people of Bosnia-Herzegovina lies in a joint struggle of the workers and peasants of all nationalities against the warmongers and progromists on all sides. This is no pipedream. There was a 40,000 strong demonstration in Sarajevo on 4 April which demanded the immediate resignation of all nationalist leaders. The armed attack on this rally shows how afraid the nationalists are that such a movement could grow and turn the course of events against them.

This progressive sentiment must be translated into practical self-defence. It must break with any illusions in a peace-keeping role of the UN forces or the Yugoslav Federal Army. To defend themselves from nationalist attacks from either side, the workers and peasants have to form multi-national defence militias and try to win the rank and file of the army to turn their guns against their officers. The recent formation of such joint militias in Sarajevo demonstrates the real possibility of this.

However, every success would necessarily pose the question of political power, even if initially only locally. The only organisational forms that could accommodate the complexities of local communities and ensure the victory of the interests of the majority are workers' and peasants' councils. Within Bosnia-Herzegovina, we are for the formation of such councils in all regions and districts and their centralisation through a congress of workers' and peasants' Councils as a basis for a genuine workers' state in Bosnia-Herzegovina.

Only unity in such a struggle can provide a way forward to overcome the national tensions and lay the basis for a common struggle to overthrow the restorationist government in Sarajevo. Only under the power of the Bosnian-Herzegovinian workers and peasants could the fears of national oppression be dispelled and economic life restored.

And such a power would be well placed to appeal to all those workers and peasants in the neighbouring states to break from their chauvinist leaders, who have brought them nothing but fratricide and war, and to form their own councils and militia as the basis for a federation of workers' states throughout the Balkans. ■

## ABORTION

# A question of choice

The right to have an abortion is one part of the broader question of women's choice. Under capitalism these "rights" are constantly under threat as right wing bigots push for women to be denied any control over their fertility. But capitalism also needs women to work, and large families and repeated pregnancies are an obstacle to this. A constant tension therefore exists between the granting of limited abortion rights and the fight of the church to repeal them.

Irish women face the most reactionary constitution which all but bans abortion. In the USA women have had a constitutional right to abortion since 1973 which the Supreme Court may be about to overturn.

In both countries whilst the courts debate the rights of women, large demonstrations have demanded choice. We look at the constitutional debates, and argue for militant organisations of working class women to take the struggle away from the courts and onto the streets.

## USA

LAST MONTH half a million people marched in Washington to defend abortion rights. The same week the right wing Operation Rescue (OR) launched a new campaign in Buffalo, New York State, aimed at closing down abortion clinics through direct action.

Both protests coincide with a Supreme Court hearing which began on 22 April. Its outcome could determine the fate of abortion rights for millions of women in the USA.

In 1973 the celebrated *Roe v Wade* Supreme Court decision produced a constitutional guarantee of abortion rights which could not be violated by local state legislators. In recent years there have been a number of attacks on abortion provision, but the current legal battle threatens to return the whole country to the pre-1973 days when local reactionary governments determined their own policies.

In 1989 publicly funded abortions were outlawed. In the recent *Rust v Sullivan* case the judges upheld a ban on abortion counselling in federally funded clinics.

The Supreme Court hearing is over the right of the Pennsylvania state government to severely restrict abortion access. They have agreed a law which would require a woman to wait 24 hours for an abortion during which time she would be bombarded with information on the detailed development of the foetus, alternative options to abortion and generally harassed into rejecting abortion. She would also have to have the consent of her husband, with a penalty of one year's imprisonment if she gave false information and, if under 18, would require the consent of a parent.

Women's groups are contesting the right of the Pennsylvania state government to implement this law. The Supreme Court, appointed by the President, has the power to interpret the US Constitution, hence its key role in the current abortion struggle. In the Reagan years the liberal majority of the Supreme Court's judges was undermined. With the recent appointment of Judge Clarence Thomas an anti-abortion majority is guaranteed.

Only a massive campaign of protest and direct action, mobilising the working class, can stop the Supreme Court from overturning the 1973 decision and giving the green light to

any US state with a reactionary government to introduce its own anti-abortion legislation.

Women's rights, and in particular abortion rights, are a class question. Even with the "right" to abortion working class women have found it difficult to obtain them. The biggest obstacle has been the lack of public provision. State funded clinics are now banned from performing abortions, meaning that women have to turn to the private sector.

For those women who are amongst the 35 million people who cannot afford any health insurance, there is little choice. They simply cannot afford to pay. In contrast, if the Supreme Court gives the go-ahead for a new backlash on abortion, women who can pay will still be able to travel to liberal states for abortions.

The pro-choice movement in the USA has been thrown onto the defensive by the recent attacks. Over recent years the movement, dominated by pro-Democratic organisations like the National Organisation of Women (NOW), has sought to defend abortion rights through lobbying of Congress. As Operation Rescue (OR) mounted its campaign, including over sixty bomb and arson attacks on abortion clinics, the respectable feminists have stood by and opposed the physical defence of clinics and women seeking abortions.

Despite the class character of the attacks, the pro-choice movement in the USA is crippled by an all-class strategy. That doesn't just mean involving women of all classes, or even placing the campaign leadership in the hands of better off women. It means tying the pro-choice movement to the capitalist Democratic Party and to obeying ruling class legality.

When it comes to active defence of the clinics, for example in Wichita, Kansas, they argue against militant opposition to OR. When OR blitzed the town in July 1991 NOW requested pro-choice activists to "avoid confrontation" and allow the bigots to close down clinics for a week.

NOW organises banquets to woo Democratic presidential hopefuls, and depends upon them delivering improved abortion rights. But while the Democrats are united in paper support for *Roe v Wade*, their practice reveals them to be no allies in the fight for women's rights.

Democratic Senators colluded in Reagan's build up of right wing bigots on the Supreme Court. Democrat controlled Louisiana has been in the forefront of undermining women's abortion rights in practice. Few Democrats opposed the 1989 legislation which virtually banned Federal funding for abortion. Democrat front-runner Bill Clinton himself signed an Arkansas law requiring parental approval for abortion for women under 18.

George Bush has adopted a clear anti-abortion line, a change from his previously more liberal position. This, combined with a Supreme Court packed full of reactionaries and a timid Democratic opposition, points to the need for a radically different strategy in the fight for abortion rights.

Attacks on abortion rights always affect working class and poor women the hardest. It is these women, through the organisations of the working class and oppressed, that need to organise a mass campaign of demonstrations and protests against the proposed restrictions.

They need to organise physical defence of the abortion clinics and protect women who are seeking abortions from the violence and abuse of OR. In addition to the defensive struggle they need to take up the fight for state provision of abortion so that all women can have access to the rights which richer women have had for years. ■

## IRELAND

Workers Power spoke to Bernadette Mulligan, a member of the Irish Workers Group and a leading activist in the Repeal the Eighth Amendment Campaign

**WP: What is the significance of the controversy surrounding the "Irish" Protocol to the Maastricht Treaty?**

**BM:** The inclusion of the Protocol was negotiated behind the backs of the Irish people late last year by a Fianna Fail deputy, Des Hanafin, who has since emerged as the leader of the Pro-Life campaign. The effect of the Protocol is to deny recourse to European law on issues arising from the anti-abortion Eighth Amendment to the Constitution. The original intention of the fundamentalist lobby was to use the Protocol to prevent any future liberalisation of the laws in this area via the European court circuit.

The Supreme Court ruling in February has thrown the anti-choice lobby into disarray, causing them to champion the dumping of their Eighth Amendment on the grounds that it now legalises some abortion provision, in the case of "real and substantial" threat to the life of the mother, and for its replacement with a more prohibitive wording.

As a result the government is now going to introduce legislation to provide for some form of abortion, information and right to travel. They will call a referendum on these issues in the autumn. But they have also announced that the referendum on Maastricht will go ahead much earlier than planned—it will now take place in June.

Because this will be held before the wording of the later referendum is known, it has led to the apparently bizarre development of both the pro and anti-abortion lobbies calling for the same line—a "No" vote in the Maastricht referendum!

The Protocol will deny recourse to European law on any issue arising from the Eighth Amendment as interpreted by the February Supreme Court ruling. Neither the right to travel nor information can be guaranteed if the Treaty becomes law. The Repeal the Eighth Amendment Campaign (REAC) has argued for the dropping of the Protocol, and will campaign for a No vote.

But so too will the Pro-Life Campaign, on the grounds that "Maastricht means abortion", since the Protocol would copperfasten the Eighth Amendment as re-interpreted by the Supreme Court.

**What kind of pro-choice campaigns exist?**

The Repeal the Eighth Amendment Campaign (REAC) consists of a small number of action groups. It has won the affiliation of forty or so organisations, including the Union of Students in Ireland (USI) and the Democratic Left (which has five deputies in Dáil Éireann). It organises activity such as lobbying politicians, publicity stunts and courting the media. The Campaign has a petition calling for repeal of the Eighth Amendment. It also gives out abortion information and has held a number of pickets and public meetings around the country.

**What does REAC fight for?**

REAC is an uneasy coalition of femi-

nists and left activists which emerged in the aftermath of the 15,000 strong February demonstration in sympathy with the fourteen year old rape victim. It was formed on the basis of fighting for repeal of the Eighth Amendment, because at that time the Amendment was the basis for the injunction which stopped the girl from travelling to Britain. When that injunction was subsequently lifted the momentum fell off and numbers declined.

At its first conference on 8 March this year REAC decided also to fight for and support legislation to strengthen the right to travel and to have abortion information and counselling. It is also committed to the provision of abortion services "in specific circumstances". In view of the various government proposals to introduce a measure of information and travel rights, some campaign activists have tended to push the broader goal of repeal into the background.

The campaign faces a number of contradictions. The problem is that legislation on information and choice (even if granted on an extremely minimal basis) could have the effect of sweetening the pill of the Eighth Amendment and thereby undermining the fight for its repeal. Certainly, some of the feminist wing even favour keeping the Eighth Amendment now that, ironically, it is the basis of at least some abortion provision in this country. An attempt was made at national committee level to change the name of the campaign but this was overwhelmingly rejected by the action groups.

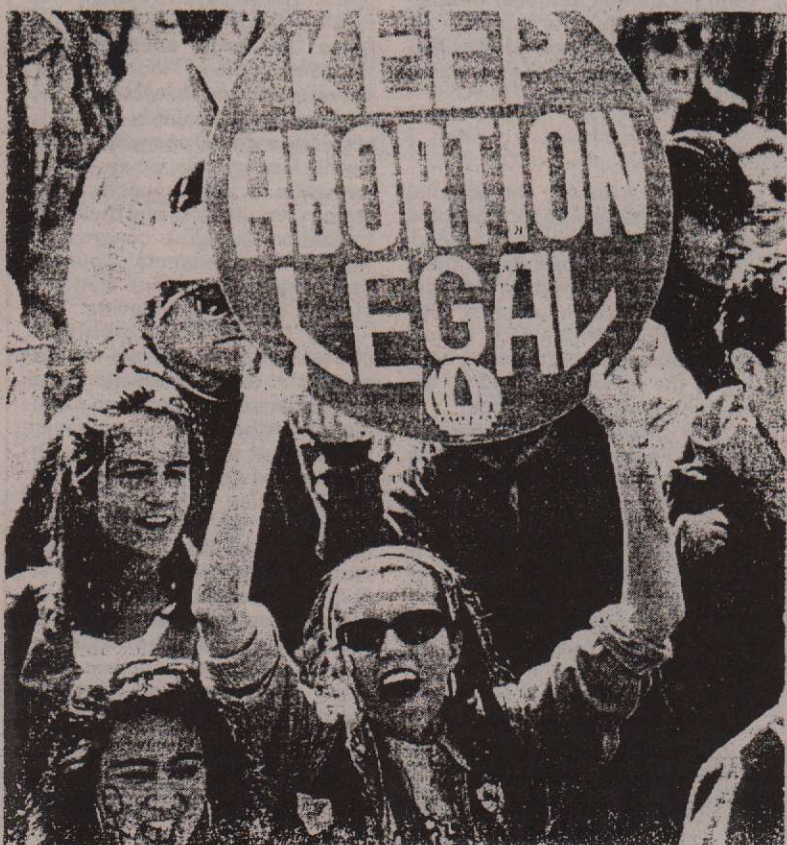
Nonetheless a real danger remains of watering down the central goal of repeal, particularly if the feminists and non-left activists get their way at the next conference which is scheduled for 10 May. Their thrust will be for realism and pragmatism. They will seek to commit the campaign to "tactical flexibility"—a coded way of arguing for acceptance of any minor reform, regardless of how it may cut across the struggle for repeal.

Our primary goal is to repeal the Eighth Amendment and fight for a woman's right to choose. A referendum on information and travel which is proposed for the autumn, while giving some rights, would at the same time strengthen the Eighth Amendment by making it seem more liberal.

**So what do you think REAC should be arguing for?**

In the first place REAC must call for a referendum for repeal of the Amendment. That is essential. If we fail to get a referendum on our terms and lose the fight for repeal, then we could critically support a referendum on abortion information and travel rights.

We would call for a Yes vote as against SPUC, Hanafin and the fundamentalist wing. But we need to use the opportunity to raise now the question of fighting for abortion rights for all women, not just those who have the money to travel or fit the narrow criteria decided by the Supreme Court. ■



# WOMEN'S OPPRESSION AND THE UNHOLY TRINITY

## Church, state and capitalism

**F**OUR DECADES of uneven and feverish capitalist development have greatly altered the social position of women throughout Western Europe. This is no less true in Ireland.

Although the impoverished economy was relatively sealed off from world capitalist expansion until 1957, many more women work now in paid employment than in the 1960s. The fertility rate is falling rapidly. Many more married women now work with the corresponding double burden of domestic toil and cheap insecure labour. But in Ireland the weight of this double burden remains much greater than in neighbouring EC countries.

The Irish Constitution opens "In the Name of the Most Holy Trinity . . ." and firmly defines a woman's role as in the home. The power of the Catholic church is enormous, with the clergy's right to serve as the moral guardians of the masses entrenched in Irish civil society.

Clerical power creates the stark contrast between Ireland and other European states in areas such as abortion and divorce rights. It is precisely these social issues which stand in contradiction to the changing economic position of women. They contain enormous potential as the sparks for revolt against the Irish ruling class and its state. The recent mass demonstrations over the abortion issue and the crisis that the issue provoked in the Irish government are clear proof of this.

Where progressive changes have occurred they often appear to be under pressure from forces external to the country. Membership of the EC forced the Irish bourgeoisie to concede legislation on equal pay, for example. But such changes are not insulated from the internal dynamics of the Irish economy, including the demands of women and the working class, which are also a force for change.

Women in the Republic comprise 33% of the total labour force. This compares with 52% in Britain. The biggest change has been for married women. In 1961 one in twenty married women worked for a wage. Today it is one in four. But this is still significantly lower than the 50% of married women in the OECD countries who work.

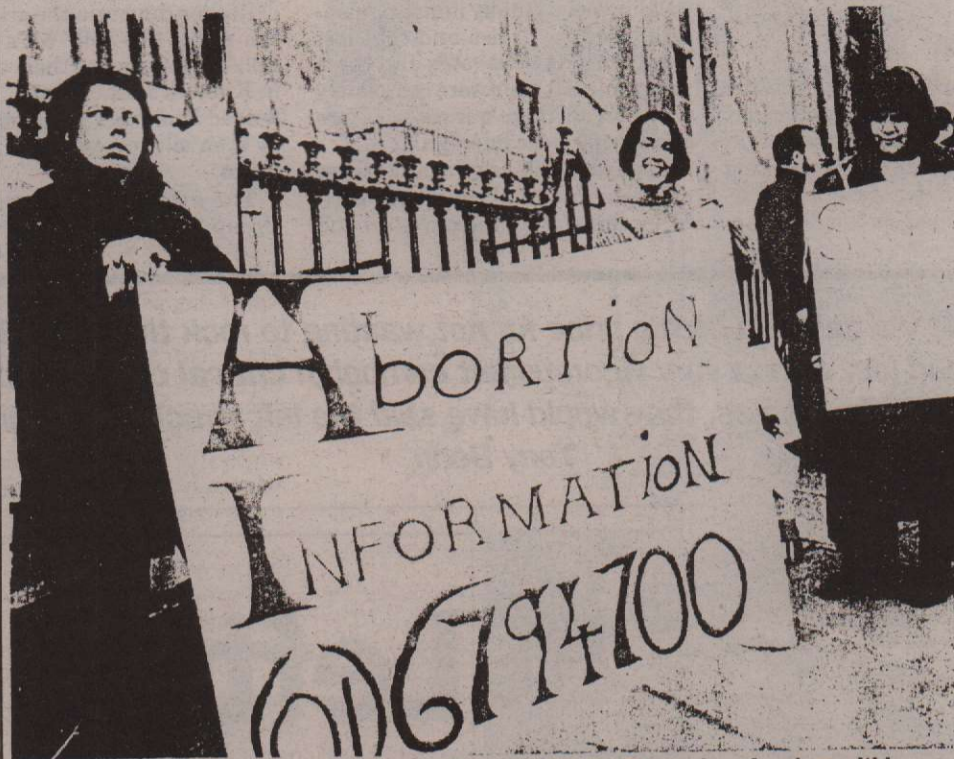
Of all women workers in Ireland only two fifths are married. This proportion has risen as the numbers of teenagers in work has declined. In turn this decline has arisen because of growth in second and third level education for teenagers.

The pattern of work for married women remains different to that in Britain. Although younger women are staying in the workforce longer, women with families tend to withdraw more completely from the workforce than in Britain where women with children are increasingly returning to work.

An important factor within these trends is the high fertility rate. Ireland's rate has always been the highest in Western Europe and began to fall much later than in the other countries. In 1987 the rate was 2.33 compared to an EC average of 1.6. Once again the power of the Catholic church, and its opposition to contraception, makes itself felt in Irish society.

The pattern of women's work is similar to that elsewhere in Europe. Women are concentrated in low paid service jobs where they are often segregated from men through occupying low grades.

Part-time work has featured much less in female employment in Ireland than elsewhere. In Britain, France and Germany there has been a significant shift from full-time to part-time work, largely done by women. In contrast only 6% of Irish jobs are part-time, although this is increasing.



The contradiction for Irish women—more work outside the home, less freedom within as they fight the most backward laws on abortion

Seventy-seven per cent of women work in service sector. Thirty per cent of their jobs are clerical, 15% catering, cleaning, hotel, hairdressing and shop work, 10% in commerce, insurance, and banking, and 27% are in teaching, nursing and technical and professional jobs. Importantly, manufacturing accounts for 16% of women workers.

Ireland is a low wage economy—last year 130,000 workers (10%) took home less than £100 a week, and most waged occupations are paid significantly lower average rates than their EC equivalents. Irish men are among the lowest paid in Europe, and women are even worse off. The gap between men's and women's wages is the highest in the EC. Irish women are paid 40% less than men. In 1990 average industrial earnings for men were IR£259 but only IR£150 for women.

By and large women are concentrated in

Even in the mixed schools segregation occurs in relation to subjects. Construction, metalwork and woodwork are largely reserved for boys. Similarly, although industrial apprenticeship is formally open to girls, only a minuscule number actually gain access. Women's participation in higher education is about a fifth less than men's, no different from the rest of the EC. Here women are concentrated in teacher training and non-scientific disciplines, remaining a minority in technical education.

The sexist discrimination in education and then work denies women equal opportunities from the start. This is then compounded by the burden of domestic responsibilities which they bear. The state provides no pre-school childcare facilities at all, and there are a mere twelve workplace creches! In urban areas there are a small number of private pre-school centres, but these are costly and not an option for most

**It is precisely these social issues which stand in contradiction to the changing economic position of women. They contain enormous potential as the sparks for revolt against the Irish ruling class and its state.**

the lowest grades with the lowest pay. It was largely EEC membership which obliged the introduction of the Anti-Discrimination (Pay) Act of 1974 and the Employment Equality Act of 1977, but the existence and creation, by regrading, of exclusively women's grades in many industries and services made it frequently impossible to progress through legal claims.

Clerical and administrative staff women invariably occupy the lower grades and get lower pay even while formally on equal pay scales. For women in the skilled and professional jobs, inequality is seen more in lack of opportunity than unequal pay.

The inequality of women in the workplace is matched in education, where the reactionary influence of the church is most clearly at work. Primary and secondary education is largely segregated by sex, and almost all schools are confessional and run by clergy. A significant number of comprehensive schools have been created on an integrated basis with a much wider curriculum, but they are still ultimately under a clerical veto.

mothers. Maternity rights are also inadequate, limited to about twelve weeks in the public sector. As a result of the lack of childcare facilities, many women are unable to work. They are also unable to register as unemployed unless they can demonstrate that they can make arrangements for children and therefore qualify as being "available for work". Despite this obstacle to women registering, official unemployment amongst women is rising. Between 1980 and 1990 women's unemployment increased 241% while men's grew by 145%. This is in the context of an official unemployment rate of 20%, far higher than in most EC countries where the average is 9%.

Discrimination in social welfare has been reduced by certain EC directives but certainly not abolished. When unemployment benefit runs out a man automatically goes onto unemployment assistance. But a married woman qualifies only if her husband is an invalid or she is separated, without support from her husband. Many single women, including mothers, are also denied

benefits as a result of a cohabitation rule similar to that in Britain.

The position of women in the economy is therefore similar, if on a slightly smaller scale, to that of women in the rest of Europe. But in the area of personal independence and sexual freedom Irish women differ most.

The liberalising trends in Europe towards greater equality for women in education, in legal terms, and through the granting of abortion and divorce rights, resulted from a combination of the pressure of women and the working class with the needs of a modern industrial economy. More women were required in the workforce, with appropriate skills. Consequently education and work opportunities increased. But the growth in the Irish economy has not been sponsored by the development of indigenous Irish capital, but by international capital.

Irish bosses, like Smurfit and O'Reilly, whilst personally enjoying the benefits of foreign divorce courts, have no desire or incentive to tackle the dominance of the church at home. They have defended the ban on abortion and divorce, the restrictions to contraception and the obstruction of secular scientific sex education which results from this clerical influence. The strong alliance of church and state owes much to British imperialism's promotion of the power of the Catholic church as a bulwark against revolutionary nationalism and agrarian revolt in the nineteenth century.

In general, imperialism prefers to consolidate such conservative forces in its subservient semi-colonies as a weapon against radical nationalist and class struggle. But now the process of European integration has had a contrary effect in the short term in Ireland by encouraging the aspiration, and even giving some of the legal means, for a levelling up of democratic rights for women. The EC's agreement, however, to Ireland's anti-abortion Protocol 17 in the Maastricht Treaty, begins to reveal the limits of imperialist commitment to democratic rights for Irish women. The contradictions of externally generated development in this relatively backward part of Europe are sharply expressed in the sphere of democratic rights of personal independence and sexual freedom. For example, while abortion is almost totally banned, the rate of abortion by travelling abroad is among the highest in the EC.

Irish women are increasingly educated and skilled to a degree that cannot be absorbed by the Irish economy, in which general employment levels stagnate even while foreign capital expands its Irish manufacturing output and profits. Young women make up a large part of the periodic emigration.

Women in Ireland are in a contradictory position, reflecting the domination of imperialism. They are a central and growing part of the economy, and yet remain imprisoned within the family denied the most basic democratic rights. These contradictions will explode, and the current struggle around abortion demonstrates the potential for organising resistance.

Whilst the domination of the church remains so strong and only a minority of women work outside the home, the most central task is to build links between women in the workplaces and those in the home. Half of all waged women are unionised, making up 35% of union membership. These women should be the centre for organising a movement of working class women which draws in housewives, youth and student women, in a common struggle against women's oppression, imperialism and capitalism. ■

**T**HE LEFT of the Labour Party had barely started discussing why Labour lost before it suffered a crushing defeat in the leadership race.

The Socialist Campaign Group of MPs chose Ken Livingstone and Bernie Grant as its candidates for the leader and deputy leadership of the party. They could only muster 13 and 15 Labour MPs, respectively, to nominate them.

The nomination system demanding a minimum of 55 MPs to nominate leadership and deputy leadership candidates is undemocratic and should be scrapped. It was imposed by the right wing in 1988 after the Benn/Heffer challenge. But it should not be used to disguise the fact that neither candidate could get more than just over half the 27 Campaign Group members to support them.

The Campaign Group is following the old Tribune Group, with "paper members" who proceed to vote and act against its own policies without being ever called to account.

The post-election issue of *Socialist Campaign Group News* contains many of the MPs' views of why

## CAMPAIGN GROUP

Labour lost. What is absent from all these analyses is the role that Labour, and its allies amongst the trade union leaders, have played in failing to organise the working class in struggle. The unemployed have been left to rot on the dole by these leaders. Struggles such as the Anti-Poll Tax Campaign were deliberately sabotaged by these leaders.

### Organising

For the parliamentarians of the Campaign Group the role of organising the working class in struggle and building a fighting consciousness for socialism is irrelevant to their strategy of cap-

turing the Labour Party for the left. Their critique concentrates on the failure of the Kinnock leadership to win back working class votes through clear alternative policies to the Tories.

Some of the criticisms the lefts make are correct. On many issues, like Smith's commitment to "defend the pound" at all costs to reassure the City, or the question of defence, Labour was virtually indistinguishable from the Tories and that lost them working class votes. But these very same left MPs were completely silent on all these questions before and during the campaign.

Instead of mobilising against these policies and rallying the anti-Kinnockite left in the party around

a national campaign in the election they went along all the way with these policies. Tony Benn justifies this craven capitulation in a recent issue of *Socialist*:

"Maybe we paid too high a price for not wanting to rock the boat. But if we had lost after a very vigorous left campaign critical of the Labour leadership's policies, they would have said the left wrecked it again."

### Criticism

Rather than face the criticism of the right, the "left" MPs all shut up! And this makes them complicit in Kinnock's catastrophe. They defended Kinnock's programme and, by their silence, endorsed his campaign.

The attempt of the Campaign Group to put forward an alterna-

tive in the leadership elections was a belated attempt to redress this uncritical stance.

As such it did merit the support of socialists and trade unionists, but not uncritical support. The Campaign group ticket put forward a manifesto of:

"No pacts or proportional representation, pulling out of the Exchange Rate Mechanism, arms cuts and scrapping of nuclear weapons, wealth distribution, maintaining union links and party democracy, anti-racism and equality for women, justice for the worlds poor and abolition of the House of Lords."

These are vague commitments, but on the key issues, against the drive for pacts and coalitions with the Liberals, on maintaining union links and on defending party democracy, the Campaign Group stood clearly against the main drive of the right wing candidacies of Gould and Smith.

At the same time Ken Livingstone, a typical left faker, put across a "left" or not so left interpretation of these policies depending on the audience he was addressing.

In the *Morning Star* (28 April) he wants to rebuild a working class coalition of the white collar, skilled and unskilled workers and attacks Smith's tax proposals in the election as an "attempt to make the skilled workers pay the burden of the economic recovery".

Livingstone insists, against Smith, that the tax shortfall could have been found by cutting defence expenditure.

### Press

In the bourgeois and popular press the same Livingstone argues alongside those who are attacking redistributive taxation, complaining about over-taxing the middle classes and in favour of a 50% top tax band.

In the *Morning Star* the Labour Party "should be strengthening the links with the trade unions". In the *Guardian* he is in favour of reducing the trade union proportion in the electoral college from 40% to 33% and lines up with Smith and Gould in calling for a reduction of the block vote at conference to 50%.

At the same time he has declared himself against the idea of democratising the block vote insisting the trade unions "cannot say they are 55% in favour of one policy and 45% against". Why not if this reflects the democratically expressed opinions of millions of trade unionists? This is a strange "winner takes all position", no doubt designed to appeal to trade union bureaucrats, from someone who personally supports proportional representation in elections.

And on the question of pacts with the Liberals it is Ashdown's policies that the popular frontism Livingstone opposes, not that they are an openly bourgeois party. As he wrote in the Liberal-loving *New Statesman*:

"Labour had much in common with the old Liberals of the Michael Meadowcroft variety and nothing with the new super-Friedmanism concocted by Ashdown."

Are you listening Simon Hughes?

### Exposed

Had the Campaign Group overcome the nomination hurdle a campaign in the party and the unions would have had to point out these weaknesses.

Even in voting for Livingstone and Grant, against the right wing drive to weaken the links with the unions and build bridges to the Liberals, the tactics and policies of the Campaign Group would have to have been exposed as being inadequate to build a truly socialist alternative to the Tories. ■

**"Maybe we paid too high a price for not wanting to rock the boat. But if we had lost after a very vigorous left campaign critical of the Labour leadership's policies, they would have said the left wrecked it again."**

Tony Benn



## Left without answers

John Mckee surveys the wrong lessons that sections of the left are drawing from Labour's election defeat

## SOCIALIST WORKERS PARTY

THE SOCIALIST Workers Party (SWP) prides itself on being "outside" the Labour Party. This, it tells its members, is the acid test for revolutionaries. Step inside, and you're lost.

The peculiar thing is that when election time comes around *Socialist Worker's* critical faculties seem to disappear. This is especially true when they are dealing with the left of the Labour Party.

### Illusions

This election has been no exception. After the election *Socialist Worker* declared:

"The election result was a disaster for everyone who wants a better society. It was a disaster for the growing army of unemployed, for the hundred of thousands of homeless, for the millions in low paid jobs, for workers under pressure to work ever harder to increase their bosses' profits."

This is called "sowing illusions" in the Labour Party. It is precisely what Tony Benn and Ken Livingstone tell workers everyday. Revolutionaries have no such illusions. We know perfectly well that the Labour Party is a party committed to running capitalism.

If Kinnock had come into government the army of unemployed would have remained just that. The homeless would have remained on the streets. There was nothing in Labour's programme which committed it to seriously tackling these

questions. John Smith would quickly have forced the abandonment of the commitment to a minimum wage if the pound had fallen and the recession deepened.

The principal reason revolutionaries call for a Labour vote is because millions of workers really believe that it will produce a better society. We work alongside them, inside and outside the Labour Party, to put Labour to the test of office. Labour in government creates the best conditions for revolutionaries to break workers from their illusions and to prove that it puts the interests of the capitalists before the interests of the workers.

Labour in opposition means that many workers will continue to look to it as a party that offers something better. We are now unable to put Labour to the test. The election result was also a setback because workers' morale and expectations would have been lifted by a defeat for the Tories. New opportunities for struggle against the Labour leadership could have opened up.

### Talk

For all its talk about the need to break from Labour, the SWP is particularly soft on the leaders of the Labour left. *Socialist Worker* (25th April) greeted the Livingstone/Grant leadership challenge with the blazing headline "Now there is a choice". There was a bit of criticism of Livingstone for being worried about "taxing the better off".

But Bernie Grant is complimented

for "defending socialist politics on the basis of a firm assertion of working class interests". The May issue of *Socialist Review* is even more effusive:

"The announcement that Bernie Grant—who tripled his majority in Tottenham by campaigning on firm socialist issues and class politics—is standing as Livingstone's running mate for deputy leader will be a beacon for many socialists in the Labour Party who feel betrayed by the leadership."

### Grovelling

This grovelling by the SWP is its pay off to Grant for the help he gave them in relaunching the Anti-Nazi League. It took a letter writer to *Socialist Worker* to point out that Grant's "firm socialist issues and class politics" in Tottenham included a refusal to make any criticism of Labour's manifesto, and a refusal to offer support to a town hall workers' strike against victimisation. Some "beacon"!

For all its revolutionary pretensions the SWP's "hardness" on the Labour Party comes down to a sectarian organisational refusal to fight inside as well as outside the Labour Party.

This it combines with opportunist political adaptations to the left Labour leaders which have nothing in common with revolutionary Marxism, but everything to do with centrism—the hallmark of the SWP's politics. ■

## Unity conferences

**S**PARE A thought for all those on the left whose world perspective hinged on the election of a Labour government. *Tribune*, *Socialist Organiser*, *Socialist*, the Socialist Movement had all banked on five years of Kinnock in Number 10.

The Socialist Movement had scheduled a conference for July to work out its demands on Labour. *Socialist Organiser* had asserted that without a Labour government, rebuilding working class confidence could not happen. They now tell us that confidence can be rebuilt, but only slowly and in a way "fraught with difficulties".

All of these trends on the left are now seeking refuge in unity conferences. *Tribune* has called one for June. *Socialist Organiser*, in the week after Easter (and in keeping with the theme of the festival), called for the resurrection of Tony Benn as a potential saviour for the left. They asked him to call a conference for the autumn. *Socialist*, likewise, has appealed to everyone to come to a "Conference of the Left" in October.

Workers Power believes that all socialist militants face pressing tasks in the months ahead. The Tory offensive is unfolding: in the mines, in the public sector and in industry. To organise militants into a coherent fighting force committed to struggle against these attacks we will fight to rebuild workplace, rank and file organisation and challenge the rightward course of the union leaders through action.

Inside the Labour Party the fight is on to defend the link with the unions. Against all who argue for a reduction of the block vote or for its abolition, we say, fight for its democratisation. Place the block vote in the hands of the union members—decisions on its casting to be conducted through union branch votes, the block vote to proportionally represent votes cast in the union on all policy issues, delegations to be elected from the membership not appointed by executives.

Such a fight will be meaningless if the left is not prepared to defy the leadership's inevitable attacks—up to and including an organisational break with Labour. And this is why in any and every unity conference called we will place on the agenda the building of a revolutionary party as the central task. ■

## Which way will Labour go?

Dear Comrades,

Last month's editorial on the reasons for the defeat of Labour argued that:

"The most likely development in the months ahead is that under a new leader Labour will embrace PR, a deal with the Liberals and press ahead with its transformation into a bourgeois peoples' party."

This was wrong as it suggested that this was the only option for developments in the Labour Party. It also overestimates the speed with which any such transformation could come about.

We characterise the Labour Party in Britain as a "bourgeois workers' party" because of its organic links with the organised working class. In Britain this takes the form of the affiliation of the bulk of the unions and their organisational participation at all levels within the Party. It is precisely this link that is under attack, not just by Smith and Gould, but by the trade union leaders themselves.

The lessons these labour bureaucrats drew from the struggles of the 1970s and 1980s was that this organic link to the trade unions was too dangerous for a party that is committed to defending capitalism. During this period the Labour Party leaders had to resist the pressure and demands of workers whose industrial militancy and defensive struggles found their reflection in the Labour Party.

As long as that link remains the contradiction between the working class base of the party and its bourgeois leadership can always erupt in a fight, especially in periods of upturn in the class struggle.

Kinnock's reforms did involve "social democratising" the party to some extent with the aim of weakening the organisational link with the trade unions once and for all. Hence the emphasis over the past period on attacking the trade union block vote, making a move to replace it with individual membership only ("one person one vote"), seeking alternative sources of funding to the trade unions (state financing etc).

This perspective is clearly not the same as pushing ahead and turning the Labour Party into an outright bourgeois party in the way that ruling class journals like the *Economist* and *Sunday Times* have been arguing is the "way forward" for the Labour Party by forming some sort of "Democratic" or "Peoples' Party".

As we said in an article in *Permanent Revolution* No 9 ("The retreat from Labourism" Autumn 1991):

"A further election defeat could well open up a new debate over the need for a further social democratisation or even the total bourgeoisification of the Labour Party and its class base."

While this debate has clearly been brought to the fore in the leadership contest in the Labour Party, we should not confuse the start of the debate for its finishing point nor suggest that the "Peoples' Party" is the only, or even the most likely, outcome of this discussion.

In comradeship  
John McKee

The editor replies:

Yes we agree that the formulation you refer to was an unfortunate oversimplification of the potential developments in the Labour Party. We would welcome further contributions from our readers on how they view the impact of the defeat on Labour and the likely direction the party will take in the coming period.

## SOCIALIST ORGANISER

# Anti-republican glee

Dear comrades

According to *Socialist Organiser* (SO) there was one piece of good news arising from the election: the defeat of Gerry Adams in West Belfast by SDLP candidate, Joe Hendron.

How can a victory by an open bosses' party, set up with help from the state to combat the popularity of the republican movement, count as a victory for the working class?

This is how SO explains it:

"Adams seems to have lost because some protestants voted 'tactically' for Hendron to put Adams out."

"As the results were announced, Adams' supporters set up a great chant directed at Hendron and his friends: UDA! UVF! That is, it was the votes of such people which gave Hendron the seat. That is, further and inescapably, that all protestants are UVF or UDA . . .

"It was a revolting spectacle of crude Catholic sectarianism which showed up the blatant communalism under Sinn Fein's republican mask." (SO 14 April 1992)

A more gross misinterpretation of events would be hard to find outside of the actual misinformation campaign run by state forces in Northern Ireland.

It is a fact that protestant tactical voting defeated Adams.

It is a fact that in the protestant areas of West Belfast graffiti appeared before the election saying "A vote for Ulster Unionist Party is a vote for Sinn Fein".

Who orchestrates this kind of tactical voting amid the loyalist community? Certainly not the SDLP itself, which has no base of support there. It is highly unlikely that the Unionist Party itself organised this.



Socialist Organiser delights at the defeat of Gerry Adams in the elections

Which leaves the UDA.

Whilst the UDA is a front for loyalist death squads it is also a legal semi-mass organisation. Precisely the kind of organisation which could, and no doubt did, organise tactical voting on the ground. That was the general consensus in the Irish media.

There is nothing in saying this which implies that all protestants in Northern Ireland are UVF or UDA.

SO's interpretation of the Hendron win is no aberration, however. According to the author of the article:

"The SDLP is a bourgeois party; it is nevertheless a lot nearer to the unity-building politics of real Irish republicanism than are Adams and his gang of armed Catholic commu-

nalists."

Whilst Sinn Fein is a petit bourgeois nationalist party influenced by Stalinism and the IRA is its armed wing, there is no proof whatever that either are "communalist" organisations. Communalism is the attempt to divide the working class on ethnic and religious lines.

There have been key protestant activists in both Sinn Fein and the IRA, and the republican movement has made repeated, if ill thought out, attempts to appeal to non-sectarian protestants. Adams himself is on record repeatedly condemning sectarian killings by "cowboy" republican units, and the IRA has punished those who carry them out.

It is Sinn Fein's politics which fail to offer a progressive means of unifying protestant and Catholic

workers, not any strategy or overt propaganda for communal violence.

To equate the IRA's guerilla struggle with the random sectarian death squads of the UVF, UFF etc, is only to repeat the lies of British imperialism.

Also, if it was such "good news" that the SDLP won, if Hendron's party is so much closer to the "real republicanism" of Wolfe Tone, how soon will it be before SO advocates a vote for the SDLP? That is the logic of the position.

Trotsky once said that socialists in Britain who refuse to support the struggle for Irish freedom should be "branded with infamy, if not with a bullet". He got it just right.

Fraternally,  
Colin Lloyd

## WALES

Dear Comrades,

The BNP's 121 votes in Cardiff North was a derisory result. Much of the credit for this must go to Cardiff Anti-Fascist Action (AFA) who leafleted every working class estate in the constituency.

But there was a downside to the campaign. For the first time in recent memory the fascists were able to openly organise in Cardiff. On Saturday 4 April, they leafleted with the aid of supporters from London.

This should never have happened. Acting on reliable information, AFA called on both the ANL and ARA to confront the fascists at their meeting point. Despite a previous agreement to co-ordinate activities, the ANL flatly refused. AFA, with many anarchist members away at a rally, were well outnumbered.

Our activities were limited to photographing the fascists and persuading two innocent ANL members not to set up their stall in the area. We later came across half a dozen woebegone ARA members standing beside the wreckage of their minibus. Their leaders had not even informed them of the potential fascist threat.

Only two days before this fiasco, the ANL had organised a "Cardiff Rocks Against Racism" gig. Several hundred attended. The ANL claimed receipts of around £900. What was the point of this exercise when not one of these people could be

# ANL inaction

mobilised when it mattered?

Leading members of Cardiff SWP have since made their position clear. They will rely on badges and "Nazi-Free Zone" stickers to "demoralise" the fascists. They will not implement "no platform" unless the fascists openly advertise a meeting. Perhaps they should go one stage further and ask the BNP to issue invitations.

Clearly the lessons of the 1970s have not been learned. Every time the fascists meet, march or leaflet successfully, their morale improves, and with it the chance of gaining new members. At present the BNP are a limited threat in South Wales. It is only the consistent application of no platform which will ensure they stay that way.

In comradeship,  
John Morgan

## FRANCE

Dear Workers Power,

In your last issue you described the threat posed by the growth of the Front National in France, and pointed out that Le Pen was planning to march his troops through the streets of Paris on May Day for the fifth year in succession.

Unfortunately, you were right: Le Pen got away with it again whilst the French left stayed at home. This year there was not even a token presence to protest against the racist and fascist scum. The best the French left could muster was around fifty members of the *Appel des 250* who wandered around Montmartre (much to the confusion of the tourists) whilst Le Pen reviewed his troops—10,000 strong—on the other side of the city.

In the afternoon around 30,000

workers took part in the CGT trade union May Day rally. Apart from the "250" none of the anti-racist organisations seriously mobilised even for this activity! And of the tens of thousands of leaflets given out, only those produced by *Pouvoir Ouvrier*, Workers Power's sister organisation in France, argued for the need for direct action to drive the fascists off the streets.

A notable newcomer to the demo was the British ANL which sent around thirty members over to show the French how to fight fascism. Unfortunately, the last people the French left needs lessons from are the ANL. The ANL's refusal to confront the fascists is already the widespread response of the left over here.

But the ANL do seem to have had some impact . . . on Socialisme International (SI), the British SWP's sister organisation in France. SI has traditionally been very clear on the need to confront the FN, and their posters which lined the route of the march called for the breaking up of FN meetings. But the leaflet they gave out merely argued for the creation of an anti-fascist united front, which would not be based on "no platform for fascists".

The SWP have obviously decided that France needs the ANL. They could not be more wrong. What the French working class needs is an organisation committed to mobilising thousands of workers to stop the FN from marching and holding meetings, to stop Le Pen from building a mass fascist party.

Emile Gallet

# Anti FASCIST ACTION

For information about AFA's activities in your area and copies of the AFA journal "Fighting Talk" contact:

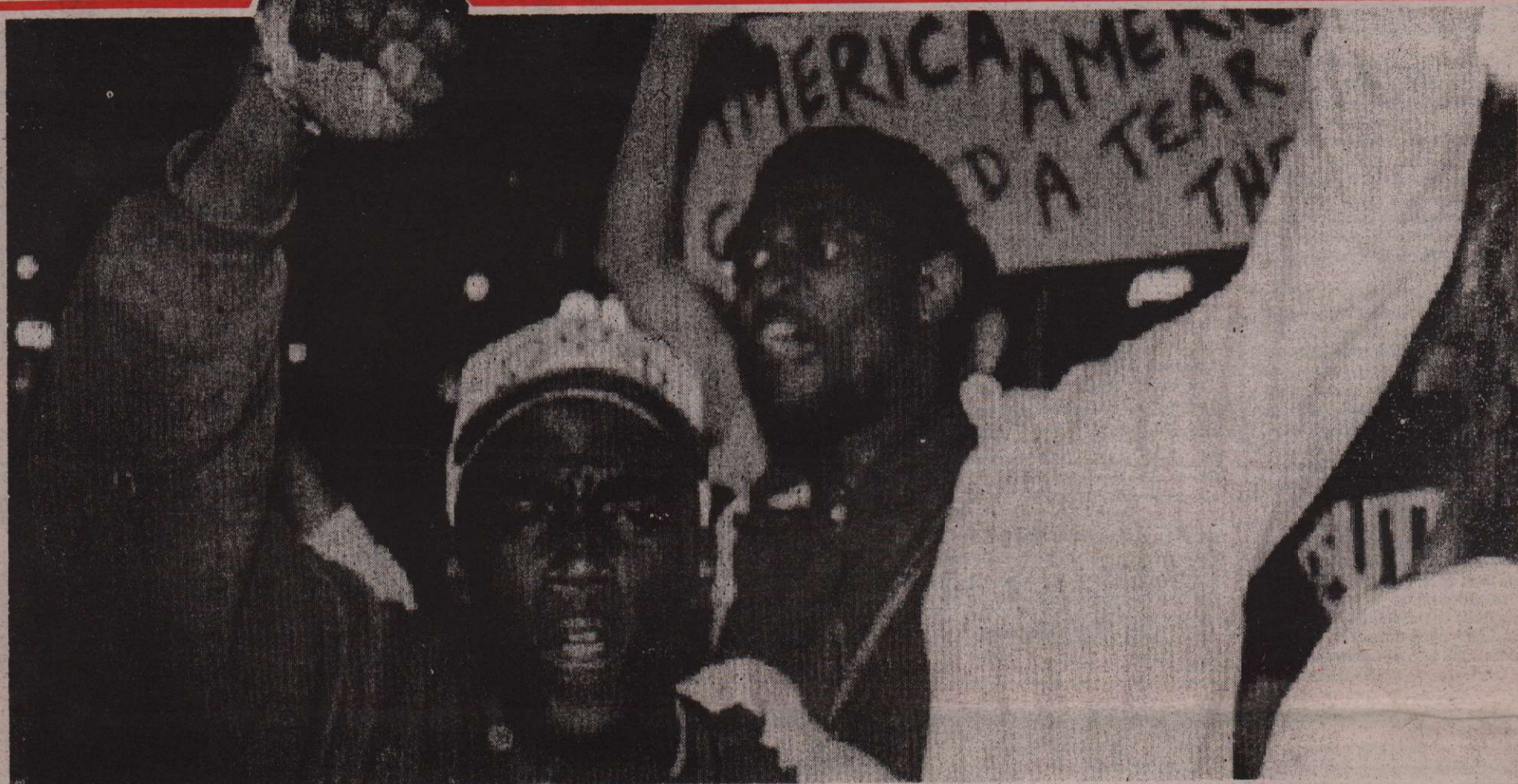
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# Workers power

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## USA: Revolt against racism

**THOUSANDS OF troops, National Guardsmen and police patrolling the streets. A curfew. Over forty people dead. Thousands more injured and arrested. Los Angeles resembled war-torn Kuwait with buildings gutted and neighbourhoods destroyed.**

The Los Angeles epicentre of the US uprisings produced these images and they hit television screens across the globe. The wealthiest state of the wealthiest country in the world was suddenly unmasked and the rotten core of discrimination, poverty and oppression revealed.

Thousands of black and Latino youth took to the streets in protest. The anger was unleashed after the racist verdict which acquitted four white LA policemen. These four officers had been filmed delivering 56 truncheon blows to a black motorist, Rodney King.

The uprising in Los Angeles, and the spread of demonstrations, protest and risings to other cities symbolised anger and resistance to this blatant racism. There was outrage at the injustice of the verdict, but it was fuelled by the fact that state racism and police repression are part of the normal pattern. The King case was unusual, not for its brutality, but because it was recorded on a video camera and broadcast on television for all to see.

Black people know that this was one horrific example of the daily repression they face. A *Washington Post* survey revealed that while a majority of whites thought the verdict was wrong, only one in four thought that it showed that "blacks cannot get justice in this country", while three out of four black people thought this was the case.

The racism of the courts is real. Blacks get longer sentences for the same crime. Racism combines with poverty to criminalise blacks on a massive scale. One quarter of all

young black men in the USA are either behind bars, on probation or on parole. Forty per cent of those on Death Row, compared with 12% of the general population, are black.

The poverty of blacks and Latinos in the USA has increased enormously over the Reagan/Bush years. The American dream, the culture of opportunity and initiative, has always been based on the few getting rich at the expense of the mass of the population. The contrast between rich and poor in the USA, and in Los Angeles in particular, is more marked and more repulsive than anywhere else in the world. And the poverty is largely black poverty.

In the past twenty years black unemployment has risen from 1.9 times that of whites to 2.8 times as high. Between 1973 and 1990 the average income of black high school graduates declined by 44% in real terms. Over half of black children are born into households below the poverty line.

No wonder that when the state forces were caught off guard and temporarily unable to control the streets, masses of people flooded into the shops and looted. People have been tortured with the consumerism of modern culture and yet denied the opportunity to participate for too long.

The story of the police attack on Rodney King in March 1991 was one of racism in action throughout. After the amateur video of the King beating was broadcast, George Bush was forced to declare it "sickening". But what happened then?

It took an official Commission report to force the resignation of racist police chief

Daryl Gates. And even as he left he had the endorsement of George Bush ringing in his ears—"an exemplary police chief".

The four police officers responsible for the assault were being taken to court—in a safe white suburb which ensured a jury that included no African-Americans.

The uprising was there in waiting. But it took on an undirected and often brutal form. The lack of an effective political leadership of militant blacks, combined with the failure of the white working class to fight racism, meant that the anger was not channelled into a strategy which could really challenge racism and the capitalist system that perpetuates it.

The targets of the riot reflect this lack of direction. Looting and destruction of shops was not confined to rich white areas, but included many small businesses. Much anger was wrongly directed. Because a Korean shopkeeper had recently got off with a light sentence after fatally shooting a black shoplifter, this combined with a resentment of the small privileges of some Koreans to produce a dangerous inter-ethnic conflict.

Violence directed towards individual whites has claimed the attention of much of the press. "Mobs", "thugs", "venom", "mindless violence" and other choice phrases have been tapped out by white journalists to describe the uprising.

This reaction has added to the feelings of anger amongst the black community. Black youth are killed daily, often by the police, and no public outrage is expressed. During the uprising the focus on white victims has been yet another example of racism. The majority

of the victims have in fact been black, many killed by the police.

Individual random violence against whites does show that the anti-racist explosion is undirected and could be quickly demobilised by a combination of repression and exhaustion. But this should not blind us to the fact that the riots were an expression of justified rage—the fury of the oppressed. Now we must defend the oppressed against the further state violence that is being meted out.

The response of the politicians was to launch a crackdown. Whatever the "anguish" felt by George Bush at the verdict, he had no hesitation in ordering thousands of National Guards and troops onto the streets of LA. Both the Republican Governor of California, and the black Democrat Mayor of Los Angeles, Tom Bradley, co-operated in organising the repression including a state of emergency and curfew.

Thousands more youth will now pay the price in jail sentences. So will the small shopkeepers who will not survive the aftermath of the uprising, unlike the big companies whose top insurance firms will pay up. And whatever redress the US legal system now allows Rodney King, it will be a tiny token compared to the continuing daily oppression of America's poor and black population.

Now the rage must find another way forward, one that can mount an effective challenge to racism and deprivation—one that challenges the system of exploitation and profiteering that the "American dream" is really about. ■