

# Workers power

Socialism, Internationalism, Revolution

British Section of the League for a Revolutionary Communist International

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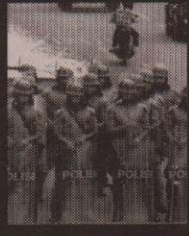
**INSIDE**

How oil and profit fuelled Clinton's war machine  
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# Now lift the sanctions!



**PARTNERS IN CRIME:**  
Blair followed Clinton to the brink of war

**FACT:** The west's economic blockade has killed over half a million Iraqi children

**Troops out of the Gulf!**



## REFUGEES: Britain's rotten record

## Scrap the Asylum Act!

**M**ANY ANTI-RACIST activists hoped that the Labour government would move quickly to repeal or, at the very least, modify the Tories' 1996 Asylum and Immigration Act. Nearly a year after Labour's landslide the legislation is still on the books, untouched.

An October 1996 High Court ruling on the Tory legislation saddled local authorities with the responsibility for providing a basic minimum of support to single adult refugees who would otherwise be destitute. The decision to place the burden of responsibility on cash-strapped London boroughs has angered a number of Labour council leaders.

The last thing they wanted was to have to earmark contingency funds for asylum seekers at a time when they are keen to contain rises in Council Tax and either cut or restructure a range of other services. A number of local politicians have lobbied Home Secretary Jack Straw and Immigration minister Mike O'Brien, but the best Labour are offering is a review.

An indication of the likely outcome of that review came during a recent exchange in the House of Commons when Labour Health minister Paul Boateng, whose own family fled to Britain in 1966 following a military coup in Ghana, railed against "bogus asylum seekers" sponging off Britain's "hard-pressed tax payers".

Now, a consortium of five London authorities, led by Tory-controlled Westminster, is seriously discussing a proposal to purchase an £8 million Scandinavian cruise ship as accommodation for asylum seekers denied the right to claim state benefits as a result of the



Refugees fleeing racism in Eastern Europe have been greeted by Britain's draconian immigration laws

1996 legislation.

Senior council management in the Labour-controlled boroughs of Camden, Hammersmith and Fulham, and Lambeth have joined their counterparts in Westminster and Tory-controlled Kensington and Chelsea in talks about mooring such a refugee "flotel" in a major river – the Avon, Mersey or Tyne are possibilities.

Last May, the same consortium threatened to send more than 120 asylum seekers to a hostel in Liverpool, but in the end only Westminster pursued the scheme. Labour councillors and management in social services departments in the other local authorities could not stomach the idea of shipping refugees 200 miles away from their legal

representatives and whatever community ties they might have established in London. Now, however, council bureaucrats like Camden's Social Services director Simon White have pressed ahead with the flotel scheme without even consulting their own top managers.

While Labour group leaders like Camden's Richard Arthur have joined in the tabloid-orchestrated chorus against "economic migrants" from Eastern Europe, social workers and council staff working with Roma families fleeing Poland, the Czech Republic and Slovakia have had to face up to the reality of racist persecution which has driven them to Britain.

On 20 February, for example, a 26-

year-old woman with six children died after a skinhead gang beat her senseless and dumped her in a river to drown in the Czech province of Bohemia. Her death was the third racially motivated murder of a Roma reported in the Czech Republic in the space of seven weeks.

Despite abundant evidence of such violent racism and the systematic denial of civil rights to Roma populations throughout Eastern Europe, Jack Straw has made it plain that the Government intends to accelerate "fast-track" deportation procedures against Roma refugees. Labour's attitude to asylum seekers can only encourage the fascists of the National Front to mobilise popular racist sentiment in street demonstrations and assaults against the Roma, and other

refugees, in Dover and elsewhere.

If the five London boroughs go ahead with the "flotel", it will spell out the message that asylum seekers coming to Britain can expect to be treated like criminals, but without the benefit of trial by jury.

There is an undeniable crisis of decent, affordable accommodation throughout London; and unscrupulous bed and breakfast operators have enjoyed a bonanza in recent months at the expense of local authorities. But the council managements keen on a flotel are not driven by financial considerations alone. They are cynically trying to prove how tough they can be on refugees, at the same time as trying to extract a few minor concessions from the Government on the level of grant paid to them by the Department of Health.

The secrecy surrounding the flotel and other sinister schemes for asylum seekers has made it difficult to mobilise opposition against the proposals. But now that information has finally come to light, Unison members in the five authorities should be forging links as a matter of urgency with refugee community organisations to launch a campaign against the flotel proposals and the abysmal treatment meted out to asylum seekers by local authorities. If senior managers move to implement the flotel option, Unison members must fight for strike action – unofficial if necessary.

A militant campaign must be built to force Labour, not to simply review the 1996 legislation, but to scrap it altogether and restore full benefit rights to all asylum seekers. ■

## UNISON: Democracy conference

## Stop the witch-hunt!

**A**NATIONAL conference to co-ordinate opposition to the witch-hunt in Unison will take place in Newcastle on Saturday 21 March. The witch-hunt is targeted at individual activists, left-dominated branches and, in particular, the Campaign for Fighting and Democratic Unison (CFDU).

To date, three Unison regions – Greater London, Northern and Yorkshire and Humber – have thrown their support behind the conference. This is an encouraging start.

The union's National Executive Committee (NEC) declared war on the CFDU three months ago (see *Workers Power* 218). The motives of the NEC clique around General Secretary Rodney Bickerstaffe vary, but the underlying goal is to marginalise opposition to the Blairite agenda of cuts in welfare provision and further backdoor privatisation of both local authority and NHS services through the Private

Finance Initiative and so-called Best Value, yet another attempt to contract out public sector jobs.

As with all such witch-hunts, there is a "red scare" element. The far left are painted as some "politically motivated" outside force. In truth, however, all fighting elements are being attacked.

The defence of internal democracy and branch autonomy within Unison is absolutely vital. But activists attending the Newcastle conference must not lose sight of this bigger political agenda. While individuals on the NEC, who have historically been hostile to the CFDU, were prepared to reject the blatant attack contained in the 10 December resolution, they are not reliable allies in resisting the witch-hunt. Branch militants should not trim their demands around the fight against New Labour bosses in order to court support within the Unison bureaucracy.

Unfortunately, there are signs in

advance of the Newcastle conference that left branches are prepared to make important concessions to the NEC. For example, a resolution from the Newcastle City Branch, which appears to have the support of key SWP activists in the union, accepts "that it is inappropriate to use Unison's funds to finance other political organisations".

Whatever the author's intention, the NEC could drive a coach and horses through such a phrase. The clear implication could very well be that branches have no right to decide to contribute to *Socialist Worker* fund drives or affiliate to the CFDU, an organisation which consists solely of Unison members. Even worse, it is a concession to so-called non-political trade unionism, which would stop revolutionaries from winning unions to affiliate to a party with a revolutionary socialist programme.

In the same resolution there is a ref-

erence to the right of "branches and regions to affiliate to organisations which have aims and objectives in line with Unison's policy". Potentially this could exclude organisations that are campaigning to change union policy. It leaves the door open to further attacks on rank and file oppositionists.

The 21 March Newcastle conference will not be delegate-based, but we urge all our readers in Unison to seek the support of their branches to attend and to back the position of Derbyshire County Unison (see resolution in *Workers Power* 219), which links clear-cut opposition against the witch-hunt to the fight against PFI, Best Value and further cuts.

● Unison democracy conference, Saturday 21 March, 12-4 pm, Mayfair Banqueting Suite, Newgate Street, Newcastle. Further information from Ian Daley (0191 456 7325) or Clare Williams (0191 281 2543). ■

## Anti-fascists arrested: Drop the charges now!

**ON SATURDAY 28 February 250 anti-fascists from a wide range of organisations gathered in Dover to oppose a coach load of National Front (NF) supporters who were attempting to stage a march and rally in the port against Czech and Slovak Romanies seeking asylum in Britain.**

**This was the second time in recent months that the NF fascists have tried to whip up racist violence against the Roma.**

**When they last tried to march through Dover on 1 November 1997, they were blocked by anti-fascists at every turn. The anti-fascists also ran the local police ragged.**

**This time the police were determined that the NF march would go ahead as planned, even if it took 90 minutes for them to walk half a mile. The police mounted a large and sophisticated operation as several hundred cops shielded the fascists,**

**while searching anti-fascists and compiling a long list of names and addresses.**

**Boiler-suited film crews kept the NF's opponents under constant surveillance, while snatch squads made periodic arrests. In all the police arrested 24 anti-fascists, charging at least 20 of them. Two defendants face assault charges.**

**The vast majority of defendants are due to appear in Dover magistrates'**

**court on Monday 16 March. Two others face hearings on Wednesday 1 April. The anti-fascist demonstrators deserve the support of all anti-fascists and the labour movement as a whole.**

**We demand the dropping of all charges. We urge our readers to back any demonstrations called to back the accused at the upcoming hearings and to support a defence campaign. ■**

## Defend Glenn Kelly

**THE WITCH-HUNT** in Unison took a new turn in February as Tory-controlled Bromley Council initiated disciplinary action against Unison branch secretary, Glenn Kelly. Not coincidentally, Glenn is also National Secretary of the CFDU.

The Tories are keen to sack Glenn for having led campaigns and industrial action which have blocked attempts by Bromley to opt out of nationally-negotiated terms and conditions and privatise the local libraries.

But the particular form of the attack against Glenn suggests that Unison officials have collaborated with the bosses. Some elements in the Unison leadership are determined to make the union safe not just for New Labour but for old Tory employers as well!

Council management informed Glenn that they had reason to believe that the council was "funding indirectly" the CFDU. He is specifically accused of "inviting financial donations for affiliation [to the CFDU] to be sent" to his office in the Bromley Civic Centre. Of course, Bromley officials may have closely monitored red-baiting coverage in Rupert Murdoch's *Sunday Times*, but the launch of disciplinary action against Glenn coincides with Unison's attempt to shut down the CFDU.

As we go to press, Glenn is awaiting word of the outcome of a preliminary hearing on 26 February. More than 100 union members and local residents attended a hastily organised lobby in Glenn's support that afternoon.

Workers Power urges readers to send messages of support to: Bromley Unison office, Civic Centre, Stockwell Close, Bromley Kent BR1 3UH. For further information, telephone the union office on 0181 513 4405. ■

# EDITORIAL

WORKERS POWER 220 MARCH 1998

## Middle East crisis

# Between war and revolution

in this issue



### South Korea workers reject austerity

Keith Harvey looks at the continuing crisis in South Korea and outlines the tasks facing the Korean workers.

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### Brown's con-trick

Newspaper reports say that Gordon Brown is about to deliver a huge injection of money to back up Labour's childcare and welfare to work proposals.

John Mckee looks at the reality behind the rhetoric and the pitfalls in Labour's approach.

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### Indonesia on the brink of revolution

Austerity drives, food riots and rebellion all make Indonesia a likely candidate for revolution. We say what needs to be done to rid the country of Suharto and bring about workers power.

• page 12

**T**HE ART of war, the military textbooks tell us, is to manoeuvre the enemy into a position where he has no more options left: wherever he moves he is defeated. During February's stand-off with Iraq, US President Bill Clinton gave a new twist to this old adage. He managed to manoeuvre himself, not his enemy, into the proverbial "no win situation".

If the USA attacked Iraq there would be uprisings across the Middle East and the collapse of any semblance of a united imperialist policy for the region. If the USA did not attack, it would be widely perceived as a victory – not just for Saddam Hussein, but for the French-Russian foreign policy alliance determined to carve out an "independent" European policy for the Gulf.

The USA did not attack. It allowed UN Secretary General Kofi Annan to broker a face saving deal that has, for now, removed the immediate pretext for air strikes. The USA wanted war, but it did not want revolution.

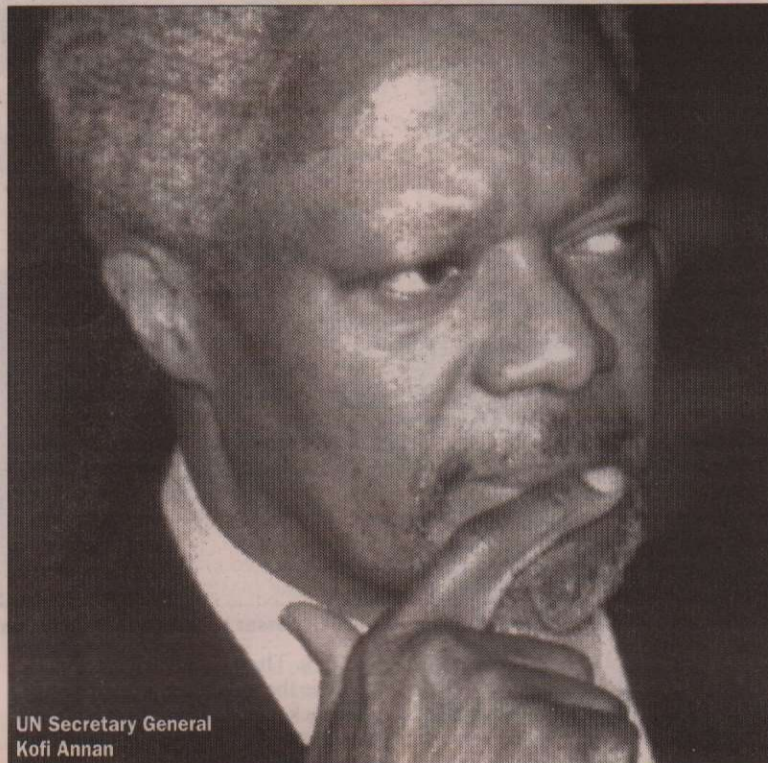
All of this points to a crisis of Middle East strategy for imperialism. It is a crisis of their own making, firmly rooted in US imperialism's twin fears: third world revolution and mass war casualties in another Vietnam.

In 1980, Iraq invaded Iran. There were no sanctions then. The USA supported Iraq because the Iranian revolution posed a key threat to the economically vital oil reserves. In May 1987, when Iraq mistakenly attacked the US frigate *Stark*, killing 37 US sailors, there were no reprisals: Washington simply accepted Iraq's apologies and carried on attacking Iran. When Saddam killed 5,000 Kurdish civilians in a chemical attack on Halabja in 1988, the west happily carried on selling arms to Saddam.

Right up to the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait in 1990 – triggered by a border dispute and Kuwait's decision to break out of the OPEC oil cartel's price fixing mechanism – US diplomats reassured Saddam that they would not take sides. But when Iraq invaded and conquered Kuwait, US President George Bush seized on the opportunity the war created to make a major change in the imperialist balance of power in the region.

The Soviet Union was in a process of collapse. This was the moment for the creation of what Bush called the "New World Order": the imposition of an imperialist order on the region entirely controlled by the USA. The 1991 Gulf War was not fought for Kuwaiti territorial integrity. It was fought for strategic control over the Middle East. And the US won.

The USA drew back from overthrowing Saddam, and completely smashing the elite Republican Guards, because



UN Secretary General Kofi Annan

uprisings in Iraqi Kurdistan and the southern, Shi'ite area around Basra, gave them a glimpse of the revolutionary chaos that could follow the fall of the dictator. Saddam was allowed to put down the rising in Basra and then withdraw two divisions of Republican Guards to crush the Kurdish revolt in the North.

Since then, the USA has adopted a policy of sanctions and "dual containment" of both Iran and Iraq. Economic

of US imperialism, the renewed instability in the Gulf demonstrates its weakness.

The USA entered the current crisis with highly obscure war aims. Here too Clinton was at odds with the military manuals which demand a "clear and achievable outcome" to any attack. Was the aim to kill Saddam, drive him from power or force him to give up chemical weapons?

There are only two ways to impose

**It was not demonstrations in the west however, nor even the fragmenting of imperialist collaboration that ultimately forced America to back down. The decisive factor was the threat of a revolutionary conflagration in the Middle East itself**

sanctions were supposed to ensure that Saddam could not build up his forces again and that all weapons of mass destruction would be given up.

But by 1994 sanctions were already becoming dysfunctional to imperialist policy in the Middle East. Russia was pressing for Iraq to be allowed to sell oil again, in order to pay off the \$4bn Iraq owes Russia for arms, French oil companies were trying to secure independent oil deals with Iran and were in exploratory talks with Iraq. The coalition that had beaten Saddam and which was supposed to underpin the "New World Order" was breaking down.

Far from demonstrating the strength

of your will on a foreign country or region: get a local "gendarme" to do it for you or put your own soldiers onto the streets, armed not with smart bombs but bayonets and truncheons. The "Vietnam syndrome", the possibility of mass American casualties, rules out direct occupation. So the USA must use gunboat diplomacy: air strikes and cruise missiles.

Only Britain has been suckered into supporting the new US aggression against Iraq. The isolation of the US and Britain shows that seven years on from the collapse of Stalinism and the proclamation of the New World Order, US imperialism is weaker than before.

Militarily it has nowhere near the firepower it could muster at the end of the Cold War. Diplomatically, the renewed independence of French and German imperialism reflects the emergence of a relatively independent foreign policy in the European Union. Economically too imperialist unity has been undermined since 1991. Then, Japan poured billions of dollars into the US war effort. Today Japan's billions are being poured into repeated reflation packages for its ailing economy and to bail out its bankrupt monopolies.

Faced with the weakness of the imperialist aggressors, the anti-war movement in the west took heart during February. Left Labour MPs like Tony Benn, who had advocated "sanctions not war" in 1991, now loudly proclaim their opposition to both war and sanctions. In 1991 revolutionary socialists were almost alone in siding with Iraq on the grounds that a victory for a semi-colonial country in war with imperialism is a victory for all anti-imperialists. In February 1998 the "right of Iraq to defend itself" could even be justified on the grounds of the hallowed UN charter and international law.

Thus the changed balance of diplomatic forces led to the bourgeois and pacifist opponents of war having a much greater voice than they did in the run up to Desert Storm. The anti-war demonstrations were just a foretaste of what would happen when the bombs began to drop.

It was not demonstrations in the west however, nor even the fragmenting of imperialist collaboration, which ultimately forced America to back down, though both were factors, and the student mass meeting in Ohio opposing the war clearly shook the Clinton administration. The decisive factor was the threat of a revolutionary conflagration in the Middle East itself.

Any government that backed the USA's aggression faced the possibility of revolution. And, in Israel and the occupied territories, the Zionist state faced a Palestinian population ready to revolt and this time with access, potentially at least, to the arms of the Palestinian Authority security forces.

As the USA retreats from open conflict, the peace movement too is demobilising. It should not. Not only is the threat still there, the sanctions – the outright economic warfare against the Iraqi people – still remain in place. We should step up the campaign for the unconditional lifting of economic sanctions against Iraq and the total, immediate withdrawal of all western troops from the Gulf.

Sanctions are war by economic means. Sanctions have killed a million Iraqi children. In economic war, as in military conflict, socialists take sides with the oppressed against the oppressor. It is the task of the Iraqi people to overthrow Saddam. In all conflicts between Iraq and imperialism, military, diplomatic or economic, we stand for the defeat of imperialism as the only progressive outcome to the conflict. ■

See pages 8, 9 and 10 for background on Imperialism vs Iraq, a joint international statement, and an interview with Iraqi socialists.

## WORKERS POWER

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## SPRING DRAW!

The winner of the WORKERS POWER spring fundraising draw will be announced in the next issue of the paper. The printer's deadline meant that we were unable to get the result in time for publication in this paper. The winner of the travel voucher for a trip to Amsterdam will, however, be notified directly.

## UNION RECOGNITION: Blair backs-off from manifesto pledge

# Time to fight for basic rights

**"THIS ISSUE** could make the lone parent rebellion look like a tea party". This was the response of MSF General Secretary, Roger Lyons, as doubts grew last month about whether Labour would deliver on union recognition.

Lyons, along with virtually all the other union leaders, TUC chief John Monks and 85 Labour backbenchers fear a sell-out by the government. The battle over union recognition could, in the words of Monks, become a "decisive moment" in the history of the British labour movement.

Union recognition means that an employer accepts that members of a trade union in his or her firm have the right to negotiate on their members' behalf. This should be a basic democratic right. But it isn't.

Trade unionists in countless workplaces have to keep their union membership secret. If they were open they would be sacked. Organising a union often has to be done with methods that come straight out of a spy novel.

When union members, like those at Magnet for example, try to use their union to negotiate, the boss simply sacks them, no matter how many years service they have given to the company.

By contrast, bosses' recognition exists in every single firm in Britain. Every worker has to recognise the right of the boss to pay them lousy wages, make them work hours on end, often in unsafe conditions, and fire them at will. There are no ballots on bosses' recognition, and no exemptions. This isn't democracy – it is the law of money, the most sacred law of capitalism.

It is high time that unions had the right to automatic recognition in every workplace where they have members, to win protection against the regime of job insecurity that dominates Britain's workplaces.

In its election manifesto Labour stated that "where a majority of the relevant workforce vote in a ballot for the union to represent them, the union should be recognised". The employers, in the form of the Confederation of British Industry (CBI), have gleefully picked apart this phrasing in the hope of neutering any legislation before it becomes law.

On 5 February, Adair Turner, the CBI's director general, unveiled his wrecking argument. He objects to a simple majority vote and argues that any "yes" vote has to consist of at least half of the workforce eligible to vote. All abstentions in a ballot would count as "no" votes.

Turner states that firms with under 50 employees should be exempt. The CBI wants to preserve the "right" of individuals to negotiate personal contracts with their employers regardless of whether a trade union is recog-

nised in their workplace.

To exempt all employers with under 50 workers means denying the right to union recognition to half of all Britain's workforce. The TUC has already conceded an exemption for firms with fewer than 20 employees. At least the TUC still maintains that personal contracts undermine the whole principle of collective bargaining.

Labour insiders have reported that weeks before the May 1997 election Lord Irvine (now Lord Chancellor) was advocating that Labour support the

BY ALISON HINCHCLIFFE

since the first of Thatcher's anti-union laws. Membership has dropped dramatically: from 12.2 million in 1979 to 6.8 million today. Union density – the proportion of the workforce belonging to a union – has fallen from over 50% in the late 1970s to under 33% now.

The decimation of Britain's highly unionised manufacturing industries accounts for some of this fall, but it cannot conceal the union bureaucrats' cul-

Rupert Murdoch's News International and consists of representatives from Associated British Ports, Midland Bank and BT.

News International's Wapping plant, the second largest industrial site in Greater London, has been non-unionised since the 1985/86 dispute. Murdoch did not go to all that trouble in the 1980s to have the unions just walk back in again. There is widespread suspicion that Blair did a deal with Murdoch on recognition legislation in return for the *Sun's* backing in the election

CBI in the hope of frightening the unions into a compromise. Such a compromise could take the form of a minimum turnout for the recognition vote and exemptions for small firms, with the unions losing the fight on individual contracts.

Even with the best deal envisaged by the unions, the US experience shows that union recognition could easily fail to realise the bureaucrats' modest hopes. The US has had recognition legislation since the 1930s. Sixty years later only 16% of US workers are unionised. The fight for recognition is a long drawn-out battle, often taking up to four years, involving endless legal challenges, bitter campaigns, intimidation and sackings.

In 1992 only a third of ballots for recognition involving more than 500 workers were successful. In 25% of all organising drives, workers are sacked and even where recognition has been won, a third of bosses still refuse to allow collective bargaining. A recent *Observer* article warns that:

"An army of anti-union consultants is already booking plane tickets to offer UK employers their advice."

Union recognition is a crucial issue trade unionists. The current demands, even before any compromise, are utterly inadequate. The fight must be for compulsory recognition in all workplaces where there are union members – no ballots and no exemptions. And union militants must not stop there. We should demand that Labour honour John Smith's 1993 pledge that employment rights should start from day one on the job. We demand Labour scrap all the anti-union laws.

Of course, none of this will happen without a fight. The rank and file must provide the backbone so lacking in the union leaders. Demands for recognition must be backed up by strike action in every workplace where there are enough union members to make a strike stop production. The unions must provide official backing for such action and challenge Labour to grant legal recognition in these cases. This means defying the anti-union laws.

Here we need to say, the laws give the bosses everything they want but don't even guarantee us the right to recognition. Labour must repeal these laws completely and support our right to take action in pursuit of the basic democratic right to union recognition. If it doesn't, we will fight it.

By ramming home this message now, by linking the current organising drives to action, we can revitalise the unions with an influx of young workers and workers from sectors never previously unionised. And we can stop bosses like Gulam Noon and Rupert Murdoch, from trampling over our rights at work. ■



Workers from Critchley Labels, sacked a year ago by bosses refusing to recognise the CWU

CBI's position and that Blair was sympathetic to this. After the election Blair rejected Monks' proposal that legislation on trade union recognition be linked to the minimum wage.

Blair then told Monks and Turner to resolve their differences, hoping that they would come up with a private deal. In the meantime, the Queen's speech in mid-May didn't even mention trade union recognition – making it obvious that it was not on Blair's priority list.

A deal between the CBI and the TUC looks unlikely. Turner's comments and a recent leak implying that Blair is pro-CBI alerted union leaders. Backbenchers threatened another revolt. They met with Margaret Beckett, the supposedly union-friendly President of the Board of Trade, who reassured them that nothing had been decided yet and that they would be consulted before it was. But it is clear that the danger of a sell-out lies ahead.

For the union leaders, recognition is the bottom line. They have seen their membership and influence decrease

pability. They repeatedly failed to mobilise the action needed to fight off the attacks on jobs and the anti-union laws. Instead, they responded to dwindling numbers with name changes, mergers and offering members financial services.

The political weakness of the union movement in the 1980s led to the defeat of the miners and the print unions at Wapping. More recently, in the Liverpool docks dispute, the TGWU bowed to the anti-union laws and refused to make the dispute official.

The bureaucrats have to arrest the decline in union membership. Their own perks and privileges, paid for by members' subs, are under threat. While some unions (TGWU and GMB) have begun recruitment drives, the union leaders main hope lies in the legal right to union recognition.

"Fairness not favours" is what Blair promised the unions before the election. All the favours have, in fact, been going to Labour's new friends among the bosses.

The CBI working party is led by

campaign.

Meanwhile another "friend" of the Labour Party, Gulam Noon, millionaire owner of a food processing factory in Southall, is denying the GMB recognition, despite the fact that 80% of the workforce have joined the union.

So which way will Blair jump when the "Fairness at Work" White Paper is finally published? Press speculation is rife over whether this is the issue that Blair might use as an excuse to break the Labour Party's union link. A recent *Guardian* leader warns of Blair "taking the party to the precipice" if he isn't prepared to concede something meaningful on recognition to the unions.

Party membership is in renewed decline, while trade union funding still accounts for 55% of Labour's income and there are no concrete moves to go for state funding of political parties. It's clear that Blair's business backing is nothing like enough to enable him to break the link now.

Instead Blair is putting the squeeze on the union leaders; siding with the

## UNISON WOMEN'S CONFERENCE

# Action forced off the agenda

**HYPOCRISY IS** alive and well in Britain's biggest union. The top table at the 1998 Unison Women's Conference barred any debate on the 29-month long Hillingdon Hospital workers' dispute.

An amendment to a motion on low pay calling on the National Women's Committee (NWC) to put pressure on Unison's National Executive Committee (NEC) to restore official support to the strike was ruled out of order. The reason? Because the dispute was *sub judice* and any mention of it would "endanger the union".

This is a pathetic and dishonest

excuse; the strikers are taking their case to an industrial tribunal, not the High Court.

It is not support for the Hillingdon women which endangers Unison, it is the leadership's failure to defend the jobs and conditions of a courageous group of low-paid, Asian women. The union has even considered revoking the strikers' rights to full membership.

Gesture politics were the order of the day, but when a *Worker's Power* supporter tried to raise the case of Faith Ryan, a steward in Birmingham currently being disciplined by Unison for so-called harassment of a regional offi-

cial, the microphone was turned off by the top table! Another delegate was castigated by the NWC for labelling Jack Straw a racist for his refusal to scrap the 1996 Asylum and Immigration Act.

Much of conference was given over to motions on proportionality (Unison's complex formula to ensure representation by members of oppressed groups) that aimed to improve the gender balance of committees and leading bodies in a union where 70% of members are women, and to increase the representation of part-time and low-paid women. The motions carried, while crit-

ical of the NWC, still rely on bureaucratic methods of addressing the problem. Grassroots organisation hardly gets a mention.

There were positive moments: firmer support for a woman's right to choose, calling for abortion on demand up to 14 weeks and the extension of the 1967 Act to Northern Ireland and successful motions condemning Labour's benefit attacks. But, apart from a national demo against benefit cuts, no calls for action.

Any proposals for action were ruled out of order, including an emergency motion from Tameside Care Group calling for support for industrial action

against the imposition of new contracts. This was deemed an inappropriate subject for conference discussion and was referred to the relevant service group. But the top table did allow an emergency motion on the Tamworth Two – no, not some activists facing wrongful imprisonment, but the two pigs that escaped from an abattoir in January!

Alongside an intense witch-hunt of the left within the union, the 1998 Women's Conference graphically illustrates the need to build a fighting alternative to the bureaucracy's stranglehold over Unison. ■

## Welfare to work

# Gordon Brown's new deal con-trick

Welfare to Work will be at the heart of Gordon Brown's budget on 17 March. The Chancellor will attempt to present New Labour as pro-big business – striding forward with the employers, yet radically seeking new ways to beat poverty and improve the lot of women, children and the young unemployed. Closer inspection reveals just where the Iron Chancellor's real affiliations lie, writes **John McKee**.

**I**T'S AN unlikely sight. An employer stands up and harangues passengers on an inter-city train. He makes an impassioned plea to other employers to step forward and join Labour's New Deal. Passengers look embarrassed and giggle. By the end of the government's TV advert, tens of thousands of bosses converge and the voice-over informs us that a "revolution" is about to happen.

Launched nationally in April, the New Deal in its first phase is aimed at 18-24 year-olds, who have been unemployed and claiming benefit for six months. In June it will be extended to those over 25 who have been unemployed for two years or more, and in October to lone parents and the disabled.

In April, if you are young and unemployed, after six months on benefit you will be summoned to an interview at the JobCentre and given a "personal advisor". You will then be placed in the "Gateway", to improve your "jobsearch skills" i.e. getting sent to job clubs or put on courses. This period can last up to four months and the government expects up to 40% to get jobs as a result.

If you refuse you will be given four options: a subsidised job with a private employer, full-time education or training, work in the voluntary sector or a place on an "environmental task force". All these options last six months.

Gordon Brown was reported as saying, "no young person will be staying in bed on benefit in future".

Refusal to comply at any stage can lead to sanctions. For example, missing an advisory interview or refusal to sign a jobseekers' agreement without good cause can lead to termination of benefits for good. Refusing an offer of a job on the Gateway can lead to 26 weeks loss of benefit. Refusing or dropping out of a six month placement can result in loss of benefit for two to four weeks.

The whole Welfare to Work programme represents a fundamental change in how the welfare benefits system is run. It is based on programmes developed in the United States under Reagan and Bush and enthusiastically taken up by Clinton's Democrats.

## Developed

In Britain the modern social security and unemployment benefits system was developed as a "safety net" paid for by those in work. These were to be drawn on as of right during periods of unemployment or sickness.

The Welfare to Work system attacks the very notion of a right to unemployment benefit. It takes one step further the Tories "jobseekers' allowance". It is part of an ideological attack on the unemployed putting the blame on the

claimant if they have no job. It aims to encourage the discipline that is supposed to be lacking among the unemployed.

In doing all this it diverts attention away from the real causes of unemployment, the capitalist system; a system which constantly throws people out of work in its search for greater profitability, and produces regular periods of mass unemployment because of its inherent boom-slump cycle. And when it does provide jobs it offers the mass of workers only poverty wages that have to be topped up by state handouts to provide a family living wage.

No socialist or trade unionist is in favour of young people being left to rot on benefit, and New Labour has played on this to rally support for its New Deal programme within the unions, promoting the scheme as part of its pay-back to the working class. It argues that the "windfall tax" on the privatised utilities, now estimated at £5.2 billion, will be used to provide 250,000 young people with jobs and training.

Bill Morris, leader of the TGWU, is typical in his praise for the scheme.

In a recent interview in the *New Statesman* he declared: "I see the £5 billion on a windfall tax as redistribution. Is that new labour in the current rhetoric? In the end the government will be judged on whether they deliver and I have every faith that they will."

How losing your right to the unemployment benefits that are paid for by your taxes and National Insurance is redistribution is hard to fathom. The only redistribution is from one set of bosses to another.

The scheme makes no secret of the fact that its primary purpose is to place young unemployed workers with private employers. It offers these employers a £60 a week subsidy, for six months, for every New Dealer they take on, plus a one off grant of £750 for one day a week training. Tesco estimates that it will save £6 million in staff costs by joining the New Deal. A very New Labour redistribution of wealth!

In the USA one of the first impacts of Welfare to Work was the shedding of existing workers and their replacement by state-subsidised employees. Employment Service guidelines make it clear that this should not happen, but it is left to the ES to investigate.

What constitutes off-the-job training is left vague and the failure of an employer to provide training does not figure in the ES's "good causes" for leaving a compulsory programme. So a young person finding that the training provided on a job was non-existent could still have their benefit withdrawn if they left.

What is clear is that the vast major-

ity of these jobs are going to be offering poverty pay levels. The only condition that the government has placed on employers is that they do not pay less than the £60 subsidy – £1.50 an hour! In Rotherham, one of the pilot areas for the scheme, the council is taking on recruits at £93.60 a week (£2.34 an hour) and is enthusiastic about Welfare to Work, having raised £300,000 from other sources to finance it. Young people on other options – voluntary work or the environmental task force – get an even worse deal being paid benefits plus £15 a week.

## Exclude

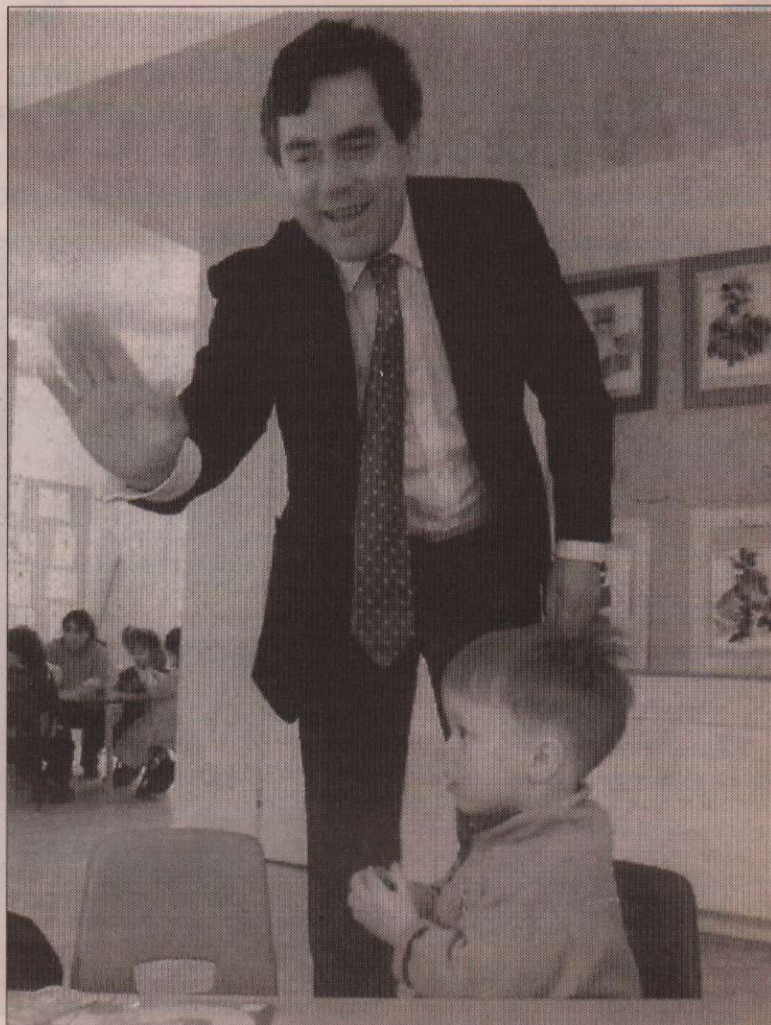
With these sorts of wages being the norm it is easy to see why Labour ministers are so desperate to exclude young people and trainees from the forthcoming minimum wage provisions.

Research in the United States on the impact of Welfare to Work policies showed that driving people off benefits increased competition for what are called "entry level" jobs, i.e. cheap labour. The Economic Policy Institute estimated that already low pay levels fell by a further 12%.

It is an urgent task for the trade union and workers' movement to stop the New Deal being used in the same way here. Every local trade union and unemployed organisation should monitor the abuse of the system and campaign to force the government to change it. We should demand that all New Dealers are paid at least the minimum wage called for by the TUC – £4.61 an hour.

The unions should launch a campaign to recruit New Dealers, taking advantage of the ES guidelines that insist on the right to join a union. This should be combined with a massive campaign around the JobCentres, including occupations, warning of the dangers of the New Deal and building a fighting organisation of young workers linked to the trade unions to struggle for improvements.

But Welfare to Work, however it is reformed, will provide no long term answer to the millions rotting on the dole. No doubt Labour will claim great success for the scheme, because as long as the economy is growing there will be no shortage of bosses with outstretched



Brown's hand outs will not help this child have a better future

hands clamouring for subsidies to "create jobs". But everyone knows that a recession in 1999 or 2000 could throw hundreds of thousands of young workers back on the dole.

Instead of recycling money from one set of employers to another, we demand that the government takes immediate steps to provide work for the unemployed, or provide benefits at the rate of the minimum wage. The compulsion element of Labour's New Deal, forcing young people into criminality or onto the fringes of society if they do not conform, must be scrapped. Far from integrating the next generation into society as creative, dignified individuals, Brown's programme is designed to crush their spirit.

Instead of subsidising private childcare facilities, public sector crèches, nurseries and youth clubs should provide a free of charge, high quality, 24-hour service for all parents, in or out of work. This step alone would lift a huge burden from the shoulders of working class women, knowing that the loss of their temporary job would

not immediately effect their child's well-being.

Labour will squeal that the money simply isn't there. Yet the windfall tax shows just how much money is there. Such are the profits of the British capitalists that quite a few companies could cough up an extra £5 billion. A massive tax on business and a wealth tax could bring in billions upon billions to finance any number of programmes.

A huge programme of public works, under the control of the trade unions with full training given for the workers, would really start to achieve the transfer of people from welfare and into work. Rebuilding and renovating our schools, homes and hospitals, and constructing fully integrated public transport systems throughout our towns and cities would provide tens of thousands of jobs.

But this will only be achieved by a mass campaign to stop Labour acting in the interest of the employers and start acting on behalf of the unemployed workers, women and youth. This would really be a New Deal. ■

## Labour's Welfare U turn?

THE GOVERNMENT seemed to have learnt something from the fiasco at the end of last year, when 47 rebel MPs voted against the £11 a week cut in single parent benefits.

A cabinet leak has revealed that the cuts will be restored through the new Working Families Tax Credit (replacing Family Credit and available to all lone parents and couples earning less than £20,000 a year), and increasing the child premium for those on income support.

But initial excitement at the news that the government were planning to

spend billions on a childcare tax credit, again for those on under £20,000, to pay for up to 75% of childcare costs for those in work, was premature. The potential for "a massive redistribution towards the poor", the political saviour of rebel backbenchers, seems to have been lost in the midst of cabinet wrangles.

Gordon Brown told an audience of businessmen and women in Glasgow at the end of last month that "there will be no return to soft options in public spending... With a £400bn national debt, £25bn a year interest payments,

a borrowing requirement of £25bn, ensuring prudence is our priority."

New Labour's real concern is not fighting poverty but allaying the fears of big business. And with Blair ruling out any tax breaks for childcare until 2000 and quoting figures of around £200 million rather than billions, it looks like Harriet Harman is in trouble again.

The scheme, if and when it does materialise, is only likely to benefit families with no existing childcare arrangements and who are on incomes well below £20,000. ■

## BRITISH FASCISM: Routed on the streets

# How the workers beat Mosley

Sir Oswald Mosley, MP, split from Labour to form the New Party in March 1931, together with a group of left MPs. By October 1932 Mosley had transformed the party into the British Union of Fascists.

**Paul Morris** recounts the events that led to his movement's defeat.

**O**SWALD MOSLEY started out as a Tory and was, by background, a rich aristocrat. But he clashed with the Conservatives over Ireland in the early 1920s. Inside the Labour Party, Mosley fought for a traditional Labour left programme. But the New Party was explicitly non-socialist.

Defeat at the 1931 General Election, growing economic crisis – and a visit to Mussolini in Italy – pushed Mosley towards creating an open fascist movement in mid-1932.

Mosley posed a real threat. He had money to spare, charisma, capable lieutenants in the shape of a dozen former socialist organisers who stayed with him to found the British Union of Fascists (BUF), as well as complex ties with the capitalist establishment.

Between October 1932 and June 1934 the BUF grew rapidly. Mosley contributed at least £100,000 to enable it to employ 150 full-time staff. He rented a barracks in Kings Road, Chelsea where 200 BUF paramilitaries drilled and trained in blackshirt uniforms.

In addition, the BUF attracted moral and financial backing from several key industrial capitalists. Mosley's most prominent supporter was press baron, Lord Rothermere, whose *Daily Mail* splashed the infamous headline "Hurrah for the Blackshirts" on 15 January 1934. He was also backed by Vickers' boss, Lord Armstrong, car magnate Sir William Morris and extremist Tories.

Fascism plays a specific role for the ruling class: it is a weapon of last resort against workers' revolution when all else fails. When even the army, police and security services cannot contain the workers' movement, the capitalists have to call on a mass reactionary movement. To build such a movement they have to delve into the "lower classes" using a mixture of crude economic radicalism and racism – and they have to control the streets.

## Crisis

Despite the severe recession of the early 1930s, the economic crisis did not mature into a revolutionary one. What bosses like Morris, Rothermere and Armstrong wanted was a strong, right-wing authoritarian movement that could act as an auxiliary to the police in the event of general strike.

Mosley cut himself adrift from the mainstream ruling class when, in early 1934, he launched a struggle for street supremacy in key working class areas. The Labour leaders urged workers to ignore Mosley. But working class socialists in the Independent Labour Party (ILP) and Communist Party (CP) recognised the BUF as a real threat: the fight against fascism in Britain was on.

Local historian Nigel Todd gives a vivid account of the BUF's attempt to take on the workers' movement in Tyneside in 1934 in his book *In Excited Times*. The CP's Newcastle bookshop was smashed up. Fascist open-air meetings were held at marketplaces in Newcastle and Sunderland, protected by uniformed blackshirts.

The BUF then tried to attack an ILP rally outside a dole office on May Day



Mosley and his blackshirts, just before losing another round to the workers

1934 and got battered by the angry crowd. Todd writes:

"By threatening a May Day meeting... the BUF unwittingly produced an entirely new situation. Instead of responding to fascist violence the strategy of anti-fascism on Tyneside now changed to one of completely breaking the BUF."

On 10 May the Newcastle Anti-Fascist League was formed. It consisted of 200 uniformed defence stewards "almost exclusively working class and fifty per cent of that out of work", according to one participant. Street battles in Newcastle and Gateshead on 13 and 14 May decisively changed the situation.

Workers turned out in their thousands to prevent fascist demonstrations. The fascists were penned into their Newcastle HQ by the angry crowd. As one fascist wrote: "The large branch room, with its floor covered in blood and groaning men, was a gruesome sight".

Throughout this period, the Labour leadership and the union leaders – as well as many local Labour branches – urged the workers to stay away from anti-fascist demos. In March 1933, straight after Hitler seized power in Germany, the Labour leaders issued the statement that "Communist dictatorship, or fear of it, has led to fascist dictatorship".

But rank and file workers ensured that the Tyneside experience was repeated all over Britain: the workers' movement was waking up to the danger of fascism and learning that, to defeat it, they had to smash it physically as well as providing a socialist answer to the politics of despair it offered.

Nationally, June 1934 proved a turning point for the BUF because of one high-profile event: the Olympia Rally of 7 June. Thousands of blackshirts and far-right Tories filled the Olympia exhi-

bition hall in London. In a well planned counter-demo the Communist Party surrounded the hall with thousands of anti-fascists and also infiltrated the proceedings.

The police, while struggling to contain the crowds outside, used an archaic legal loophole to justify staying outside the hall. The result, as described by one far-right Tory, "looked like a Russian pogrom". Every few minutes squads of fascist stewards jumped on the protesters and beat them senseless, in the full glare of the spotlights Mosley had ordered for the occasion.

## There is nothing in the "national character" of Britain that guards against a turn to murderous fascist reaction

Olympia was a bloody setback for the anti-fascists. But newsreel film was shown all over Britain, rousing millions of workers to reject the Labour Party line of "ignore Mosley". Meanwhile, Mosley's Tory sympathisers were appalled. Many quietly slipped away, including all the BUF's high-profile industrial backers.

Olympia has gone down in history as the watershed for the BUF. But history has ignored the struggles, such as those in Newcastle, replicated in Glasgow and the Welsh valleys, which actually did the decisive damage to the BUF as a street-level movement.

After being routed at the General Election of November 1935, Mosley returned to street politics – this time concentrating his forces against the Jewish population of East London. Mosley had failed in a frontal assault on the working class areas; now he tried a "divide and rule" strategy, realising that successful fascist movements "divide

then rule" the working class.

Major confrontations followed in 1936 in Tonypandy, Oxford and at London's Albert Hall. In each case the police subjected the anti-fascists to brutal attacks. The culmination of the BUF's attempted revival came in London's East End between August and October 1936.

During these three months the BUF drenched the streets of East London with a sustained campaign of racist intimidation. The three London boroughs of Stepney, Shoreditch and Bethnal Green contained 60% of the UK's Jewish population. Of these, half lived in the overcrowded and poverty-stricken borough of Stepney.

The working class Jews of the East End were to be the scapegoats in Mosley's plan. Constant street propaganda was his method. A mass confrontation with, and victory over, the workers' organisations was his goal.

It is important to point out here that, contrary to the impression given by Channel Four's lamentable drama series, anti-semitism played an important part in the BUF's propaganda from the word go. But it is true that Mosley emphasised anti-semitism after his first attempt to smash the left in the industrial areas was defeated.

After a sustained three-month racist campaign Mosley announced his master stroke. There was to be a mass fascist parade through the East End, with Mosley "reviewing the Blackshirt troops" who would proceed to four open air meetings. The date was set for Sunday 4 October. The fascists were challenging the East End working class to a showdown. And that is what they got.

The full details of the Battle of Cable Street have been recounted in many places. Mosley's 3,000 stormtroops formed up near Tower Bridge, protected by 6,000 police. Against them was a crowd estimated at between 300,000 and half a million – mainly London workers, including the vast majority of the Jews of the East End.

Tram drivers disabled their trams to



and establishing the right of police to enter public meetings. Many on the left, including the Labour Party and TUC leaders, had called for the fascists to be banned and now welcomed the three month ban on demonstrations in London instituted under the new act.

But it soon became clear that the left itself was the main target. The "three month ban" on blackshirt marches in the East End was renewed every three months between 1936 and the outbreak of war in 1939. Anti-fascists consistently found themselves on the receiving end of police brutality as the ban was extended to all "extremist" activity.

Meanwhile, as the first anniversary of Cable Street approached, Mosley planned another march – from Westminster to Bermondsey in south east London. But the workers rallied once again, blocking the fascists' path at Borough High Street with a crowd estimated at more than 100,000.

## Attitude

Between 1936 and 1939 a split broke out within the ruling class over its attitude to Hitler and Mussolini. A powerful faction around former King Edward VIII – who abdicated in 1936 partly as a result of the split – wanted "appeasement" with Nazi Germany as a protection against Russia and the threat of revolution. Paradoxically, this network of fascist sympathisers within the ruling class now worked overtime to distance themselves from the BUF, whose attraction was diminished as the true scale of Nazi repression in Germany, and fascist Spain and Italy, was revealed.

By 1940, when Mosley and a hard core of BUF members were imprisoned for supporting Germany at war with Britain, the fascist movement was a spent force.

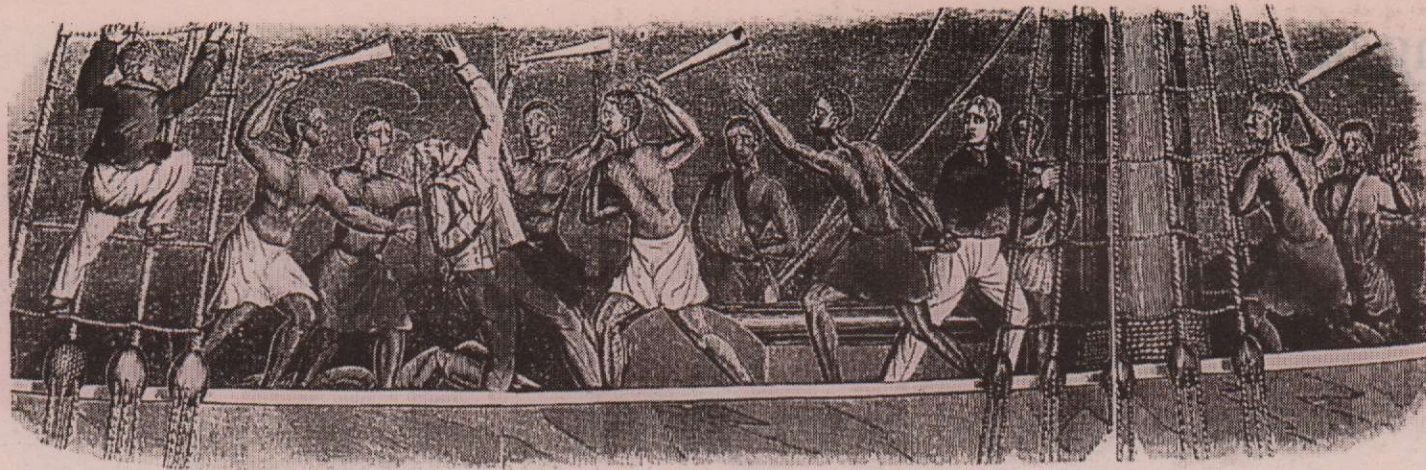
There is a strong cultural tradition that says "the English are too mild for fascism". George Orwell, the ILP member and Spanish Civil War veteran, propounded this wrong theory throughout World War Two.

There is nothing in the "national character" of Britain that guards against a turn to murderous fascist reaction. If the British ruling class failed to reach for the fascist weapon in the mid-1930s it was because the crisis never reached the depths that it did in Italy, Germany and Spain.

## Anti-fascists

At the same time, however, the working class struggle against fascism injected its own logic. If the workers of Glasgow, the Valleys and Newcastle had not chased Mosley off the streets in 1934; if hundreds of anti-fascists had not got themselves hospitalised at Olympia; and if Mosley had made it down Cable Street, the workers' organisations would have been all the weaker. And the fascists would have grown in strength.

Mosley was weakened by the failure of an economic crisis to develop into revolutionary crisis. He was also weakened by his own tactical ineptness and personal philandering, amply illustrated in the Channel Four series. All these things weakened Mosley: but he was beaten by the working class. ■



Left: A contemporary view of the Amistad affair

# Spielberg's history of slavery

**M**ORE THAN 130 years after the abolition of chattel slavery in the United States, its poisonous legacy still influences US history. The exceptional virulence of racism against African-Americans, residential segregation in virtually every US city and the criminalisation of nearly one in four black men aged 18 to 29 – all have their roots in the “peculiar institution” of slavery in America.

Very few films have attempted to address slavery in the US in spite – or perhaps because – of its obvious importance in shaping American society. So the decision by Steven Spielberg, the most commercially successful director in the history of Hollywood, to make a two hour and 35 minute epic focusing on an incident in the 19th century slave trade is significant.

## Serious

Five years after *Schindler's List* and ten years after *The Color Purple*, Spielberg is again in serious film mode. Despite its political defects, *Schindler's List*, was a fine work of popular cinema. *Amistad*, sadly, is not in the same league.

Off the Cuban coast in 1839 fifty men, abducted months before from their villages in west Africa, revolted against their captors on a Spanish-registered ship, *La Amistad*. Two Spanish profiteers had purchased the men at a slave market in Havana. The survivors of the revolt, after further weeks at sea, eventually found themselves in the custody of the US navy which

## G R McColl reviews *Amistad* directed by Steven Spielberg

### On general release

captured the vessel off the New England coast.

The black slaves, victims of a trade which had, in theory, been outlawed by an international treaty more than 30 years before, found themselves shackled in a Connecticut jail while the US legal system deliberated over their fate. A cast of comic lawyers, cynical politicians and Christian evangelists determined to save their souls, variously bewilders and frustrates these men.

*Amistad* has some undeniably powerful moments, including a graphic depiction of the reality of life aboard a Portuguese slave transporter crossing the Atlantic.

Blessed by a Catholic priest, the crew of the *Escuda* maintains its control over hundreds of men, women and children through a reign of terror conducted through shootings and whippings. Human beings become so much disposable ballast, reduced to a state far more desperate than that of any young calf on a cross-Channel ferry.

In addition to capturing the horror of the global traffic in human beings, the screenplay is occasionally both witty and illuminating. One scene depicts the child queen Isabella of Spain (pursuing her two subjects' “property rights”)

dictating a letter to the then US president Martin Van Buren in which she pompously declares that “the business of great nations is business.” Van Buren himself appears as a corrupt coward, abusing his presidential powers to appoint a stooge judge for the trial in the vain hope of retaining those powers after the 1840 election.

A White House dinner party features a meeting between Van Buren and the Southern demagogue, Senator John C Calhoun, in which Calhoun's threats of Southern secession are more than enough to persuade the Northern Democrat to press ahead with the prosecution of the *Amistad* rebels.

Though there is no question of the men becoming slave labour in the USA, Calhoun, of the agrarian capitalist “plantocracy” of the South, argues that the bodies of these men can be bought and sold like any other commodity, and that they are therefore the property of the Spanish traders.

## Superficial

Serious weaknesses overshadow the superficial cleverness of the screenplay. The black actor Morgan Freeman has top billing in the cast, yet his role as the fictional abolitionist Theodore Joadson is severely under developed. Similarly, the treatment of the rebellious slaves is sympathetic but simplistic. Their leader, conveniently christened Joseph Cinque by the Spanish slave traders, played by Djimon Hounsou, is a one-dimensional character.

Spielberg and script-writer David

Franzoni encourage the audience to view the Africans as “noble savages”. Inexplicably, the film includes subtitles of the dialogue between the Spanish slave-traders, yet the words of the Mende-speaking west Africans remain untranslated for more than the first half hour of the film.

The film also distorts the role of Britain, suggesting that the British were somehow ardent abolitionists. While Peter Firth portrays a British naval officer full of righteous anger at the slave trade and committed to smashing the fortress on the Sierra Leone coast which holds people for export as slaves, the US Civil War actually divided the British ruling class.

Key sections of it sided with the South, some in the hope of maintaining the indefinite flow of cheap cotton imports, others with an eye to the competitive threat posed by the rapid expansion of industrial capital in the Northern states.

In many ways *Amistad* follows the formula for the classic Hollywood tear-jerker. This reaches its climax in an impassioned plea to the US Supreme Court calling for the Africans' release by the venerable John Quincy Adams, a former president, who spends his twilight years as a maverick Congressional representative from Massachusetts. The Adams' speech, as delivered by Anthony Hopkins, is a masterful display of bourgeois democratic oratory, actually distilled from an eight-hour monologue presented over the course of two days.

The film achieves a dramatic climax with the Supreme Court speech, but Spielberg includes an unfortunate epilogue, which compresses more than 25 years of history into two or three minutes. The film makes no mention of the fact that the slave trade actually continued long after the apparent victory in the *Amistad* case.

Indeed, at the end of the 1850s the trade reached its highest ever levels. Marx and Engels quote a Congressional report from 1860 suggesting that 15,000 slaves had been imported that year alone.

The US Civil War, the bloodiest in the nation's history, becomes an almost trivial footnote, finally marking the end in 1864 of Queen Isabella's attempts to retrieve the “property” which had revolted on *La Amistad*.

## Ignorant

If an audience did not already know better before entering the cinema, it might leave ignorant of the fact that the Civil War, which lasted four years and claimed hundreds of thousands of lives, took place before the demise of chattel slavery.

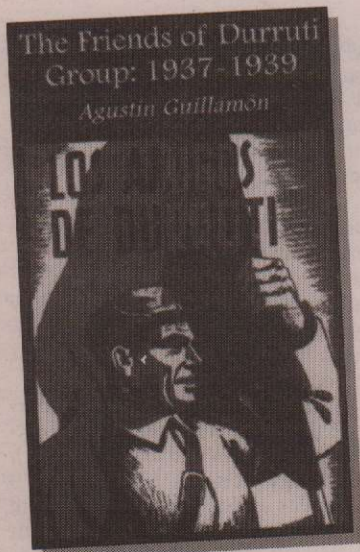
The end of the “peculiar institution” came not through the polished discourse of John Quincy Adams in a courtroom but by force of arms.

If you are after entertainment but with a serious edge, the film delivers. But if you want to find out about the real history of the slave trade, don't ask Spielberg because you won't find it in *Amistad*. ■

## BOOKS: The Friends of Durruti

# Anarchism in the Spanish Civil War

**Dave Green reviews**  
*The Friends of Durruti Group: 1937-39*  
by Agustin Guillamón  
(AK Press) £7.95



**T**HIS FASCINATING book should be read by anyone interested in the great events of the Spanish revolution of 1931-39. It provides an account of the work and ideas of an important organisation on the revolutionary left of the Spanish workers' movement – the Friends of Durruti.

Anarchism played a very important role in the Spanish revolution. After Franco's fascist rebellion in 1936, it was members of the mass anarchist trade union CNT that took a leading part in organising resistance, seizing and distributing arms, establishing revolutionary committees, and taking over control of large scale industrial enterprises. Within a week all transport in the Spanish republic was under the control of the CNT and the socialist union, the UGT.

But the anarchist leaders betrayed the revolutionary movement, joining the capitalist popular front government led by the reformist Largo Caballero. The government proceeded to use its anarchist ministers to help sell its capitalist measures – taking land back from the peasants, appointing directors to remove workers' control of industry, and removing democratic control from the workers' militias that were flourishing all over Spain.

The friends of Durruti were named

after a heroic leader of the anarchist fighting militia who fell in the early months of the civil war. They completely opposed the sell-out of the CNT leaders and at first appealed to traditional anarchist principles to reject collaboration with the capitalist government.

What comes through very clearly from this book, however, is that the logic of the revolution and the need to overthrow the bourgeois Republican government propelled the Friends of Durruti – irrespective of their ideological starting point – away from anarchism and towards the programme of revolutionary Trotskyism.

In May 1937 the government in Catalonia, part of the popular front and under the influence of the Stalinists, launched a major counter-revolutionary offensive in Barcelona. They sent police and state militia against the CNT members who were in control of the Telephone Exchange in the centre of the city. The anarchists resisted and a general strike ensued.

Across Catalonia the government was paralysed – hundreds of thousands of CNT members rallied to their union and the defence of the revolution. The bourgeois government could have been overthrown and replaced with a workers' government based on committees of worker, peasant and soldier dele-

gates. This was the programme of the small Trotskyist group in Spain at that time – the Bolshevik-Leninists, led by G. Munis.

The CNT leaders completely failed the test. They issued a disgraceful appeal to their members to leave the barricades in the interests of “unity” – surrendering working class control and the fate of the revolution to the Stalinists and social-democrats, who were desperate to preserve capitalism, and an alliance with their false friends in the governments of Britain and France.

As CNT members tore up their union cards and copies of the CNT paper in disgust, the Friends of Durruti organised opposition to this betrayal. But anarchism's opposition to any form of state power – including working class state power – could not provide them with practical answers. This book shows with crystal clarity how the Friends of Durruti began to develop answers to the revolutionary crisis based on the need for the workers to overthrow the government and erect an alternative authority in its place.

The Friends of Durruti, and their leading theoretician Badius, were well aware that this concept represented a radical departure from anarchism. They issued posters and handbills which insisted on the need for a clear politi-

cal programme and the establishment of what they called a revolutionary junta, defined as being a state based on delegates of the working class, to destroy the capitalists and their parties. Their decidedly non-anarchist message was:

“All power to the working class. All economic power to the unions. Rather than the Generalidad [Catalan Government], a revolutionary junta!”

The Trotskyists constantly appealed to the Friends of Durruti and the left-wing of the centrist POUM party to unite in action and discuss the formation of a new party on a clear revolutionary programme. But despite their actual break with anarchist conceptions, the Friends of Durruti still regarded themselves as anarchists and viewed Marxism with great suspicion, encouraged in this by the crimes of the Stalinists.

The anarchist printing house AK Press have done a real service to the revolutionary movement by bringing this book to a wider audience. Ironically, they have done anarchism itself no favours. For, as the author concludes from the whole history of the Friends of Durruti's heroic struggle:

“The Spanish Revolution was the tomb of anarchism as a revolutionary theory of the proletariat.” ■

## The making of a semi-colony

# IMPERIALISM

The recent crisis in Iraq has revived a debate on where socialists should stand in the event of an armed conflict between the US/UK and Saddam's regime. The answer lies in a clear understanding of Iraq's status in the world capitalist order. **Keith Harvey** and **Richard Brenner** investigate the history of Iraq and explain its continued subordination to western imperialism.

## What is imperialism?

**F**OR MARXISTS the word imperialism has a specific meaning. It does not just mean one country conquering another. It means the modern system of exploitation and oppression under which a few rich and developed capitalist nations keep the rest of the world in poverty and under-development.

At the start of this century the world was divided between oppressed states and oppressor states. On the one side stood a handful of big imperialist powers. On the other side lay the colonies, forcibly seized by the imperialists during the preceding decades and centuries and subject to direct rule and shameless plunder.

States such as Britain and France had huge industrial and banking sectors. In their quest for profits and raw materials they were impelled to strike out abroad into relatively under-developed parts of the globe. By force of arms the governments of these rich nations divided the world between them, securing stable and protected markets for goods and capital investments, and a source of cheap labour.

The imperialists introduced capitalist relations of production into the colonial world, but in an uneven and distorted way. The great powers had developed their own enterprises embracing everything from light to

heavy industry, from consumer goods to plant and machinery.

Industrial development in the oppressed countries was subordinated to the needs and rhythms of these giant companies within a growing world economy.

Indigenous capitalism was severely undermined, as in India, by cheap imports. Often countries with a particularly valuable raw material (oil, coffee, rubber etc.) would be deliberately confined to producing this and at best a few related industries, and the profits accrued would mainly benefit the imperialist companies and only secondarily a small layer of the local ruling class.

## What is a semi-colony?

**T**ODAY, AS IN 1916 when Lenin wrote his pamphlet *Imperialism*, we can still speak of the imperialist powers as centres of monopoly finance capital; robber states vying with each other for advantage in the exploitation of the non-imperialist world.

But since 1945 the non-imperialist countries have undergone a fundamental change in their relationship with the imperialist powers.

After the Second World War the USA aimed to abolish the old order of protected colonial empires. It established military and political supremacy and, on the basis of this, a world market for its goods and used this to pressure its allies and enemies alike to relinquish most of their colonial possessions.

This US dominance coincided with a rise of national liberation struggles against the old imperialist powers, primarily France and Britain, which played a vital role in ending direct colonial rule. From Africa and the Middle East to South East Asia an era of "independ-

ence" dawned for the former colonies.

Did this mean they had escaped subjugation to imperialism? No. The system of colonial exploitation was replaced by a system of semi-colonies, countries like Argentina and Iran which Lenin had described as "politically and formally independent but in fact . . . enmeshed in the net of financial and diplomatic dependence".

In 1916 Lenin viewed these as "transitional" forms, which would inevitably be colonised as inter-imperialist rivalry intensified. But in the post-war order erected by USA the semi-colonial exception became the norm.

Imperialist finance capital was able to control the independent Third World countries through the operation of multinational companies and through loans, and assisted by what Lenin called "its friend diplomacy", the threat of imperialist intervention and the covert operations of military and intelligence forces.

There are many advantages of this

new system for the imperialists. The denial of formal political independence often gave rise to revolutionary nationalist movements against imperialism. In turn, such mass revolts posed the question of which class ruled – the capitalist system itself was threatened.

With the semi-colonial system, however, imperialism's stranglehold is hidden. By nurturing local ruling elites and playing one country off against another, imperialism hopes to derail any opposition. As a last resort, the rulers can always be dumped if they prove too unreliable or attacked if they dare to challenge imperialism's interests.

Few who claim to be Leninists would today deny that such backwaters of poverty and underdevelopment as Bangladesh or Bolivia constitute classic semi-colonies. But it is the emergence of developed and industrialised semi-colonies like Iraq, and their resultant military ambitions and adventures, which has led many to call into question the division of the world into



US troops still occupy the Gulf

oppressor and oppressed nations, and to challenge the whole analysis of the structure of imperialist exploitation outlined by Lenin.

This challenge also conveniently eradicates the need for revolutionaries to support such countries in military conflicts with imperialism. They argue that the ability of states like Argentina and Iraq to mount military

adventures in their region is paramount in defining them as something other than semi-colonies.

However, the current crisis stems directly from Iraq's failure – despite its immense oil wealth in the 1970s – to escape from the semi-colonial restrictions imposed on its economy by imperialist governments, banks and multinationals.

## Iraq – anatomy of a semi-colony

**I**RAQ'S BORDERS were drawn by British civil servants and intelligence officers after the carve up of the old Ottoman Empire. Its early capitalist economy was dominated by the Iraq Petroleum Company (IPC). Established in 1928 it included five of the eight western companies which between them dominated world oil production and distribution. BP and Shell controlled nearly 50% of the company between them.

The concessions to explore Iraqi territory were prised out of the Iraqi royal family as the price for political independence. By the end of the 1930s the country was divided up into oil concessions to the big US and British companies.

There was supposed to be provision for Iraqi nationals to buy into the IPC but this was effectively blocked. During the whole period of the rule of the

IPC over Iraq the multi nationals controlled the evolution and development of the country in their interests. They restricted the amount of revenue that was deducted from the oil profits of the IPC. Up to 1952 the government gained only \$1.75 per tonne sold.

The IPC also had it in its power to sell the oil to its "customers" abroad (in reality another branch of the same network) at a superficially low price, often below the prevailing world market price. This ensured the official profits which Iraq took a share of, were low.

Despite its independence Iraq was a classic semi-colony. All the major decisions about its economy were under the control of the major benefactors of that economy; the imperialist oil companies.

Compared to the pre-war situation when oil output from Iraq was small, the booming 1950s demanded more and more. This put revenues at the

state's disposal for some measure of industrial development, raising the possibility of a gradual diversification of the Iraqi economy and the promise of an eventual break with its semi-colonial condition.

When Colonel Qasim led a nationalist revolution against the royal family in 1958 he declared:

"We are fighting for the industrialisation of our republic and the ending of our dependence on the sale of crude oil."

But the class structure of Iraqi society – one nurtured and protected by imperialism – stood in the way. The overwhelming bulk of the profits from oil that stayed in Iraq went directly to the tribal landlords and was invested in trade and land rather than industry. The small amount of manufacturing was confined to food, drink and textiles, purely for the home market.

In the 1960s, as global oil produc-

tion increased in line with the long boom the IPC kept the production of oil from the Iraqi fields well below potential capacity, preferring to maximise output elsewhere. Iraq's income was dependent on increasing the volume of production but this was outside of its control. This is a perfect illustration of the way in which the semi-colonial system of exploitation works; Iraq's overall pace and direction of economic development was kept within the limits and at a tempo of imperialism's choosing.

Matters changed considerably after the bourgeois nationalist Ba'athist revolution finally triumphed in 1968. Between 1972 and 1975 the Iraqi government nationalised the holdings of the IPC entirely, after negotiating compensation. These years coincided with the first oil price rises of OPEC. Taken together this improved the finan-

cial situation of the Iraq government at a stroke. Oil revenue in 1972 was about \$1 billion. On the eve of war with Iran in 1980 it was to register \$26 billion a year and rising. But how were these revenues used?

Manufacturing certainly increased during the 1970s; it grew at about 11% per annum. Investments in industry, controlled by the state banking sector, did allow for the development of a new layer of the Iraqi capitalist class – primarily one involved in contracting for services in trade and construction.

It was the state itself which undertook the largest volume of investments; in heavy industry and high technology. Between 1969 and 1979 there was an 80% increase in state owned industrial establishments. But the pattern of these investments only underscored Iraq's dependence upon oil and imperialism.



# DEMAND IRAQ

## Is Iraq a minor imperialist power?

**M**ANY WHO reject the notion of Iraq as a semi-colony place great emphasis upon the creation of an economy that is highly stratified, highly monopolised—controlled and owned by an Iraqi ruling class.

However, the tendency towards state ownership and monopolisation of the economy is not evidence that Iraq is imperialist or even "proto-imperialist". Wherever capitalism lays down its roots the tendency for the centralisation and concentration of capital occurs. In semi-colonies many states inheriting a weak or non-existent bourgeoisie have to rely on the state as a forcing house for the accumulation of capital.

Nor does the existence of an economy relatively free of penetration by imperialist multinational capital prove that it has broken free of semi-colonial subordination. There are many ways in which imperialist capital can subordinate the development of a nominally independent economy to its own designs.

In the 1970s, far from breaking free of its dependence upon oil as a result of acquiring great financial wealth, Iraq increased its dependence on this one commodity with dramatic consequences.

Over half of the investments in this decade went into oil exploration or increasing productivity in the oil industry. Other investments went into the associated industries of chemicals and petro-chemicals. Most of these depend upon exporting their products in order to be viable but their costs of production are reckoned to be at least 50% to 75% higher than those produced in the west. Consequently these industries, far from making an export surplus, are subsidised by the oil revenues.

Nor did Iraq make much progress with refining its own crude oil which would have considerably increased the value of its exports. By 1988 of the 2.8 million barrels a day (b/d) of crude oil that Iraq extracts from the ground only 400,000 b/d are refined inside the country—a figure barely above what is consumed in Iraq itself.

It is in the nature of oil industries that they do not lead to a related development in infrastructure: transport, communications etc. Ports and pipeline facilities are the basic requirements for an oil based economy. But these do not automatically aid the rounded development of other industries. It was only in the plans drawn up for the 1980s that a modern motorway and railway system were envisaged; plans that were aborted



Coffins carry the victim's of imperialism's blockade

by the war with Iran, the Gulf war and the ensuing sanctions.

Overwhelming reliance upon one commodity, even one as profitable as oil, always carries the danger of major problems if the price does not hold up. From a 1981 high of \$36.90 a barrel the price of oil plummeted in 1986 to around \$14 before recovering to around \$18. Iraq could not compensate for this halving of the price because it had failed to develop a broader economic base.

The industrial development that did take place, narrow as it was, was dependent upon imperialist multinational companies. After 1973 Iraq imported \$2 billion worth of capital goods, more than twice the value of its entire manufacturing sector. Consultant and service fees paid to imperialist companies are more than twice the value of Iraq's non-oil exports and ten times more than is spent on local research and development.

Over half of investments went on "turnkey projects", that is, huge heavy industrial complexes which depend upon foreign companies for the initial investigation, design, procurement, installation and servicing. Foreign specialist labour is used preventing Iraqi workers and managers from acquiring skills jealously guarded by the imperialists.

It is true that all economies today are interdependent upon one another. But here we are talking about a situation in which the majority of investments in the industrial spheres of the economy are

dependent upon imperialist capital. This means a considerable amount of the surplus finds its way back to the multinational companies and guarantees that the main levers of control lie out of the hands of the Iraqi ruling class itself.

The 1980s war against Iran is a classic example of the way imperialism rules. The US urged Iraq to act as a bulwark against the Iranian revolution. Saddam obligingly invaded Iran, hoping to gain favours by becoming the region's policeman for the West.

Once the initial threat of the revolution spreading had subsided, however, the USA and Britain cynically let this war drag on, thus deflecting anger away from imperialist exploitation. Huge profits were garnered by the West's sale of conventional, biological and chemical weapons to both sides, while an estimated million lives were lost on each side.

The economic consequences of the war with Iran after 1980 were disastrous. Industrial development plans were abandoned and large swathes of existing manufacturing were destroyed by Iran.

Iraq was transformed from a country with considerable foreign currency reserves and negligible debt into one, at the end of the decade, with \$30 billion worth of debt and a mere \$1 billion of reserves. The debt servicing entails more of the wealth generated within Iraq being siphoned off abroad, again restricting the development of the economy.

On the eve of the invasion of Kuwait, Iraq was as far away as ever from breaking its chains of semi-colonial subservience to imperialism. It had no significant capital investments abroad. It had failed to diversify its industrial base. Oil accounted for nine-tenths of all its foreign earnings, three-quarters of its GDP, yet its real value today, barrel for barrel, was less than in 1970-71.

The devastating outcome of the 1991 war and the ensuing economic blockade only deepened Iraq's dependence. Sales of Iraqi oil have been massively restricted, costing the country over \$100 billion in lost revenue. The UN has made concessions: every six months for the last two years they have allowed Iraq to sell approximately \$2 billion worth of oil. But this "barely provides for the basics of life", according to Denis Haliday, the UN's man in Iraq.

One third of the revenue pays for the UN inspection team and war reparations for the 1991 conflict. Last month *The Economist* admitted:

"The money is not nearly enough. Hospitals are not only short of such medicine as antibiotics, but also of gloves for doctors, light bulbs for operating theatres. The monthly food ration lasts two weeks and malnutrition is everywhere... The city's buildings are crumbling; many sanitation systems have collapsed."

According to Unicef, over 1.2 million children have died directly because of the seven year regime of

sanctions.

For the British and US ruling classes, this is all irrelevant. They won't be satisfied until a more pliant dictator is in place. France, however, is keen to avoid another war and to get the sanctions lifted quickly. Can Iraq be a semi-colony if imperialist France is prepared to argue against US and British aggression in the Gulf? But as we pointed out in *Workers Power* 217:

"Both Russia and France are owed billions of dollars by Iraq - debts dating back to the 1970s. Even more importantly, both countries have lined up gas contracts worth \$2 billion with Iraq. Neither the repayments nor the contracts can be realised unless sanctions are lifted."

Far from standing up for Iraq's rights as a sovereign, independent nation-state, France is merely protecting its own national interests.

Of course those who see military aggression as simple proof that a state is imperialist will not be satisfied by, or even bothered about, an analysis of Iraq's economy and its place in the world system of imperialism. But for anyone interested in understanding Iraq from the point of view of Marxism, understanding its economy is vital.

To launch a thoroughgoing and balanced industrialisation and development of Iraq would require breaking the chains of debt, of oil dependence and of imperialist diplomacy.

That is why no section of the Iraqi bourgeoisie can lead Iraq out of semi-colonial subservience. Fundamentally its class interests lie with the imperialist system, despite Saddam's anti-imperialist rhetoric.

Iraq is incapable of achieving the stage of "medium capitalist development", sub-imperialism, or proto-imperialism some claim it has already achieved.

The basic tenets of Trotsky's theory of permanent revolution apply to Iraq today just as they applied to the "classic" colonial and semi-colonial revolutions of the 1920s and 1930s.

Only the working class and poor peasants, whose interests are implacably opposed to imperialism, can lead Iraq out of semi-colonial servitude. To do that they will have to defeat not only the imperialists but Saddam himself.

The anti-imperialist revolution in Iraq, as in the rest of the Third World, will triumph as a workers' revolution or not at all. ■

## Iraqi socialists speak out

**D**uring the present Gulf crisis one voice has been conspicuously absent from western media coverage: that of the Iraqi people. Workers Power spoke to a representative of the **Workers' Communist Party of Iraq**, which is committed both to the overthrow of the Ba'athist regime and to fighting against imperialist intervention in the region.

**WP: Why is the USA determined to stir up war against Iraq?**

**WCPI:** The USA's aim is not primarily to topple Saddam, nor even to implement UN resolutions. The USA's aim, before and after the 1991 war, is to bolster its power in the region: it has manufactured the present crisis as an excuse for intervention. The 1991 war was an excuse for

US imperialism to establish its "New World Order"; now the Iraq crisis is an instrument for the USA to exert its diplomatic dominance over its main rivals: Russia, Germany and Japan. Regionally the US intervention is designed to make sure that the general "peace process" in the Middle East stays within limits that coincide with US interests.

**Some Iraqi opponents of Saddam Hussein have supported the UN sanctions, and call for Saddam to comply with them. What do you think?**

The sanctions are an economic war against the Iraqi people. The stated aim of the US inspired sanctions was to weaken the regime. But they have not done that. Saddam has not been touched

by the sanctions. The main effect of the sanctions has been to increase the suffering of the people of Iraq. The increased quota of oil that Iraq is allowed to sell is not a concession to Saddam. It means that, even if there is no war this time there will still be a severe economic crisis and paralysis in Iraq. The economic blockade must end, whether or not Iraq complies. The sanctions should be lifted unconditionally. First call on the oil income is to repay Kuwait and pay for the UNSCOM inspectors. In relation to the war reparations to Kuwait: the Iraqi people are not responsible for the damage done to Kuwait. Iraq should cancel the debts.

**The USA claims it is fighting to over-**

**throw Saddam. What do you say?**

We say the task of overthrowing Saddam Hussein falls to the Iraqi people. At the same time, we say that the struggle between Saddam and the USA is a struggle within the bourgeoisie. Saddam wants to be a hero of Arab nationalism, the USA wants to rule the Middle East. We say the Iraqi people must fight both Saddam and US imperialism at the same time. In fact, for all the threats, people in Iraq recognise that the USA will not overthrow Saddam. Workers in Britain should declare their solidarity with the Iraqi people, against the war.

**What about Kurdistan? Some of the Iraqi "democrats" actually have the same line as Saddam when it comes to the Kurds.**

Today Kurdistan is in limbo: it is not ruled by Iraq and it is not an independent nation. It is administered by the

UN and by the rival Kurdish nationalists, Talabani and Barzani. Into this territory both Iraq and Turkey repeatedly launch military incursions. And where the Iraqi state has retreated, the Kurdish nationalists just replace them, repressing the left and the workers. This state of limbo has reduced Iraqi Kurdistan to the position where there is no work, no government, no real society. So we say: the Kurdish people must be allowed to decide their own future. We call for a referendum: if the majority wants an independent Kurdistan, then they should have the right to leave Iraq. In such a referendum our position is for an independent Kurdistan—as long as Kurdistan is being oppressed by Iraq. If Saddam were overthrown and replaced by a secular, not nationalist government, we would fight for unity between the people of Iraq and Kurdistan. ■

## IRAQ: Trotskyist Faction/LRCI joint statement

# Down with US and British aggression!

**O**NCE AGAIN the USA is moving its armed forces to the Gulf to force Saddam Hussein to surrender his country to UN (i.e. US) "inspection". Its ally, Great Britain, has announced that it will stand "shoulder to shoulder" with the USA.

Bill Clinton and Tony Blair claim their actions are necessary because Saddam Hussein is "an evil dictator" who possesses "weapons of mass destruction". This is a sheer hypocrisy from powers which themselves have vast stockpiles of weapons of mass destruction and have actually used them at Hiroshima and Nagasaki, through Vietnam, to the Gulf War in 1991.

Just as cynical is the argument that Iraq must be bombed because Saddam Hussein is a dictator. What about the absolutist monarchies of Saudi Arabia and the Gulf states that hold the oil fields for the Western oil companies? What of Israel, which is widely known to have nuclear, chemical and biological weapons? No one suggests inspecting them or submitting them to economic embargoes, let alone bombing their countries "back into the Middle Ages".

Already the economic blockade of the last five years has led – according to the UN's own admission – to the deaths of half a million Iraqi children under five as a result of the lack of medicines and basic hospital provision. What was once one of the most advanced semi-colonial countries has been reduced to dire poverty.

The fundamental reason for US aggression is the need for Washington to buttress the world imperialist order. It regards the oil fields of the Middle East as its property. It will only entrust them to proven puppets and gendarmes like the Saudi or Kuwaiti dynasties. On a broader scale it is setting an example to all oppressed semi-colonial peoples, who are being subjected to the dictates of the IMF and World Bank, that they must submit to austerity programmes and open up their economies to the US, European and Japanese multinationals.

In the face of the recent economic and financial crisis which has already laid low many South-East Asian countries, the imperialist powers are trying to prevent the emergence of any resistance to austerity measures. Saddam Hussein is a whipping boy, used to demonstrate the fate that awaits any government thinking of demanding a moratorium on the foreign debt or other measures to resist imperialist domination, however weak they may be.

### US isolation

In contrast to the events of 1991 during the Gulf War, the USA is today considerably more isolated. This demonstrates – as did the war in Bosnia – that there are mounting tensions within the imperialist camp. US world domination, which seemed total in 1991 after its Gulf War victory and the collapse of the USSR, is coming under ever greater strain.

US plans to bomb Iraq are being resisted both by the European imperialist powers (with the exception of Britain), by Russia and even by some of the pro-imperialist governments of the Middle East. France, Germany and Russia have their own interests in the Middle East which they do not want to see threatened by a mass upsurge of



anti-imperialist protest.

However, even though these powers (along with China) opposed military action by the US, they support the UN embargo and want to use diplomatic measures to force Saddam to accede to the outrageous demands of the US. Arab governments such as Egypt desperately fear an uprising by their own people against the US bombing which would threaten their links with imperialism.

The diplomatic and supposedly "peaceful" solution that all these powers propose obliges Saddam Hussein to accept the UN resolutions. They defend the same measures that are bringing hunger and misery to the Iraqi masses as a result of the blockade that has been going on now for seven years, enforced by US troop presence in the Gulf.

### Peace process

At the same time the "peace process" between Israel and the Palestinians is at an impasse due to the intransigence of the Netanyahu government. If the USA is obliged to act as the "world policeman" with only the support of Britain it could face a fiasco. It is in the interests of progressive and working class forces world-wide to use this situation to launch a renewed offensive throughout the Middle East against the imperialist powers and their Israeli gendarme.

The Palestinian masses in particular have demonstrated their solidarity with Iraq, not out of love for the dictator Saddam Hussein, but in the firm knowledge that the Iraqi and Palestinian people face the same enemies: US imperialism and the racist Zionist settler state. Mass mobilisations against any war on Iraq must also direct themselves against the maintenance of the Zionist

state and its brutal denial of the national rights of the Palestinians, extending mass resistance to imperialism into a new *Intifada* across the region, opening the perspective of an end to the Balkanisation of the Middle East and the goal of a Socialist Federation.

Faced with an imperialist military attack on Iraq, the working class movement and all consistent democrats must stand unconditionally for the defeat of US and British imperialism and their armed forces. The same people who would attack Iraq are those who oppress the masses of the backward countries. Clinton defends the banks which year after year extract billions of dollars through repayments of foreign debt, interest and other mechanisms of exploitation. He also defends the interests of the great US oil multinationals that make billions by sucking natural resources out of the semi-colonial nations.

Clinton and Blair are no friends of the North American or British workers, despite the fact that their trade unions gave millions to elect them. Both are planning assaults on social welfare provisions for the working class and the urban poor. It is not for one minute in the interests of the workers of the USA or Britain that "their" armies should be victorious in the Gulf.

For these reasons the exploited of the whole world must be unconditionally in the Iraqi camp against the imperialist aggression. This is not because we give the slightest political support to the regime of Saddam Hussein, which has brutally massacred the Kurdish minority, and imposes a fierce repression against the Iraqi people, off loading the costs of the embargo on to them. But the task of overthrowing Saddam

is the task of the Iraqi and Kurdish people.

Military reverses for the US and British, the forced withdrawal of the US forces, their manifest failure to bring Iraq to its knees would raise the confidence and fighting spirit of the masses throughout the region. Military victory could also of course strengthen Saddam's prestige in the short term, although his defeat in 1991 did not prevent imperialism from keeping him in power in the face of internal rebellion.

### IMF dictatorship

Far more importantly, it would encourage the masses of the Middle East and the whole semi-colonial world to stand up to the IMF. This would do more than anything else to hasten the overthrow of dictators like Saddam across the Middle East and indeed around the world. The humbling of Clinton and Blair would weaken their attacks at home and strengthen a militant working class fightback.

Bonapartist dictators like Saddam Hussein cannot lead a consistent struggle against imperialism. Saddam himself is merely a gendarme of imperialism turned rogue. He served his former US masters loyally for a decade or more by attacking Iran, in which period he was armed to the teeth and funded by the West. Only the implacable US blockade has closed the way to a compromise. After the seizure of Kuwait the USA does not trust him and seeks another general in power in Baghdad.

But, as they showed at the end of the first Gulf War, the USA fears a revolutionary uprising of the masses and the free exercise of self-determination by the Kurds far more than the continued

rule of Saddam. They wish to preserve a military dictatorship in Iraq but one which will act for the USA and the huge oil companies.

The total expulsion of imperialist forces from the Middle East can only be achieved with the mobilisation and independent organisation of the masses, who have shown time and again their willingness to confront the USA and Britain.

The smaller imperialist powers of Europe, which are protesting against a US attack, cannot be relied upon for one minute. Nor can Yeltsin's Russia, which is only pursuing its own geo-strategic interests, hoping to recover the influence which the Soviet Union once possessed in the area. Nor should the masses of the Middle East place their trust in their own governments—Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Iran, Syria or Jordan—which have proven their servility to imperialism time and time again.

### Mass action

Today it is essential to put a brake on US aggression and develop the broadest possible anti-imperialist mobilisation. It is necessary to mobilise mass action for the withdrawal of all the imperialist troops stationed in the Gulf and the Middle East, for the withdrawal of the UN "inspectors" and for the total lifting of all the economic sanctions that have strangled the Iraqi people.

In semi-colonial countries like Argentina, which have military forces capable of joining the US war effort, we must demand that neither the country's troops nor its ships are sent to the Gulf, as happened in the 1991 Gulf War. Once more the Menem government is showing its servility to its US boss, declaring itself ready, in virtue of its status as an "extra-Nato ally", to send "logistical support" for the US military adventure.

In countries like Britain, with Labour or Social Democratic governments we must relentlessly expose their imperialist character, fight in the workers' movement to rouse the rank and file of the reformist parties and the trade unions to denounce their leaders, call them to account and if possible oust them. We should call on the Labour or Social Democratic MPs to speak openly against the war, vote against its approval and all war credits in parliament and raise the call openly for mass resistance on the streets.

We call on all workers' organisations, student unions, human rights groups, left wing parties and declared opponents of imperialism to push now for a common campaign in defence of the Iraqi people against imperialist aggression. We should aim to mobilise huge demonstrations against the war and imperialism.

- Down with US and UK imperialist aggression against Iraq.
- Halt the war preparations against Iraq now.
- All UN inspectors out of Iraq.
- Down with the UN imposed blockade.
- Lift All Sanctions.
- For the victory of Iraqi forces in the event of imperialist attack.
- Self-determination for the Palestinian and Kurdish peoples.
- Defend Iraq against US and UK attack.
- Imperialist troops out of the Gulf and the Middle East! ■

## Join the anti-imperialists!

ON THIS PAGE is the **Joint Declaration on Iraq** by the Fracción Trotskista (Estrategia Internacional); consisting of Partido de los Trabajadores por el Socialismo (Argentina), Liga de los Trabajadores por el Socialismo (Mexico) and Liga Obrera Trotskista (Chile), and the League for a Revolutionary Communist International; including

Gruppe ArbeiterInnenstandpunkt (Austria), Gruppe Arbeitermacht (Germany), Arbetarmakt (Sweden), Irish Workers Group, Pouvoir Ouvrier (France), and the Workers Power groups of Australia, Britain and New Zealand-Aotearoa.

We appeal to revolutionary and anti-imperialist organisations around the world to co-sign this declaration and to

struggle on its basis against imperialism's economic blockade and threats of armed assault on the Iraqi people.

This version has been slightly edited for reasons of space. The statement was drafted before the UN deal was finalised with Iraq, but given the continued US military presence in the Gulf it retains all its relevance.

## PEACE PROCESS: Blair's rush for a deal

## Endgame in sight?

**T**HE BRITISH are notoriously ignorant about the politics of Northern Ireland. What is all the fighting about? Why can't the two sides sit down, forget the past and work out a future together?

A close look at the events of the last couple of months reveals the answer to these questions, an answer that lies in the fundamentally sectarian nature of the Northern Ireland state.

On 16 February the British Secretary for Northern Ireland, Mo Mowlam, indicted Sinn Fein (SF) with responsibility for the murders of Robert Dougan, a prominent leader of the paramilitary Ulster Defence Association, and Brendan Campbell, a known drug dealer. She had asked RUC chief Ronnie Flannagan for an assessment. As a result, SF were expelled from the peace process talks for six working days.

What was Mowlam's evidence? This was, apparently, sub judice, i.e. no evidence was given. But Flannagan had said that there was "incontrovertible evidence" of the IRA's hand. An anonymous officer added, "These people were not mavericks, they answer directly to the Belfast brigade of the IRA".

Proof? A regime that has subjected anti-unionists to decades of no-jury courts doesn't let such legal niceties stand in its way.

SF delegates were not allowed to see the evidence, not allowed to cross-examine witnesses, not even allowed to reply to the charges. As their chief negotiator, Martin McGuinness, rightly pointed out:

"This is a charade. It amounts to a kangaroo court. We are seeing a lynch mob of Ulster unionists led by the British government."

When Gerry Adams asked whether Mowlam had demanded an assessment after the Ulster Freedom Fighters (UFF) were suspected of the recent murder of two Catholics, the Northern Ireland secretary replied, "No".

Yet, nine Catholics have been killed by Loyalist death squads during the recent phase of the "peace process", at least three of them by the UFF. How do we know? Because the UFF admitted responsibility.

The RUC knew about the link but delayed for weeks before making any statement so as not to embarrass the Ulster Democratic Party (UDP), who represent the UFF at the peace talks. The so-called respectable face of unionism, the Ulster Unionist Party (UUP), and the Labour government were also silent.

Yet within hours of Dougan's killing, Flannagan was fingering the IRA and unionists of all stripes were calling for SF's expulsion from the talks and threatening to walk out themselves if their demands were not met.

This kind of double standards is par for the course for the RUC. And it is quite clear that the UUP, which has refused to talk to SF throughout the talks, has always aimed at getting SF kicked out.

The RUC is a sectarian police force, over 90% of its officers coming from the Protestant community. The unionists, of every shade, all resist any reform of the RUC because it is the guardian of their interests. And the British and Irish governments have consistently caved in to this unionist veto.

It is this political reality and the lack of any progress at the talks that led unionists and even British government officials to decide that SF and the IRA committed the two murders and probably gave logistical support to the break-away Continuity IRA's subsequent bombings out of sheer frustration. As Gary McMichael of the UDP said:

"The talks process is going nowhere for Sinn Fein. There's nothing coming out of this that they can agree with."

The implication is that SF is being marginalised and all meaningful

Despite the bombings and the shootings and the unjust expulsion of Sinn Fein from the "peace talks", Tony Blair emerged from a meeting with Irish Taoiseach, Bertie Ahern, and Ulster Unionist leader David Trimble at the

end of February claiming he was, "cautiously, perhaps even stubbornly, optimistic" that an agreed settlement was in sight. **Jeremy Dewar** describes the kind of settlement Blair, Ahern and Trimble have in mind.



Hume, Trimble Adams and McGuinness

reforms blocked.

As with the RUC, so too with the questions of the rights of the Orange Order to parade annually through nationalist areas, the release of republican prisoners of war and the removal of British troops from their armed garrisons in the north-east of Ireland: the clear message from Dublin and London is that the unionists have nothing to fear on these questions.

The annual Orange parades are not simply symbolic gestures towards a dim and distant past. They have always been and remain orgies of sectarian violence and terror. This is why Tony Blair is so keen to have a settlement in place before the marching season blows the peace talks apart.

Only last year, a 25-year old Catholic, Robert Hamill, was savagely beaten to death in Portadown as residents in the nationalist Garvaghy Road community demonstrated against the Orange march. The RUC and the British government had allowed the parade to go ahead. David Trimble, the UUP leader, even turned up to place himself prominently among the marchers.

Yet, despite an RUC mobile patrol being just yards away, an Orange mob was allowed to kill Robert Hamill, unimpeded. Still no one has been brought to trial for his murder. In fact, the person who was detained longest after the infamous Drumcree stand-off was Robert Hamill's brother.

A few republican prisoners – to the outrage of every unionist politician – have been moved from British jails to Northern Irish ones. But that's as far as it goes.

Meanwhile, Lee Clegg, the only British soldier ever to have been convicted for murder since the British army came to Ireland in 1969, was not only released after just two years of a life sentence, he has now had his conviction quashed!

Even the Bloody Sunday inquiry – some 26 years too late – is likely to come back with the line that mistakes were made, though too much time has now elapsed for anyone to be brought to trial. Indeed, the British army's presence in Northern Ireland remains crucial for the enforcement of any settle-

ment and for that reason Britain will not countenance any of its soldiers being punished. An army of occupation must be sure of complete backing, no matter what atrocities it commits, or its morale will be undermined.

#### Central question

The central question in the peace talks for SF and the Republican movement, however, is the respective powers of a Northern Ireland assembly, a future North-South body and the bilateral powers of London and Dublin. For SF, the specific questions of the RUC, the prisoners, the troops and the Orange Lodge marches can be dealt with later, so long as there is no return to an executive, all-powerful Northern Ireland assembly.

It was just such an assembly, renowned for its sectarian hostility to the minority nationalist community and its stubborn resistance to any notion of power-sharing, that was based at Stormont up to 1972.

But is this just another bogeyman from the past, being dragged up to frighten the Catholic community? Not at all. Take a look at today's Belfast City Council.

Elected last May, Belfast Council's largest single party is SF. For the first time since partition, the mayor of Belfast is not a unionist. At the time, this was heralded as a breakthrough for consensus politics. The unionists did not walk out; they stayed, albeit loudly remonstrating about the "terrorists" in their midst.

But SF has remained excluded from any power or authority within City Hall. In the council, the various unionist parties, aided by the supposedly non-sectarian Alliance Party, have connived to systematically deny SF any members on the various boards and committees which run education, health and the other services. Gerry Adams recently told delegates at the peace negotiations:

"Our position on institutions for the six counties is straightforward. The status quo has failed. An internal settlement will not work. It therefore follows that an assembly dominated by unionists is unacceptable to Sinn Fein and we believe to many nationalists. Look at Belfast City Hall."

SF's strategy is clear. If a future six-county assembly is answerable and subordinate to a North-South body, or even a London-Dublin body, then it will be tolerated. So long as the decisive executive powers of Northern Ireland – or a significant and growing number of powers – reside with a North-South body, then a settlement can be sold to SF's supporters on the basis of it being a step towards a united Ireland.

The problem for Adams and McGuinness is that the Heads of Agreement document, which forms the basis for the final stages of the talks this month, says the opposite. The internal assembly will have all the powers. The North-South body will become some vague consultative institution. Not only will it meet irregularly, but it will even include representatives from the Scottish Parliament and the Welsh Assembly! This is yet another outrageous unionist demand which the British and Irish governments have accepted.

#### Ambitious

So, why then is Tony Blair so optimistic that a settlement can be reached? His timetable is indeed ambitious: SF back in the talks by 9 March; a settlement agreed by the peace negotiators and put before the House of Commons before the Easter recess, 9 April; referendums, North and South, on 7 May. Has he got any chance of success?

Partly, the speed is in order to prevent any further fragmentation of the various parties. It is a threat to SF (and to a lesser extent to the minor loyalist parties) that if they walk out now, they will miss out on the "endgame". But it also implies that Blair is confident that – with or without SF – Britain, Ireland and the unionists can put together a settlement that they can win in a referendum.

The key to this is the SDLP. Throughout the peace process, the SDLP has been squeezed, by SF on the one hand and the unionists on the other. A substantial section of the leadership of the SDLP now believe, after the experience of the talks, that a settlement can marginalise SF and allow the them to regain their influence as the main party

of the nationalist community, influence eroded by SF's growing electoral strength. That is why the SDLP delegates at the talks were as keen as the unionists to exclude SF last month.

What is likely to emerge over the next six weeks, therefore, is a settlement – but it won't be just, and it won't necessarily deliver peace!

Such a result would prove what we have said for a long time – SF's peace strategy is wrong. If they continue to pursue it and if they back such a settlement and either campaign for a "Yes" vote or agree to accept the result of the referendum, it would mark a further decisive stage in their transition from revolutionary into constitutional nationalists.

Either way, socialists must be clear: any settlement emerging from this process will be a reactionary one that will not bring justice to the oppressed nationalist community in the six counties nor self-determination for all the Irish people.

In the turmoil that such a settlement will create in the ranks of the republican movement socialists will fight for an alternative to both SF's pan-nationalist "constitutional" strategy and any return to the IRA's dead-end guerrilla strategy. We will fight for a socialist strategy based on the mobilisation of the working class in mass action against British imperialism and the sectarian state and for a socialist programme that can break the Protestant workers from their allegiance to reactionary unionism and loyalism.

Workers, socialists and consistent democrats should continue to campaign against the current framework for a settlement, emphasising its maintenance of the loyalist veto and its denial of basic rights to the nationalist minority. At the same time, we should try to mobilise mass action on all the immediate questions.

SF's strategy has failed. Only if mass, working class action is put on the agenda can a reactionary, pro-imperialist settlement be stopped.

- Disband the RUC
- Stop the Orange Parades through nationalist areas
- Release all republican prisoners
- British troops out of Ireland now!

Australian dockers face a battle to defend jobs, conditions and the very existence of their union. Comrades from Workers Power (Australia) describe the current situation and outline a strategy to win

## AUSTRALIA: Docks' dispute

# "A battle over all workers' rights"

**S**INCE 28 JANUARY workers at Patrick Stevedores' Webb Dock facility near Melbourne have been off the job. This struggle began as a lockout and has escalated into a major conflict between the union movement and the ruling class.

There is a good reason for targeting the "wharfies" (dockers) of the Maritime Union of Australia (MUA). The MUA is one of the bulwarks of Australia's militant industrial unionism.

As Dick Ryan, a spokesman for the MUA and leading figure at Webb Dock, told *Workers Power*:

"This is simple politics, a battle over all workers' rights. [They] want to smash organised labour in Australia. And if workers are to protect those rights, then we must all organise to fight for them."

On 28 January the MUA released documents revealing the existence of a company called PCS Training Services. It is run out of the National Farmers' Federation (NFF) headquarters in Canberra, and is led by NFF officials.

The documents also showed that PCS was trying to recruit overseas dock workers on contracts worth at least \$25,000 (£10,200) for three months' work; this from the same people who have been moaning about some dockers earning up to \$70,000 per year (if they work a double shift).

That same night Patrick managers neglected to call in the twilight or night shift at Webb Dock. When suspicious MUA members went to the dock they were confronted with busloads of security guards who had occupied the site.

It transpired that Patrick Stevedores had leased one berth at Webb Dock to the PCS front company. Workers were assured that their jobs were not under threat. They were told the guards had come to change the locks on the sublet berth and that normal working

patterns would resume in the morning.

When the morning shift reported for work they found the gates locked.

One of the directors of the NFF company is Paul Houlihan. He is an ex-NFF industrial relations director. One of his more lucrative deals was the public money he received for drafting the new anti-union Workplace Relations Act. This boss literally wrote a law to suit his own political and economic needs, and those of his class.

On 31 January further links emerged in the network of ruling class interests surrounding Webb Dock. A former Police Commissioner, Kel Glare, was employed to provide security. The guards were using weapons from the state government's stockpiles. Included among the soldiers in this private army are serving members of the armed forces.

By 3 February the full extent of this conspiracy had become apparent. Peter Kilfoyle, an ex-SAS officer, is a director of two companies: Fynwest and the Australasian Security Group. The first of these was responsible for trying to train soldiers as scab dockers in Dubai late last year. The second acted to secure the riot gear used at Webb Dock.

From the outset John Howard's right-wing coalition has encouraged the NFF to take full advantage of its union-busting Workplace Relations Act. Under this legislation, the Industrial Relations Commission has ruled that the workers at Webb Dock must return to work. If they can bring the full weight of the law to bear on the MUA they can smash it.

Through these laws the union can be sued and bankrupted (which would lead to the seizure of its assets), its members and leaders can be jailed, and it can ultimately be de-registered.

It is no coincidence that the attack on the "wharfies" has been unleashed



Locked out dockers confront the bosses' thugs at Webb Dock, Melbourne

now. The Howard government is keen to stage a decisive confrontation with organised labour prior to calling a general election. At the same time, the severe economic slump across South East Asia has dictated a ruling class strategy that emphasises the slashing of Australia's labour costs.

The Australian bosses have been planning to smash the MUA as a prelude to crippling the whole union movement. An equally forceful response by Australian workers and their allies abroad is needed.

Unfortunately, such a militant response has not been forthcoming from the MUA's leaders. MUA secretary John Coombs has retreated behind the Workplace Relations Act, while the leadership of the Australian Council of Trade Unions is in headlong retreat from its feisty rhetoric of less than

two years ago.

Instead of generalising industrial action, the MUA leaders have insisted on limiting the union's actions to a "peaceful" picket at Webb dock, while challenging PCS and Patrick Stevedores through the courts. This strategy will lead to defeat.

While the legal representatives have exchanged verbal blows in the courts, the judges have instructed rank and file members at the Webb dock picket to allow equipment and security scabs through the gates.

When one member refused to obey the injunction and threw a rock at a vehicle, his union officials publicly "disowned" him and are refusing to defend him from prosecution.

The MUA is a powerful union with a fine record of struggle against the bosses. But the real power of the MUA

lies with its members, not its lawyers.

We appeal to workers in other countries to actively support the MUA.

To defeat the bosses we need a class-wide fightback in Australia. Given the implications of this attack for the organised working class, Workers Power has called for a general strike in order to defeat the union-busters.

A general strike would bring the entire Australian economy to a grinding halt. Such class-wide defiance of the anti-union laws is the best method for destroying them. While we demand the present union leaders launch such action, we must not rely on them to organise it. To ensure that industrial action is not sold out, rank and file workers must be in control.

This means building strike committees, support committees and workers' councils of action. These need to be democratically elected, and made fully accountable to those who elect them.

Of course, a general strike raises the stakes enormously. It risks bringing down the full weight of ruling class law and the armed force of the capitalist state against striking workers. Such a threat requires the building of workers' defence squads in response. They will be the only effective shield against the thuggery of the bosses and their state.

The determined organisation of self-defence, combined with a general strike, could secure a famous victory for the MUA dockers and erase the anti-union laws from the statute book. It would also halt the Howard government's whole anti-working class offensive and demonstrate the potential of the working class to challenge the profit-crazed system of capitalist exploitation. ■

Visit the MUA website at:  
<http://mua.tcp.net.au/welcome.ssi>

## INDONESIA: Food riots spread

# On the brink of revolution

**"THE REVOLUTION** will start, but there will be a lot of blood. It will be very messy. There is no ideology. Angry mobs will turn on Suharto and the Chinese."

The Indonesian academic who delivered this warning confidently predicts that the "revolution" will begin in April.

Indonesia's economic collapse began last July after a run on the currency. Between July and November the stock market fell by 40%. Almost all companies and banks in Indonesia are technically bankrupt with \$74 billion owed in private debts.

The dollar was worth 2,500 rupiah in July 1997 – seven months later it stands at 8,200 rupiah. The fall in the rupiah has caused food shortages and price rises. Indonesia imports all its wheat and 10% of its rice.

The price of rice has soared by between 30% and 100% in the last two months. In the same period the price of another staple, chicken, has also skyrocketed.

It is increasingly clear to everyone that the crisis is no longer just eco-

nomie. It is a political crisis resulting from Suharto's refusal to relinquish power and his determination to protect his family's and cronies' billions. On 10 March Suharto will be re-elected, by a body which he has appointed, for another five-year term. This can only fan the flames of revolt.

Suharto's personal fortune is estimated at \$40 billion. Meanwhile, thousands of Indonesians are dying from hunger.

The targets of the recent riots have been the ethnic Chinese. Three million, out of a population of 200 million, are ethnic Chinese. Many are small shopkeepers and traders. Some have become very rich. But all have become targets of the famished rioters. The rioters have painted slogans on the walls: "money hungry, Chinese fools", "destroy the Chinese". Other shopkeepers try to save their property by painting "Muslim" above the door.

The Suharto government is only too happy to see others turned into scapegoats for the crisis. A February Human Rights Watch report stated:

### BY KATE FOSTER

"Senior officials . . . have tried to deflect blame for the economic crisis onto prominent members of the ethnic Chinese community".

There are reports of local police and army units standing by while Chinese shops are burnt out. Some ethnic Chinese businessmen are now paying soldiers to guard their property.

The rioting is moving closer to the capital, Jakarta. Forty towns and cities have witnessed rioting in the past month, mainly around the central and western provinces of Java.

The International Monetary Fund (IMF) had promised a \$43 billion package to bail out the economy. It is now threatening to cancel the deal. The reason is Suharto's refusal to implement key aspects of the IMF plan.

He has been unwilling to dismantle monopolies and cartels, particularly those which benefit his friends and family. Last month he announced a plan to peg the rupiah to the dollar. The gov-

ernment would set a rate of exchange and use its reserves to defend the currency at that rate.

This was widely seen not as an attempt to support the rupiah, but as a means by which Suharto could protect the business interests of his family, who might otherwise face bankruptcy.

The US, IMF and the other "Tiger" countries were all opposed to the plan, given Indonesia's political instability. Suharto has shelved the plan but not before sacking the governor of the central bank who dared oppose it.

He is clearly preparing for confrontation. Last month, he told military leaders to "take stern action against those who act unconstitutionally, especially any action that could lead to national disintegration". On 22 February the government announced a 25-day ban on street protests.

Meanwhile, all the legal political parties and the leadership of the army support Suharto's re-election. The bourgeois opposition remains silent. Once a serious popular movement against

Suharto begins, they may well emerge from their shells (see *Workers Power* 219).

Indonesia is on the brink of a major political upheaval. The question is, in the unfolding crisis, can a revolutionary alternative to the existing opposition be built?

Workers, students and poor peasants in Indonesia must turn to formulating the demands and building the organisations that can answer "yes" to this question. They must move quickly to channel the anger of hungry millions away from anti-Chinese chauvinism and towards the real enemies in the Suharto regime and the IMF.

The scale of the crisis and the desperation of the masses for a solution mean that even a small revolutionary nucleus – armed with a clear programme for workers' power as the answer to Indonesia's turmoil – could rapidly develop mass support. If that happens then a revolutionary alternative to Suharto can be built and can ensure that the revolution does have an "ideology" – socialism. ■

## SOUTH KOREA: Workers reject austerity plans

# Tiger bares its claws

On 25 February South Korea's new President, Kim Dae-jung, was sworn into office. In turn he promised Kim Jong-pil the job of Prime Minister, the same man who 17 years earlier headed the secret service agency that tried to kill him while in exile. This unlikely combination, writes **Keith Harvey**, is the best bet the Korean ruling class have of dealing with a major social and political crisis they will face during 1998.

**T**HIS YEAR Korea will suffer its first recession in 30 years. The new regime will face a unionised working class in the strategic heavy industries. In late 1996 the militancy of the organised worker beat off an open assault by the government on their already limited rights and benefits.

Now a president who opposed the country's old military dictatorship fuels the hopes of millions of Koreans that the present crisis will be managed "fairly". But the Prime Minister, the reactionary architect of General Park's 1960 coup and a man steeped in blood, reassures the ruling class that this regime will unleash brutal repression against the working class if resolving the economic crisis demands it.

There is no mistaking the depth of Korean capitalism's problems. For the last 30 years cheap state loans and abundant capital from foreign banks have been channelled to the industrial conglomerates (chaebols). By the time of last year's crash, the government-backed Korean banks had lent \$750 billion while a further \$150 billion had been borrowed abroad.

As Korean labour became more expensive on the back of this seemingly endless boom, the big chaebols started to expand abroad. The biggest four (Samsung, Hyundai, Daewoo and LG Group) set up plants in Europe.

But like all capitalist firms, the big conglomerates invested regardless of demand. A second-tier layer of South East Asian countries (Indonesia, Thailand, Malaysia, Philippines) followed Korea, investing in prestige projects or overheating property markets, egged on by US, Japanese and European banks eager to lend huge sums. As a result, between 1990 and 1994, 40% of all new industrial investment was concentrated in the region, which accounted for 60% of the growth in world output during the first half of the decade.

### Pressure

This situation could not last, despite the boasts of corrupt politicians, so-called economic "experts" and the fund managers of western banks. In 1994 China devalued its currency and launched an export drive flooding cheap goods into an already saturated market. In 1996, the domestic appliance, car and consumer electronics industries could not sell their products at prices that realised the anticipated profits. Korea's big semi-conductor industry was badly hit.

Meanwhile, pressure built up in the financial markets. Thailand had the most inflated property market and a banking system that was harshly exposed, given the industrial retrenchment underway. Last July, foreign fund managers doubted that Thai firms,



New President Kim Dae-jung



Korean workers protest against the November agreement with the IMF which puts bankers' loans before working class jobs

banks and the government could repay foreign loans (in dollars) at the existing exchange rate with the Thai baht. They tried to get their money out quickly, precipitating a full-scale wave of panic selling which soon hit most regional currencies since Thailand's problems were only an extreme reflection of those plaguing the whole region.

At first, the Korean government used its foreign reserves to stave off the currency crisis, but it was a losing battle. The Korean won was devalued by 10% when the crisis hit in August. By the end of 1997 its exchange rate had plummeted by 50% against the US dollar.

**The current level of unemployment at around 660,000 is set to double or even triple by the end of the year if there is no resistance to the proposed cutbacks.**

The scale of this collapse pounded small firms and huge chaebols alike. The massive dollar debts they and the banks had carried to finance the earlier investment could not be repaid under these new exchange rates. Only six of the country's 16 banks reported a profit for 1997. Seven of Korea's 30 chaebols, which together account for 80% of the country's output, collapsed - with \$28 billion in debts - and sought bankruptcy protection from the government.

But, with the government's debts totalling 69% of GDP by the end of 1997, who was going to save the government? On 21 November the inevitable happened: the country was declared virtually bankrupt. The announcement came barely two years after it had joined as the 25th member of the OECD - the exclusive club of the world's richest industrial nations!

The International Monetary Fund (IMF) negotiated a record \$58 billion package of aid - providing Korea's stock markets were opened up to US, European and Japanese firms. The government agreed to relax the restrictions on foreign ownership of banking and industrial assets, as the major powers behind the IMF prepared to buy up cheap assets.

The shock awaiting most Koreans is difficult to exaggerate. This is a country that has been used to annual growth

rates of 6% and more for decades; during 1992-96 GDP expanded at over 7% a year. Now in 1998 a conservative guess would suggest a 1.2% decline in GDP. An estimated 3,000 businesses went bust in January alone.

To restore profitability and attract foreign buyers Kim Dae-jung said that "downsizing is inevitable". The *Economist Intelligence Unit* noted that "history has cast him in the role of South Korea's Margaret Thatcher", insisting that there is no alternative to "slaughtering such sacred cows as full employment."

Before his election in December, Kim Dae-jung opposed the IMF pack-

age, calling for it to be renegotiated. The day after he won he became a staunch supporter of it!

The current level of unemployment at around 2.5% (660,000) is set to double or even triple by the end of the year if there is no resistance to the proposed cutbacks. This goes against the law agreed in March last year which bans mass layoffs until March 1999. To get around this Kim Dae-jung established a Tripartite Emergency Economic Committee with representatives from the employers, trade unions and the government.

### Sell-out

In early February, the bureaucracy of the dissident Korean Confederation of Trade Unions (KCTU), which organises 550,000 workers, agreed to legislative proposals to scrap employment protection measures in return for a meagre \$3 billion IMF-financed social welfare fund, reforms in the management of the chaebols, and the right of teachers to join a trade union.

A week later, 200 KCTU delegates rejected this sell-out at a conference and removed the leadership responsible for it, threatening the new government with a general strike if the deal was not renegotiated. This shows that the militancy of the 1996 strikes survives in the vanguard of the working class.

The government's aim of making one million workers unemployed by the end of the year will provoke stiff opposition from the rank and file in heavy industry. They are only too aware that, with few jobs being created and no social security system in place for the unemployed, losing your job spells disaster.

But unemployment is not the workers' only concern. Living standards had been rising fast in the 1990s, even though monthly wages still averaged only \$1,568. Real household expenditure rose 30% between 1992 and 1996. Now the dollar value of these wages has been halved. Moreover, to Korean workers who are used to getting consistent real wage rises (8.4% a year between 1970-90 and 7.8% during 1992-96), 1998 threatens real wage cuts to follow those of the last half of 1997.

Inflation jumped to 6% in December 1997 while wage increases were pegged to 5.5%. Workers in 20% of firms have had their wages frozen; those in the Ssangyong Group (the sixth biggest chaebol) had their wages slashed by 15%.

Although Kim Dae-jung was elected with only 40% of the popular vote, many workers voted for him. The "workers' candidate" in last December's election - the leader of the KCTU, Kwon Young-gil - only polled 1.2%, finishing fourth out of seven candidates. But the 300,000 who voted for him included many of the 12% of Korean workers who are organised in trade unions.

As the illusions placed in the bourgeois dissident Kim Dae-jung are stripped bare, these class-conscious Korean workers must become a force fighting for a political, not just a trade union, answer to the country's crisis. A mass revolutionary workers' party based on - but not limited to - the KCTU could focus working class anger during the coming year and direct it at the real enemies: the Korean capitalist class and the IMF.

An independent workers' answer to the current crisis starts from recognising that the working class is not responsible for it and must not pay the costs of overcoming it. There is a real danger ahead that workers' grievances will be channelled into a nationalist response that accepts the joint responsibility of all Koreans (worker and boss

alike) for the current mess. Such an outlook has been fostered for decades by successive governments and nurtured by enterprise relations, with life-long job guarantees and measures to mask class divisions.

### Danger

Bourgeois propaganda has encouraged workers to adopt a nationalist outlook and be suspicious of foreigners. The coming wave of acquisitions by US, Japanese and European firms will inflame these sentiments further. A clear internationalist programme uniting the whole working class against Korean and imperialist bosses alike is urgently needed. No foreign migrant workers must be expelled from the country; no jobs will be created for Korean workers by such measures.

The KCTU must launch a massive unionisation drive to draw in the millions of unorganised workers. The unions must oppose any dilution of the law barring redundancies, fight all sackings and occupy factories declaring redundancies or threatening closures. In the past, the shipyard and steel workers have heroically used this tactic. It will be needed again.

Reform of the corrupt family chaebol system, a demand of the trade union bureaucracy, is totally insufficient. A transparent and more "honest" system of industry will not put an end to waste, mass unemployment and speculation. Indeed, the likely outcome of the reformist leadership's programme will be an open, globally integrated Korean capitalism, more vulnerable to rapid global movements of capital.

### Workers' inspection

Instead, the KCTU must lead the fight for a general workers' inspection of the chaebols' accounts. The IMF have demanded transparency and access to the secret dealings of Korean finance. But it is the workers who need to know where the wealth they created was stashed, how much of the profits they generated was used for corrupt purposes.

The workers must see what is on the order books and so be able to share out available work and control the number of hours worked. There must be a wealth tax on all chaebols to pay for a social security fund under the control of the union rank and file.

The workers' movement must revive the unfinished struggle for democratic rights.

In February the incoming regime offered concessions, allowing the formation of opposition political parties and trade unions other than the KCTU. This reform must now be granted unconditionally by Kim Dae-jung's government, along with an end to bans on the right to organise politically, hold demonstrations and criticise the regime.

Kim Dae-jung has already released ex-presidents from jail as a gesture of national reconciliation; the working class must demand the immediate release of all its prisoners and the students and socialists who have fought for class justice or spoken out in defence of North Korea.

The fight to build and recruit to a mass revolutionary independent workers' party must be the organisational expression of these political tasks. It must rally the forces for a fightback on the streets and inside the factories. And through that fightback it can go on to destroy the real source of today's economic chaos - capitalism itself. ■

# FRANCE: Splits and fusions

# Revolutionary unity and the French left

**O**VER THE past three years France has been in the forefront of the European class struggle. The mass strikes and street demonstrations of November and December 1995 and the lorry drivers' strikes and blockades in succeeding years crippled and discredited the right wing government of Alain Juppé. This led to victory for the Socialist Party (PS) and Communist Party (PCF) in last June's elections.

Headed by Lionel Jospin, the new government promised to tackle the question of unemployment. France has a jobless rate of 12.2%. But by the turn of the year a militant movement of the unemployed was occupying job centres and demanding that Jospin introduce substantial improvements in unemployment pay and job creation schemes.

These developments have led to a major shake-up on the far-left, in Lutte Ouvrière (LO) and the Ligue Communiste Révolutionnaire (LCR). The events of recent years have only confirmed the LCR leadership in its strategy of "mutation" into reformism and left the LO leaders unmoved in their passive propagandism. But critics have emerged in both organisations, dissatisfied with their leaders' policies.

### Disciplined

LO, with its hundreds of fortnightly factory bulletins, its highly disciplined members, and its popular perennial Presidential candidate, Arlette Laguiller, can seem an orthodox alternative to the LCR's revisionism. In reality, LO's politics are sterile and abstract. This is true even of their factory bulletins which offer no operative tactics or overall strategy to workers in struggle.

Behind the façade of "discipline" lurks an internal regime centred around a cult leader which would not be out of place in a Stalinist party. This regime has proved incapable of standing up to the stresses and strains of the present class struggle period, leading to growing tensions in the group.

Since the late 1980s, a small group of LO members have opposed the leadership's line on the USSR, in particular the majority's idea that the planned property relations were under no threat from economic and political developments. The minority's current analysis is that capitalism has been restored in the shape of a pro-bourgeois government and state machine, but this is not yet expressed at the economic level.

### Criticism

This tendency – which has never got the support of more than 3% of LO members – subsequently became a faction and broadened its criticism to other questions, such as the nature of the period, the pessimism of the majority's positions and the need to orient to workers under the influence of the PCF with a clear set of united front proposals.

This is an unprecedented development in an organisation in which the leadership's congress documents are regularly adopted without the slightest opposition and in which political discussion rarely takes place.

Whereas the Faction maintained an armed truce with the leadership – they have a weekly column in the paper, they have their own factory bulletins and branch meetings – the LO leadership indicated that it will not tolerate any new dissent.

Just under a year ago, LO expelled two of its main branches – Bordeaux and Rouen – which have since formed the Voix des Travailleurs (VDT – Workers Voice).



The VDT were expelled because they opposed the LO leadership's refusal to carry out its promise to build a new workers' party following the 1.5 million votes gained by Arlette in the 1995 Presidential elections.

While inside LO, the leaders of what became the VDT had initially argued the LO leadership was being too soft on the Faction and should have expelled them! This meant that when the LO cult leader, "Hardy", decided to turn against the Rouen and Bordeaux branches, they were in a weak position to rally support in the organisation. Nor

### BY TREVOR HANSEL

defeat the trade union bureaucracy and the reformist parties and a tendency to reduce differences with rival tendencies to their supposed petit bourgeois class composition.

To really help build a revolutionary party, they will have to take their draft programme to its logical conclusion and fight for a re-elaborated action programme for France firmly based on the transitional method. But this evolution is far from certain.



had they developed a critique of the political degeneration of LO or fought for a rounded political alternative to it.

Hardy's pretext for attacking the leaders of what became the VDT was that they had accepted that two members who were partners should participate in the same activities (LO has strict – and strange – rules about partners not working alongside each other). The real issue was that they had privately expressed their lack of confidence in Hardy. That is a cardinal sin in LO. The inevitable result was the expulsion of the two branches, with only the Faction voting against.

Since being expelled, the VDT have taken a number of steps away from the passive propagandism and sectarianism that has characterised LO over the last 10-15 years. They are breaking from LO's negative approach to programme. During the 1995 presidential elections, LO issued a short, abstract "emergency programme" of reforms and speculated on the possibility of founding a new "workers' party" only to drop it shortly after.

The VDT have taken a step forward from all of this. They have published a draft programme which raises transitional – not merely reformist – demands and lays particular emphasis on the question of workers' control. Nevertheless it has serious weaknesses: economic catastrophism, a lack of any serious treatment of racism or the Front National, a lack of tactics to

However, the political differences between these tendencies are far from being fully resolved. For example, the fusion between the VDT and the LST leaves open a number of important questions – the "new" trade unions in France such as the Syndicats Unitaires Démocratiques (SUD), the Yugoslav civil wars, and the collapse of Stalinism. This method of leaving aside major questions of method, programme or tactics in favour of joint work or semi-fusion inevitably means that political divisions will reappear at the first major test.

Similar problems were encountered when the VDT, together with the LO Faction and the Révolution! tendency in the LCR, organised the Rencontre Militante Ouvrière – Militant Workers' Meeting (RMO). This was a conference at which 500 workers, most of them industrial workers in and around the far-left groups, met to discuss the problems of their workplaces and how to fight back against the bosses' and the government's offensives.

The meeting was a great success in drawing so many workers together for the first time. The enthusiasm and fighting potential was palpable. The VDT hoped that the meeting would be a springboard for their regroupment perspective. The question of the need for a new revolutionary party was raised repeatedly by their representatives.

However, they left the programmatic content of this party undefined and the key question of organising workers to

The most striking example of this took place a year ago when the LO majority refused to participate in the mass demonstrations that took place against the proposed new immigration laws because these were called by a group of intellectuals who were close to the Socialist Party.

The LO Faction rejected the sectarian logic of the leadership and participated in the demonstrations, calling in their factory bulletins for workers to join the protests and denouncing the LO leadership in a paper article which was (unsurprisingly) censored.

The LO Faction's seriousness, its origins in a political debate over a key international question (the USSR) and their openness to discussion are all signs that they too could play a positive role in the months ahead.

### Danger

The greatest danger facing the attempts at revolutionary regroupment is to assume that everyone agrees on what constitutes a revolutionary programme and party. They don't, and we cannot get round this simply by posing these issues at a general or abstract level, leaving the detail until later. The programme must be worked out first – it is the basis of what the party will do, and is the test of the party's revolutionary credentials.

Likewise the attempt to return to some supposed healthy stage in the past of today's major organisations will lead to future splits. LO, the LCR and the PCI (Lambertists) were not "revolutionaries" but centrists, vacillating between revolutionary and reformist positions. Their heritage – even that of ten or fifteen years ago – is not one to build upon.

The heritage we have to return to is that of Lenin and Bolshevism, that of Trotsky and the Fourth International which he founded. This is far from being a dry historical legacy. It is a living method which can be applied to the problems and tasks of today. A real and lasting unity of revolutionaries must be based on fulfilling three vital tasks:

- the elaboration a revolutionary programme which shows the road to power for workers in the last years of the twentieth century;
- the construction of a centralised and disciplined combat party with real internal democracy;
- parallel to the above tasks, the struggle to build a new revolutionary International.

The LRCI's section in France, Pouvoir Ouvrier, is addressing all the tendencies involved in the "regroupment process" on the basis of urgently recognising the importance of these tasks and proceeding to fulfil them. ■



The VDT place great emphasis on the need for revolutionary regroupment – hence their draft programme which they want the whole of the left to discuss.

This regroupment offensive has already scored some successes – the VDT have recently fused with the Ligue Sociale des Travailleurs, the small French section of the Morenoite International Workers League, are in serious discussion with the Gauche Révolutionnaire (Militant) and have a joint electoral list with the dissident Rouen branch of the LCR.

fight back against the trade union bureaucracy was consistently ignored. Why? For the simple reason that the different tendencies present had quite different answers to this vital question.

At the moment the Lutte Ouvrière Faction seem to place more emphasis on such questions. Although, like the VDT, they have yet to grapple fully with the nature of LO and its political and organisational degeneration, they have focused their recent congress documents on the key tactical question of the united front, which LO's hardened sectarianism leads it to reject.

# LCR tries to dissolve

**T**HE LIGUE Communiste Révolutionnaire (LCR), the French section of the United Secretariat of the Fourth International (USFI), is desperately trying to turn itself into a left reformist organisation by adopting a programme and perspectives that would enable it to fuse with the various tendencies in and around the decaying French Communist Party.

This attempted political suicide represents the final step in a process that began in the early 1980s and which conforms to the perspectives of dissolution repeatedly adopted at the USFI's international congresses.

At the LCR's recent conference, the leadership just failed to get the two thirds majority needed to drop the words "Communist" and "Revolutionary" from the name of the organisation.

Nor were they able to push through a reform of the statutes that would have abolished the LCR's (few) workplace branches. However, the leadership has already announced that there will soon be a further congress to settle matters once and for all.

The main opposition inside the LCR, the Révolution! tendency – which plays a decisive role in the Rouen

branch of the LCR – appears unaware of the scale of the political changes inside the LCR. Their main opposition focused on the question of the name and the proposed abolition of "party names", leaving aside the key questions of programme and perspective.

And on these two points, the LCR leadership scored decisive victories. Changing the name of the organisation will merely bring the form into line with the new content. It remains to be seen whether the Révolution! tendency will wish – or be able – to remain in the LCR under its new political flag. ■

GERMANY: As jobless total rises...

# Protests grow

**T**HE GERMAN government's announcement on 5 February of yet another record unemployment figure triggered a wave of protest across the country. Between 20,000 and 30,000 came out onto the streets. For the first time, the protests were nationally co-ordinated.

Officially, there are now 4.8 million unemployed in Germany. It is possible that the March figures will show five million unemployed. And if you include those who have "dropped out" of the official statistics - those in various retraining schemes, in state-sponsored work schemes (ABM) or in early retirement - there are about eight million unemployed.

**Announcement**

Every month over the past year the announcement of the official jobless figures has always carried the same message: a new post-war record of unemployment. In February the national unemployment rate reached 12.6%. In the old East Germany the rate is nearly double that at 21%. A government official said:

"The gap between the west and the east has not closed, but is getting wider."

Unemployment in Germany hits older workers especially hard. One in four of the unemployed in Germany are 55 or older. Many of them feel that they will never be able to work again. Unlike France, where youth unemployment stands at 27.5%, in Germany unemployment amongst those under 25 is 10.5%.

The Kohl government has increasingly focused attacks on the millions of unemployed. Unemployed benefits have been "frozen". The long-term unemployed are now forced to take almost any job they are offered. They no longer have the right to reject low-paid jobs or jobs which are below the level for which they have been trained. If they reject such "offers", they can lose part or all of their benefit for two to six weeks.

**Demonstrations**

The protests last month affected 70 towns and cities. They were organised by unemployed associations and the trade unions. In many big cities, pickets and demonstrations were held in front of the Arbeitsämter - employment centres where the unemployed have to sign on.

In Bremen 200 protesters put up a 55 yard-long washing line to which they pegged their various job application forms. In Berlin, 4,000 to 5,000

BY A MEMBER OF THE GRUPPE ARBEITERMACHT



A protester dressed as Kohl announces record German unemployment

marched to the city council offices. The chant on the march was "Kohl must go" and the protesters almost managed to occupy the council offices. In Oldenburg and Frankfurt the unemployment offices were occupied for two days.

**Inspired**

These actions were clearly inspired by the French unemployed movement. Its activities have been widely reported in the German media. More importantly, representatives of the French unemployed were invited to meetings of trade unions and unemployed associations in the country.

All this shows that internationalism is very much a living force within the European working class. Solid links between the various European workers' movements can and must be built on the basis of such internationalism.

Even the German TUC (the DGB) was forced into action. It has made support for the unemployed protests a key component of its campaign to oust the Kohl government in the coming general election in September. Kohl is attempting to win a fifth term in office.

Similar and bigger days of action are being organised to coincide with the announcement of the new sets of figures each month in the run up to the general election.

The demands put forward by the unemployed and the unions are:

- A minimum unemployment bene-

fit of 1,500 DM (£500) for all, plus housing benefit

- Introduction of the 30-hour week without loss of pay
  - A programme of public works to bring back millions into work.
  - Repeal of the changes in unemployment legislation of recent years.
- The problem is that reformist and syndicalist leaderships of the unions and the initiatives of the unemployed are not prepared to go beyond symbolic actions to fight for these demands.

**Explosive**

The DGB aims to limit the actions so as not to detract from its campaign for an SPD election victory in the autumn. It is not planning to link up the unemployed struggles with the current and potentially explosive wage round in the public sector. Yet a common struggle could not only build a fighting front between the employed and unemployed workers, it would also mean that the incoming German government would be faced from the very beginning with a struggling and combative working class movement.

Of course, it is just such a movement that the bureaucrats in the SPD and the trade unions fear most. But it is just such a movement that working class militants and revolutionaries need, and the German section of the LRCI, the Gruppe Arbeitermacht, is involved in the current struggles with the clear goal of building it. ■

## WHERE WE STAND



**Capitalism**

is an anarchic and crisis-ridden economic system based on production for profit. We are for the expropriation of the capitalist class and the abolition of capitalism. We are for its replacement by socialist production planned to satisfy human need. Only the socialist revolution and the smashing of the capitalist state can achieve this goal. Only the working class, led by a revolutionary vanguard party and organised into workers' councils and workers' militia can lead such a revolution to victory and establish the dictatorship of the proletariat. There is no peaceful, parliamentary road to socialism.



**The Labour Party**

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



**The Trade Unions**

must be transformed by a rank and file movement to oust the reformist bureaucrats, to democratise the unions and win them to a revolutionary action programme based on a system of transitional demands which serve as a bridge between today's struggles and the socialist revolution. Central to this is the fight for workers' control of production. We are for the building of fighting organisations of the working class—factory committees, industrial unions, councils of action, and workers' defence organisations.



**October 1917**

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

recognise that only workers' revolution can defend the post-capitalist property relations. In times of war we unconditionally defend workers' states against imperialism. Stalinism has consistently betrayed the working class. The Stalinist Communist Parties' strategy of alliances with the bourgeoisie (popular fronts) and their stages theory of revolution have inflicted terrible defeats on the working class world-wide. These parties are reformist.



**Social Oppression**

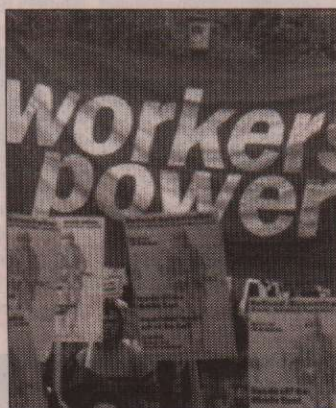
is an integral feature of capitalism systematically oppressing people on the basis of race, age, sex, or sexual orientation. We are for the liberation of women and for the building of a working class women's movement, not an "all class" autonomous movement. We are for the liberation of all of the oppressed. We fight racism and fascism. We oppose all immigration controls. We fight for labour movement support for black self-defence against racist and state attacks. We are for no platform for fascists and for driving them out of the unions.



**Imperialism**

is a world system which oppresses nations and prevents economic development in the vast majority of third world countries. We support the struggles of oppressed nationalities or countries against imperialism. We unconditionally support the Irish Republicans fighting to drive British troops out of Ireland. But against the politics of the bourgeois and petit-bourgeois nationalists, we fight for permanent revolution—working class leadership of the anti-imperialist struggle under the banner of socialism and internationalism. In conflicts between imperialist countries and semi-colonial countries, we are for the defeat of the imperialist army and the victory of the country oppressed and

exploited by imperialism. We are for the immediate and unconditional withdrawal of British troops from Ireland. We fight imperialist war not with pacifist pleas but with militant class struggle methods including the forcible disarmament of "our own" bosses.



**Workers Power**

is a revolutionary communist organisation. We base our programme and policies on the works of Marx, Engels, Lenin and Trotsky, on the revolutionary documents of the first four congresses of the Third International and the Transitional Programme of the Fourth International. Workers Power is the British Section of the League for a Revolutionary Communist International. The last revolutionary international (the Fourth) collapsed in the years 1948-51. The LRCI is pledged to fight the centrism of the degenerate fragments of the Fourth International and to refound a Leninist Trotskyist International and build a new world party of socialist revolution. If you are a class conscious fighter against capitalism; if you are an internationalist—join us! ★

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# Workers power

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## Students: Occupations show the way

# Action can stop the fees!



**A "NIGHTMARE** on campus" was how the NUS billed Friday, 13 February. It was to be a day of demonstrations and protests against the introduction of tuition fees.

The real nightmare facing students since New Labour started its reform of higher education is already making itself felt:

- 20,000 fewer applications to UCCAS (the central body dealing with university admissions) this year
- an estimated 20% drop in mature student applications
- students continuing to drop out for financial reasons (an estimated 35,000 per year)
- estimates suggesting that over 70% of students will receive no assistance towards fees – except through loans
- Lord Dearing's warning that more funding for universities will have to come from the government "selling its loan book to the city".

The organisers of the "nightmare on campus", the Blairite

leadership of the NUS, tried to ensure that rather than a "nightmare" warning to the government, the day was a tonic to give them all a "good night's sleep".

Douglas Trainer and his fellow Blair loyalists in the NUS have been mostly successful in stifling the fightback against Labour's plans to introduce tuition fees. Their campaign has been lacklustre and ineffective.

However, Trainer's attempts to limit the campaign to letter writing and pleas for a "fair" system of fees are being challenged by militant students. Friday 13 February saw the first small, but important, steps by rank and file students to break with the NUS's conspiracy of complacency and take direct action themselves.

In both Manchester and Leeds students occupied administration buildings in the universities. In Preston there was a walk-out and protests; there was also action in Plymouth, Edinburgh and at UCL in London. Further Education students

at many colleges are showing their frustration through walk-outs and demonstrations, recently storming the BBC in Manchester demanding to be heard!

These initiatives reveal the extent of distrust among students at the NUS leadership's handling of the fight against New Labour's plan for the education system. They provide a basis for a co-ordinated and sustained campaign against Blunkett, Blair and their NUS cronies.

To build on this at the NUS conference Workers Power is calling for a vote for the Unity slate. This will bring together the major student campaigns – the Campaign for Free Education (CFE) and Stop the Fees (StF) – into a united opposition at the conference, the first of its kind for many years. It is also the best way of throwing out the Blairite leadership.

But to defeat fees, defend the grant and win the right to a genuinely free education, the Unity slate needs to go beyond an elec-

toral pact at NUS conference. We need a campaign that mobilises and unites the hundreds of thousands of students in schools, colleges and universities with education workers and trade unions. We need waves of occupations and demonstrations.

The potential to build such a rank and file movement could be wasted by the approaches of both campaigns in the slate. This is clear from the statement of Jo Cardwell, (a member of StF and a suspended member of the NUS executive), during the occupation of Manchester University, that StF had not made a permanent turn to united work and that the Unity slate was a temporary measure.

The CFE, whilst calling for unity, has consistently failed to build the rank and file campaign that is needed, instead relying on capturing bureaucratic positions within the NUS.

Active unity is possible. Workers Power students in the Uni-

versity of Manchester have fought for and established just such a rank and file unity campaign. This unites the CFE, StF, Save Free Education, students with no political allegiance from colleges and universities, and education workers. It has become the focus for the fightback against education cuts in the city – leading the first occupation of the University for ten years.

The 4 March National Shutdown, called by the NUS, will hopefully build on the small successes of the "nightmare on campus", but militant action must be stepped up. As Workers Power in Manchester has shown, the basis for unity in action can be built, and neither the CFE or StF can be allowed to squander the opportunity to build a united fighting campaign.

The campaign we need is not the run of the mill pact, electoral or otherwise, of small left groups, but one based on action committees that draw in students from every department, every

course, every hall. Every student is under attack. The working class families of students are under attack, and every college worker faces the threat of cuts. Action committees can unite students and workers in powerful organisations of resistance.

If your school, college or university has no united free education campaign – set one up! Contact Workers Power students through our London office (0171 357 0388) and we will provide speakers and information about how to get your campaign going.

- Vote Unity for NUS executive!
- For a fighting NUS!
- Build rank and file action committees in the schools, colleges and universities!
- For a nationwide wave of strikes and occupations to stop education cuts and the fees!
- Demand that Labour taxes the rich and business to fund free education and a living grant based on the minimum wage for all students! ■

## Fight for full grants and free education